

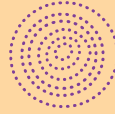
# I Speak 4 Myself Vol. 2

Photo  
graphy

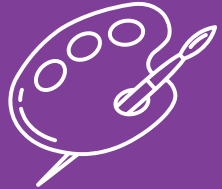
Articles

PERSONAL  
JOURNALS

POEMS



Paintings



## Foreword

In 2022, FEMNET launched the #ISpeak4Myself campaign with the objective of creating a safe, brave space for African girls and young women in all their diversity. The space not only nuanced the authentic voices of the Girls and Young Women (GYW) but also reinforced their agency through conversations.

The one-of-a-kind campaign recognized that girls and young women are not a monolith and experience a manifold of overlapping sources of oppression. Their struggle for rights is deeply impacted by and connected to racial prejudice, social injustice, gender imbalances, migration injustices, climate injustice, among others.

It is against this backdrop that the #ISpeak4Myself campaign reclaims the power of African Girls and Young Women and enables them to rewrite their stories through compelling pieces that tell their own stories through words, pictures, music and dance.

Taking into consideration that FEMNET is the home of her stories, the ensuing pages mainstream our intersectional approach centred on the diverse needs, and experiences of African Girls and Young Women. The stories are conveyed as poems, paintings, photographs, personal journals and articles. Reviewing them will make you ponder and reflect about untold realities.

The 2022 African Women's Journal honours the expertise, experiences and realities encountered by African girls and young women. Taking into consideration that her stories have often been silenced by histories, the following pages seek to progressively initiate the feminist ideas that break the discriminatory systems that African Girls and Young Women live in .

The stories will make you not only ponder but also appreciate the contribution of African Girls and young women to the development agenda.

Enjoy the reading of I Speak for Myself journal written by African girls and Young Women.

- Esther Nyawira



## Editorial

This creative book represents the soul and voice of African Girls and Young Women in all their diversities. The pieces herein attest the relived experiences and realities and also analyse power relations that question injustices endured by girls and young women.

Taking into consideration that girls and young women are faced with negative social stereotypes and cultural attitudes, which pose a barrier to their participation in the social, economic, and political development, the ensuing attempts to break all forms of impediments by giving the authors the liberty to literally speak for themselves.

The breadth and tone of the articles exercise the uncensored voice agency and self-determination of African Girls and young women. They have been brought to life through art, words, and pictures.

The introduction is a poetic retrospection dubbed Introducing Eve and it sets the pace of an epic tale entitled She Is from North. The tempo of the book then shifts to the Covid- epidemic and narrates a chilling anecdote dubbed Healing the Wounds of the Pandemic. This is then followed by a review of Pan Africanism and the essence of Feminism, but it's not complete without a glimpse of the Impact of Covid-19 On Women and Young Girls: A Closer look at Rural Ghana.

The Untold Impact of Covid -19: A Tale of Sakina, The Street Girl takes centre stage and also paves way for the master piece entitled Raising An Emergency Flag on the Plight of Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic. The book also assesses patriarchal systems and COVID-19: reviewing the Pandemic's Impact on Women and Girls and capitalizes on this to highlight a myriad of challenges Girls and Young Women have endured in Post COVID Africa.

Indeed, Volume II is a step closer to the reality of She Leads. Its notation and rendition enable for African Girls and Young women to authentically speak for themselves. Their voices shape a different narrative that would otherwise have been overlooked or unspoken all together.

