



African Philanthropy Network
THE VOICE AND ACTION FOR AFRICAN PHILANTHROPY



**VOICE FROM FOYER D'ENFANT + FEMME (FET+F)
(WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)
ON THE IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN UVIRA CONGO
HELD ON THE 21ST JUNE, 2022**



1. Brief about Foyerdenfant + Femme (FET+F)

DR of Congo is a multi-sectoral non-profit organisation, created in November 2009. FET+F works to promote the socio-economic rights of women, girls, and vulnerable children in rural areas. The organization makes them live with dignity in their respective communities, in a healthy environment, to mobilize communities to fight against all forms of violence against women and girls by strengthening their capacity to control, prevent and adapt to all conditions of sexual violence. The organization has the vision of making Congo a country where vulnerable women and children know their fundamental rights and can defend them and take charge of their socio-economic lives. In implementing its activities, FET+F linked with other regional organizations to implement concrete strategies for promoting women's and children's rights and community development in rural areas of Fizi and Uvira, province of South Kivu in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The organization contributes to community development and the promotion of gender equality. Being an organization working with a marginalized group of women and girls, FET+F collaborated with the APN to conduct the FGD in Congo.

The APN collaborated with FET+F because the organization is one of its grantees implementing catalytic grant projects on building capacities of women and girls' rights, and the community at large. FET+F is working with marginalized groups which are also a target for the Community Immunity campaign. The FGD was held on the 21st June 2022.

2. The Context of the COVID 19 Pandemic in Congo

The COVID 19 pandemic reported worldwide did not spare the Congolese nation and the town of Uvira. In Uvira, some cases and even COVID 19 deaths related reported. In the beginning, although the pandemic was real, it was characterized by misinformation on all sides, followed by unrestrained speculations that impacted all sectors of community life, especially social interaction.

In its obligation to protect its people, the government of Congo DR adopted some sanitary policies through the application of barrier measures, the compulsory wearing of face masks, the setting up of hand washing devices in public places, the social distancing of one meter, the prohibition of ceremonies gathering of more than 20 people, the closing down of schools and borders with neighboring countries and the travel ban to neighboring cities. The state policy measures significantly reduce the imminent spread of this pandemic.

Policies put in place by the state had negative consequences on the lives of communities in general due to the cessation of certain activities. Significantly, COVID 19 policies related to reduced formal and informal



activities and exposed men to unemployment and other technical leave, particularly women who bear the family burden.

Since each situation has its adaptation, women without means of survival did not remain arms folded. Women innovated some actions of resilience against the pandemic, such as the local manufacture of face masks with African fabrics, hand washing with ashes instead of soap, and *Mufuke* therapy. FET+F, in collaboration with the Africa Philanthropy Network (APN), organized a Focus Group Discussion with women with different women from the informal sectors: Women with disabilities, Women traders, Women from local associations and Girl leaders of Uvira. The FGD session took place on June 21st, 2022.

4. The Objectives and the Participant's Expectations

The focus group discussion (FGD) had the objective of promoting the voices and actions of women and girls in times of COVID 19 to date and the impact of COVID 19 related policies. See the agenda in Annex 1.

Participants were asked to register their expectations from the FGD. All their expectation fell under the two main themes, as listed below:

- Women and girls in the informal sector have a real understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic and are able to thrive despite the presence of the pandemic, and
- Women and girls in the informal sector innovate preventive resilience actions against COVID 19 while taking ownership of its new consideration.

4. Participants

The FGD was made up with participants from four groups namely:

- a. Women with disabilities (3): Mapendo Matumaini from the association of Femmes Handicapées Sans Frontières (Disabled Women without Borders), Tumba Musemakweli from the Bethany Centre and Furaha Mahengero from Haki Yetu.
- b. Women traders (3): Emmanuela Amnazo from the UMOJA Cooperative, Charline Matabaro from AVEC TUUNGANE and Eliza Wabiwa from Femmes Petites Commerçantes Transfrontalières FPCT.
- c. Women from local associations (2) for the promotion and women's rights advocacy: Abigail Bitondo from GAD and Beatrice Bibishe from SOFAD.
- d. Girl leaders (2): Marthe Ilunga from Noyau 1325 and Dorcas Saleh from Institute Kabunambo.

The list of Participants of given in Annex 2.