- Imali Ngusale



# Acknowledgments

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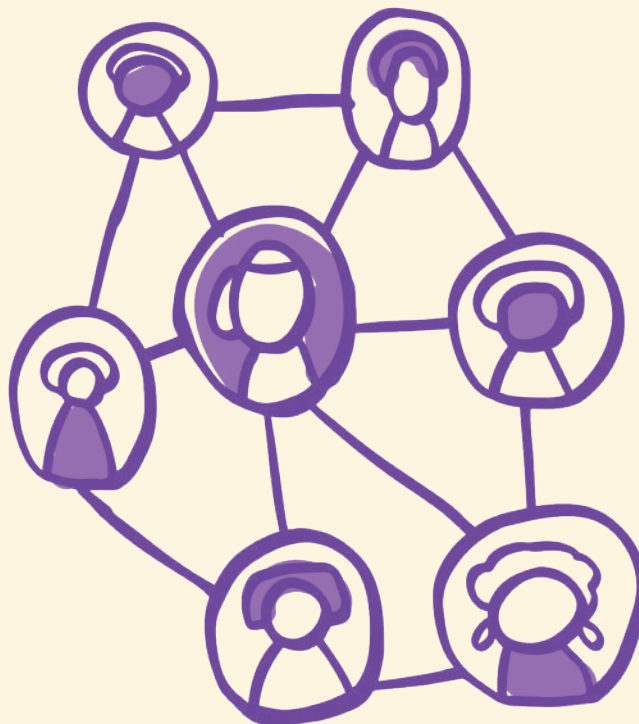
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# INTRODUCING EVE

Eve is a country of single mothers posed in prayers  
At midnight  
To patch up the cracks left on the walls of their nation  
When we cry rivers of emptiness from our bellies  
Where grief is undigested  
And fathers are nowhere to be found

Eve is she who comes from a lineage of shattered pots  
That failed to keep water in them  
She who still carry the pain of rejection  
Under the graffiti of scars handed to her by her past

Eve carries the world on her shoulders  
The trouble of the world as if it was hers  
While life sucks the hell out of her body

-By Maxine Coker



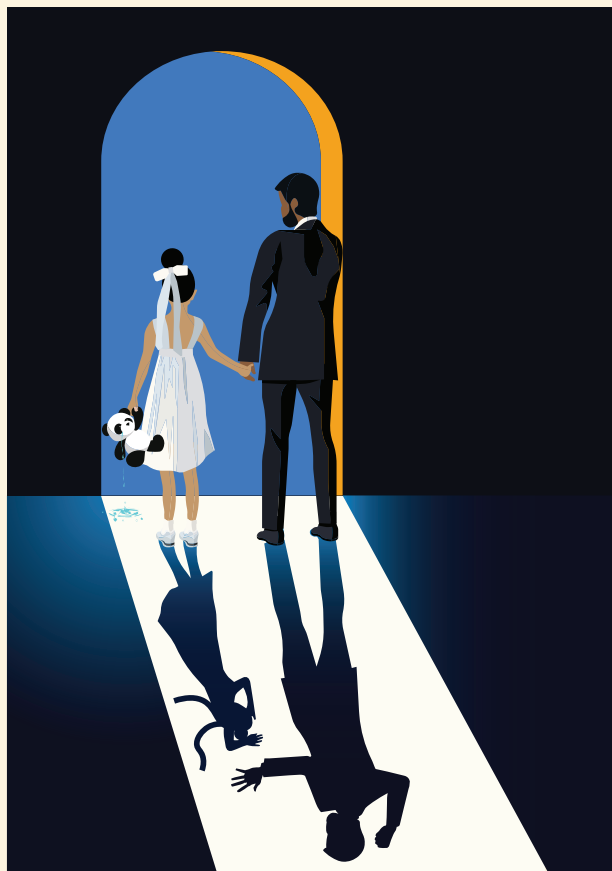
# SHE IS FROM NORTH

I remember every detail as if it happens yesterday what made think I should forget it silly me while I still have scares and nightmare to remind me about it.

I was 14 in class 8 when he approached my parents for my hands in marriage I didn't know anything about a man, but he thought may be I was old enough to get married to him and his wife my parents accept it and give me away it's still aches on me that I wasn't given time to say if am okay or not.

The man was my father's age by then and papa didn't refuse either what pains me was my mom has the guts to advise me on how to stay with soon to be husband.

- By Fatuma Wako



# COVID-19

I woke up to a pandemic  
Tears in our eyes  
Masks on our face, absence of our taste  
The struggle of social distancing  
We reduced movements  
We reduced meetings  
Everybody got distant  
Hard to give greetings  
We are in trouble

Difficult situations  
Our aims, blindfolded  
Our destination, we couldn't reach  
The pandemic is messy  
It leaves the toothpaste tube open  
It lets separation happen  
It awakens the fear on the transmission

It whispers through your ears and tells you  
It's impossible  
When you just wake up  
It's impossible  
When you organize your plans  
It's impossible  
When you just want to reach your aim  
It's impossible  
When you want to move, speak and make a change  
It's impossible  
When you want to prove, work and drop a new range  
And because of it I started facing him  
His name is violence,

He comes in different forms and brings up a case  
He takes away the freedom, he takes away the peace  
He increases depression, anxiety, stress  
He increases disease, death and makes a whole big mess  
He arises in the world of the young girls  
Destroys their minds, their physical and mental health,  
Gives them bruised eyes  
Those red and purple marks on the neck  
Sprained and broken wrists  
Chronic fatigue from all the the and exertion  
He is a brother of COVID, and violence is his name





He is upsetting and terrifying  
He is hurtful and wrong  
He is abusive, he is assault  
I am only fifteen  
He does not make me feel safe  
He is annoying, he is unacceptable.

I am crying, I am shattered  
I am dying, I don't matter  
I am 14 and still in school  
Being married off so they'll get the cows  
which my brother shll use to marry  
They are taking my pride and dignity  
Schools went into COVID lockdown  
Now my husband's fourth bride.

I am out of energy, he took my pride  
Please find a strategy, to end his ride  
He placed me down, and took my crown  
My virginity is gone, so I keep singing my  
sorrow song  
Now I am pregnant, I couldn't even fight  
It was all irrelevant, where is my right  
And it's all because of his brother COVID's  
lockdown

There's men on my right, there's men on  
my left  
One touches my lap, one touches my hair  
They think my body is a give away  
'Leave me alone', is all I can say  
I can ruin my identity in an hour because  
where there's roots there's power but I am  
just a top soil, I skip and jump and dance

and fall between the things I've never seen,  
Sexual harassment is just too mean and  
COVID makes it

It was terrible when COVID 19 arrived  
And I knew exactly what it was  
The sacrifice out of salvation  
The problems out of peace  
Drawbacks out of dreams  
The burden out of blade

COVID 19 wore a faint necklace  
You wouldn't have recognize it at first  
glance  
It played a losing chant  
Acid to a plant





COVID 19 became the reason  
I lost my confidence  
It brought a brand new season  
I had no assurance

COVID 19 brings unpredictable actions  
Not only for the nation  
But for future generation  
And brings about the destruction

COVID 19 is a terrible driver  
And the worst navigator  
In stormy weather  
It's a unreliable coordinator



When COVID 19 grew  
possibilities became a few  
It stretched like a trampoline  
It made us weak  
It made our aims disappear slowly  
Like baby teeth, loosing parts of us we  
needed  
In the end the possibilities vanished like an  
amateur? magician

COVID 19 robs us of community  
Immobilizes my ability  
Stifles the best within me  
Takes away my chance to make a difference  
Reduces my leadership skills  
Reduces my teamwork skills  
Discourages me to take the lead  
Makes me want to escape it  
Makes me want to rise up  
Makes me want to be free  
And building a better future for me

I wanna live  
In slow motion and devotion,  
I wanna achieve  
My world, my skills, without COVID 19  
Dreams and goals I take it  
Character is my crown I wear it  
I refuse to backdown,sit down,calm down  
I accept to rise up, grow up, move up  
Caring like mother Theresa, let me not lose  
my dreams  
Passionate like Oprah, let me not falter with  
tears

Intelligent like Marie Curie, let me not lose my dreams  
Respected like Queen Elizabeth, let me not lose my worth  
We live in the world, which has too much to hold and millions to unfold  
But why? Why is the government, the states, the UN agencies,  
They don't switch and twitch and make the decision of which  
Which part of me belongs today  
Which aspect of my personality will they  
defend the least and blend the most and and  
work and succeed and carry the lead  
Because absence of COVID 19 is all I need  
I need peace not problems  
I need dreams not drawbacks  
I need goals not gaffe

I wish you could know  
What I am scared to show  
I wish you could hear of  
The things that I fear  
I wish you could tell  
What I don't know too well

I seek help  
I seek equality  
I seek my rights  
I seek peace  
I seek development  
As a young girl facing challenges  
because of COVID 19



# PAN AFRICANISM, FEMINISM, & HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE PANDEMIC

Pan Africanism is more than some fancy title; it has little to do with how "African", or how popular or strong a person can be. In reality, Pan Africanists tend to be congruent in words and actions, doing away with racism, and all kinds of division, while exhibiting authenticity and compassion.