5. The Focus Group Discussion Proceeding per Questions

<p>What knowledge do you have about covid-19: signs, measures, propagation, prevention, and treatment routes?</p> <p>How did you deal with the pandemic? /As a person with a disability, what is your experience with COVID 19?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - According to Mrs. Mapendo Matumaini of the association Women with disabilities without borders (Femmes handicapées sans frontière): COVID 19 is a fatal disease because it has impacted all areas of life in terms of deaths and socio-economic imbalance. - As for the signs, according to the girls' leaders Dorcas Saleh of the Kabunambo Institute, they were manifested by excessive headaches, coughing, and body weakness. - According to Charline Matabaro, a woman trader, they found that the ways of propagation were promiscuity, gatherings, and not wearing face masks. <p>The ways of prevention were: wearing face masks, regular washing of hands, and physical distancing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - According to Tumba Musemakzeli, they have realized that this pandemic is inevitable and widespread. However, disabled women were significantly affected by the pandemic to the point that their husbands abandoned them. Border closure contributed to hardships among women as they could no longer do small cross-border businesses. <p>In addition, family members who should have also been helping abandoned them when the prices of commodities and the scarcity of products increased.</p>
<p>What are the practices put in place by the government to control the spread of the pandemic?</p>	<p>Madame BIBISHE BEATRICE of the women's human rights activist organization (Organisation des femmes' activists) responded to the question by stating the Policy put in place by the government is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The strict respect for barrier measures - Physical distancing - Regular washing of hands - Mandatory wearing of face masks - Imminent closure of the Democratic Republic of Congo's borders - Establishment of screening centres at the borders - Establishment of quarantine centres and - Reducing mobility and traveling ban.
<p>What is the level of acceptance and implementation of these policies?</p>	<p>The degree of acceptance for these policies responded by FGD participants generally accepted because the state had imposed binding policies applicable to all regardless of their status. However, some of the guidelines, to a great extent, affected the marginalized community.</p>
<p>Have these policies had a negative impact on your daily life as a member of the marginalised group?</p>	<p>As for the negative impact, Mrs. ABIGAEL BITONDO, coordinator of the GAD organization, stated that these policies negatively impacted their lives, especially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The restriction of movement and social distancing hindered African solidarity. - The increase in cases of GBV and - Unemployment among men has impacted family and marital life.

	<p>Also, MARTHE ILUNGA, a girl leader from Uvira, responded that COVID -19 caused the following problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promiscuity due to the interruption of school activities - Early marriage - Increased famine in families due to fear of contacting COVID 19.
Have you developed strategies or actions to cope with these COVID-19 related problems?	<p>Strategies mentioned by the FGD group included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity building on COVID-19 pandemic, - Awareness raising about the pandemic - Learning new technology, - Online studies; - Self-help in terms of food, economy, - On the social level, there was the deculturation of women. They are no longer just housewives but actively working to support the family - Taking tea with ginger and lemon in case of cough, occasional use of traditional sauna - The wearing of face masks - The washing of hands with ashes for those without soap and - Physical distancing
Did you get support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ELIZA PASCAL, a shopkeeper, confirms that as members of FET+F, they received support in terms of materials (face masks), gel, and hand washing from other CSOs. - Benefited from FET+F awareness raising. In turn, it also sensitized the community about COVID 19 pandemic measures put in place by the government. - Received soap to wash hands, and ash for the less privileged, the use of natural saunas (Mufuke), admission to the quarantine center for those showing signs of COVID 19 and Vaccination.
In your sectors/status, did COVID 19 bring some innovations? What were those innovations? What about opportunities?	<p>Mrs. FURAHA, a disabled woman, responded that COVID-19 had brought innovations on the preventive, curative, and social levels. For example, ginger and lemon tea, service of Mufuke, and occasional use of traditional sauna played a significant role in the curative part.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The use of information technology that is going online was among one innovation used in implementing activities without physically going to the office. - Funding opportunities and investing in the use of technology - COVID 19 revived traditional norms of protecting families from pandemics by using ashes and - Protection from other diseases due to frequent hand washing and cleaning

6. Lessons learned

- It is possible to live with the COVID-19 pandemic as long as preventive measures have been adhered.

Knowledge about COVID 19 risks still has an impact on the community in the following ways:

- Respecting working in small groups to avoid contamination has become a norm.
- Respecting rules of hygiene is appropriate for women's and girl's business places.
- The reinforcement of marital love because men now came home before 7 p.m.
- It increases the use of technology, for example, remote working.

7. Recommendations

Participants recommended the following to FET+F:

- a. That FET+F continues raising awareness on COVID-19 through the media, t-shirts with the message, flyers, and banners in public places to stop misinformation and various speculations.
- b. That FET+F supports the actions of our innovations that strengthen preventive measures.
- c. That FET+F provides learning centers in arts and crafts for women with disabilities deprived of their routine activities, such as crossing the border with goods. and
- d. That FET+F strengthens the capacities of new technology (ZOOM, internet, WhatsApp for women of associations to respect communication in reduced numbers

8. Conclusion

The FGD participants observed that women remain unanimous on accepting the widespread character of the pandemic. With the use of local preventive mechanisms and following guidelines put in place while promoting the importance of the vaccine, the pandemic will be a non-fatality. COVID-19 is not the end of all life, let alone the extinction of living beings. Therefore, with skills and necessary empowerment, women and girls could regain their confidence and rebuild their businesses.