Despite the honorable values related to this ideology, one barely hears of women and girls acting as Pan Africanists. We have all heard the tales about: Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Namadi Azikiwe, Gamel Nasser, to mention but a few, but where are the women? Few examples come to mind, with the exception of Lady Yvonne Chaka Chaka, who showcased Pan Africanism through her songs. This is disheartening, to say the least.

This may of course be a result of lower literacy and fewer skill sets within this subset, including as it pertains to leadership, as well as prevailing gender bias. Indeed, there is a need to dismantle these structures; at this juncture, I urge young women and girls to stand out from the crowd and persistently challenge the status quo and participate in political discourse; Make history by embracing the Pan African journey and becoming the continent's future icons.

Let's reimagine a Pan African story, with women and girls at the center, a Pan African story based on equity and justice. Only then shall we overcome the impacts of COVID-19.

- By Maria





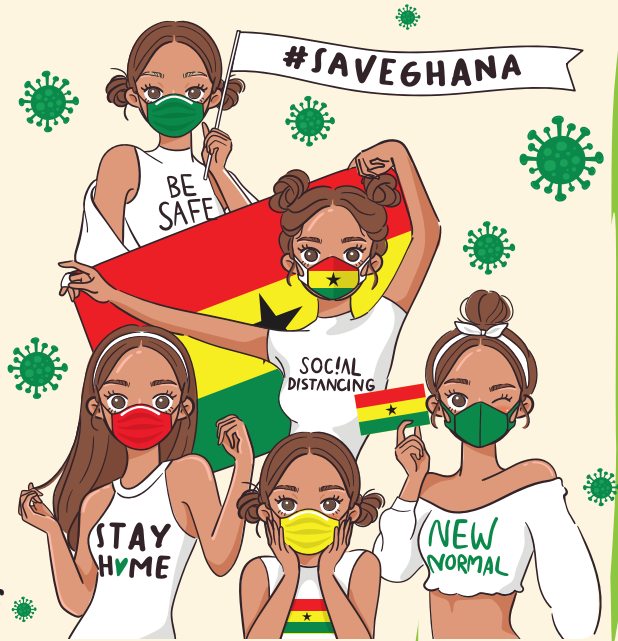
# The Impact of Covid-19 On Women and Young Girls: A Closer look at Rural Ghana

In February 2020, Ghana recorded its first case of COVID 19. The mental scare we went through as a country was so great that if fear could kill, many Ghanaians would have died. The death toll from fear would probably have surpassed that from COVID 19 infections. In Ghana, the fear was so great that there was a trending phrase by June deirr na obiaaa w)) which translates by June, everyone would have been dead . This phrase was so popular that it became a song we sang like a country with fear in our hearts.

Hearing reports from other countries about how people were dying because of the virus, and understanding our situation in Ghana and Africa at large, with inadequate health facilities and health equipment created much worry. We knew that if we were hit like the Western world, we would have lost more lives than they did.

The fear became real in March 2020 when we were asked to stay home from school for our own protection. Our parents were asked to work from home, and some were laid off their work. The fear around us got worse, and it felt like a dream as our world came to standstill.

For people in the urban areas who recorded new cases every day, one can imagine how scary it might have been. I was in the Upper East Region when the pandemic started. Being from a rural community, we were a bit lucky because we did not record as many cases as the capital city of Ghana. However, we had our own challenges when the pandemic hit, and I will highlight some of the struggles



that women and girls went through during the pandemic in rural Ghana. When we were asked to stay home from school, we did not know what the future held for us. We had no idea whether we would see another year or whether we would be wiped out just like the stories we were hearing from other countries.

In my region, most girls did not know what the future held for them and so they decided to move on with their lives. There were some rumors that schools were never going to resume. Some parents asked their young daughters to find husbands, settle down, and give birth instead of waiting for schools that might never resume. Some girls decided to get married on their own with no push from their parents. There was so much peer pressure happening in my community. Other girls advised their colleagues to do the same by settling down with any man since they did not know how much longer the world had to live.

According to a survey conducted by the Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana in the Upper East Region, many girls decided to get married early and get pregnant since they did not know how long they had to live. For almost a year, we were home, and that was enough time for some girls to give birth. It must be noted that these girls never went back to school after the schools reopened.

During the pandemic, there was also an increase in sexual gender based violence against girls and women, including in their homes. Many girls were raped by family members and neighbors. When several people are asked to stay together in a closed space, idle and bored, very dirty thoughts start creeping up in people's minds. As the saying goes, the devil finds work for the idle mind. Many girls were raped in the span of the one year we were made to stay at home. Some were even raped by their own fathers and had to carry these pregnancies.

Many women were also physically and mentally abused by their husbands. Some men became frustrated especially after losing their jobs or being made to sit at home for months. Consequently, they took out their anger on their wives the best way they knew, by beating them up whenever they felt provoked. I remember a woman in my area being injured by her husband



because she refused to have sex with him due to tiredness. This woman was beaten so hard that the neighbors had to intervene. She was rushed to the hospital and after two days she passed away, unfortunately. The number of sexual gender based violence victims rose during the pandemic.

Economically, women and girls who depended on petty trading as a source of income suffered when the pandemic hit. Business came to a standstill and small businesses had to close. Some women never recovered from the economic loss after the pandemic. The girls who depended on money from these petty trading and small businesses could no longer afford to go back to school, and this increased the number of school dropouts.

After a year at home, we were finally asked to go back to school. My class which had a total of 64 students 20 boys and 44 girls - before the pandemic, only welcomed 36 students back. The 20 boys were all back to school and ready to pick up from where they left off. Out of the 44 girls, 28 did not return to school. We were later told they had either given birth and were nursing mothers, or they were married and were now living in their husband s houses and would not be returning to school.

Indeed COVID 19 has impacted the whole world greatly, but in rural communities including my small village in the Upper East Region of Ghana, women and girls continue to deal with the impact of the pandemic.

- By Azoteyine Salome Adeliyine  
From Ghana



# The Untold Impact of Covid - 19:

## A Tale of Sakina, The Street Girl

The phases of life flip just like the pages of a book – or as easy as it would be to draw a curtain. That’s how fast we were introduced to this world of “the new normal” overnight. On the 12th of March 2020, Ghana registered her first COVID; this single event would be the beginning of events that turned a school-going girl into a street girl. The impact of COVID might have been often measured on other factors like the economy and standards of living, but it is also because of COVID that the country lost out on who would have become one of the best nurses.

To some, the urge to wake up early in the morning, get dressed, and find their way to school came from their desire to pursue their life dreams. Some did the routine because it was part of their training at home; but to others, it was to get rid of the tedious domestic chores waiting for them. This is the situation of Sakina, a young girl of thirteen years old who left the Nondori village in the Upper West region of Ghana. Sakina took abode in the home of Auntie Grace, a chop bar operator (a local eatery joint in Ghana) at Kasoa. She arrived in the southern part of Ghana in 2016, but it was not until September 2019 that she had the opportunity to taste southern education for the first time.

Although brilliant, Sakina had had to watch, with sadness, as her neighbourhood friends left for and returned from school each day. Eventually, she had the Lord’s light shine on her and gained admission to enrol in Primary 5 education at a public school about 2 km from home.



The excitement of going to school graduated from the mere sight of school garments to have the opportunity to skip the tedious housework that would typically be her duty. Sakina got acclimatized to the school quickly and was loved by students and teachers alike during her just four to five months stay.

This ushered Sakina into a new life of recognition and the confidence it came with. Sakina would hurry to school every morning after doing some house chores. She was no longer helping at the chop bar because she would be busy with school between 7 am and 2:30 pm. Things seemed to be going well. Sakina was on the route to achieving her dream of becoming a nurse. The previously sad, unkempt, and constantly exhausted Sakina had turned into a happy, joyful, and refreshed Sakina in a few months.

This joy did not last. Sakina's life regressed when COVID 19 hit. The world was in fear, and so was Ghana. Economic and social activities were halted. Major cities in Ghana, including Kasoa, were put under lockdown. Schools were closed. The little source of joy that school created in Sakina's life was taken away. Her Aunt had her extended family visit during the lockdown, which meant that the domestic chores became twice as many. Bowls were to be washed in multiple folds, and clothes had to be washed many more times than usual. At the chop bar, the locals often gathered because they were not allowed into town. This workload became overwhelming for the 13-year-old.

Sakina lost out on an education (public primary schools had no online structures). As the situation worsened for Sakina, she had no money to buy essential items like sanitary pads. A male customer at the bar who had promised to give her some money defiled and got her pregnant. When she sought help from her aunt, she threw Sakina out instead. Sakina was now a homeless, pregnant girl.

The man responsible was nowhere to be found, leaving Sakina to fend for both the baby and she. Her interest in education has fallen off the cliff due to shame and stigmatization. Her new abode has been with friends and on the streets where she sells. It could be said that what is meant to be, but maybe, just maybe, Sakina's dream of being a nurse might not have been curtailed if schools were not closed due to COVID 19.



- By Bernice Orcan Dadoo



# RAISING AN EMERGENCY FLAG ON THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

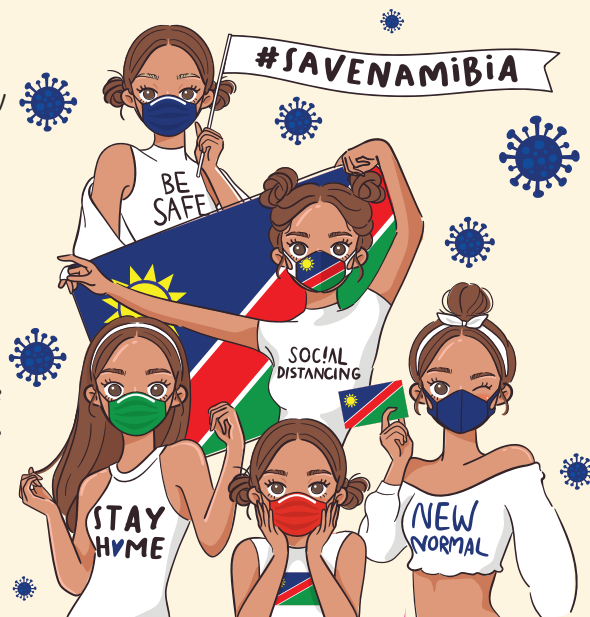
The COVID-19 pandemic blew into 2020 like a gust of turbulent winds, grey and darkened with grave sorrow and reflection. It bolted us to confront the deepest and shameful deeds we swept under the carpet including Gender-Based Violence (GBV), economic injustices, poverty, etc.

The lockdowns and strict rules were unusual experiences for all of us. The pandemic trapped us in what felt like a movie where we were both the audience and actors. Lockdowns were meant to prevent the spread of COVID-19, yet it seemed like it was the playground for 'BEINGS' lurking in the dark preying on innocent people.

It would be safe to say that some of us – if not all – have had their dip into the pool of near-death experiences, sorrow, and disappointments during this time. I experienced a terrible incident on my way to work when I was robbed and assaulted in the taxi that I was in. It shifted the energy within me on how I view men, and it created a fear of using public transport.

The pandemic also rattled the cages on women's issues. GBV has increased around the world. Every day, the news shows the extent of what lockdowns have done to the conditions of women from Namibia to South Africa and to the UK.

It is necessary to point out that some sociologist scholars assert that gender construction was perpetrated by colonial officials, male elite indigenes, and Christianity. The monopoly and domino construction of gender by these three dynamics alienated the contributions of women in every aspect of life. It is claimed that colonial officials and Christianity came with a mindset of patriarchal European analogy that women were to remain in the back seat, be mothers, rear children and be non-existent. This created



the male elites who took over the say and rule over land, sexuality, and superior roles. It became enshrined that a man was superior and deserved the role of the ruler in all areas of life.

In turn, this has created the current traditions that have an invincible hand in the execution of law reforms around women's issues. How do we then tackle the race against GBV and the economic injustices faced by women? COVID-19 had its lockdown, but no one dares to raise the red flag of emergency on the plight of women.

In Namibia, a few months ago, a young woman's body was found buried in one of the coastal towns and chaos erupted. It sparked the #SHUTITALLDOWN movement and people took to the streets. I didn't join the movement on the streets.

Did I cower? Maybe, I was conflicted about what happened to me and that left me disgruntled. During the week-long protest of the #SHUTITALLDOWN movement, a friend of mine was arrested. Her courage is beyond me. With everything that happened to me I cowered away from something I should be knee-deep in. After much prayer, I realized that I come with a different spin on the movement of GBV and for that realization, I am most thankful.

It is difficult to write about my experience but that's what writers do: write. We write our feelings; we write to educate; we write to heal.

I take what happened to me on the 17th of August 2020 as a gift, an eye-opener, and as a surviving testimony. I now understand as a woman with the gift of writing why I survived. Not all of us can be on the frontlines, yet all of us can raise our voices through any given means.

Women must take up arms as a collective, young and old, to break the invincible hand of old traditions and cultural influences that have a hold on the structures of our lives. No more press statements, no more cultural and traditional influences. There must be a collective measure to bypass the injustices we face. I am one of many in my country fighting for justice and I am one of many that have survived the clutches of GBV.

I am still healing but I do have a voice and I am using it in this piece.

- By Romancia



# Patriarchal Systems & COVID-19: Reviewing the Pandemic's Impact on Women & Girls

"The Master's Tools will never dismantle the master's House" is a literature piece authored by Audre Lorde, a renowned feminist.

As the title suggests, Lorde metaphorically shows how tools of oppression, sexism, and gender bias cannot be used to dismantle the same patriarchal systems which they empower. Indeed, fighting against oppression with the same tools that encourage dominant pedagogy, and that promote patriarchal systems has strengthened existing systemic forms of oppression. These systemic forms of oppression are the very reason that feminist thought is overlooked in times of crisis, in fact, it is these systems that contribute to the prevailing gaps of gender equality, widening them all the more.

This is clearly evidenced by the disproportionate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. For instance, because of systemic oppression, women have been devalued and underpaid, and this has only heightened after the COVID-19 pandemic; while the pandemic's economic effects have cut across all identities and groups, the economic impact it has had on women is immeasurable.



Women already earned less than men before the pandemic, but the crisis has further exacerbated this pay gap, and has resorted to most women to living from hand to mouth. Moreover, most women work in sectors that were most affected by the pandemic, including the education and food sector; as such, job and business opportunities for this subset have been significantly affected. This effect multiplies exponentially when we think about women with intersecting social identities such as single mothers or elderly women in poor populations.



Women's health, especially in marginal areas, is another depiction of the widening gap of gender parity, especially amidst the COVID crisis. The detrimental effect of the virus on the economy has pushed many women to live in impoverished fragile states, while those who were already living in such fragile conditions, are at a higher risk of worsening health.

Furthermore, equal access to protective measures, medicine, and proper medical treatment is restricted to the wealthy and endowed; meaning that the disparity widens even more for women from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Additionally, with more and more families being forced to stay at home due to joblessness or 'work from home' considerations, women and girls have been more exposed to the risks of gender injustices such as gender-based violence. This has been evident in places such as Machakos County, Kenya, where nearly 4000 school-going girls got pregnant during the pandemic; suggesting some exposure to sexual violence in the domestic sphere. It is also worth noting that changes in the economy, as well as the uncertainty and adversity resulting from covid 19 have also raised anxiety levels, which ultimately led to an increase in alcoholism during the pandemic and a subsequent increase in cases of gender-based violence.

Indeed, women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic in the economic and domestic sphere. By applying a feminist lens, the coronavirus crisis and future crises can be handled more effectively and can allow for some mitigation of some of these negative effects on women and girls. This is because feminist thought embraces the thought that each and every person is valuable regardless of their intersecting identities. This, if adopted, fosters an environment where people can live in understanding, which will prevail even in unprecedented times. Moreover, in times of crisis, governments should employ an intersectional lens in identifying the various forms of oppression related to gender, class, and even race that contribute towards bolstering inequality. This will help tackle crises without losing sight of the human rights of a particular group, while promoting that of the other. Intersectional analysis and intersectional solutions are fundamental tools, which will effectively dismantle these systems of oppression otherwise labelled by Audre Lorde as the 'master's house.'





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