

African Development Bank Civil Society Engagement

# Newsletter

“Voices of Citizens in Africa”

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## COVID-19: Changing Patterns for Civil Society Engagement

### Editorial by Vanessa Moungar, Director, Gender, Women and Civil Society Department

COVID-19 has changed people's lives all around the world in a very short amount of time, impacting our health, economies, and livelihoods. Governments, institutions, companies, organizations and citizens are taking measures to help prevent the spread of the virus, and to manage our joint human response.

Unprecedented challenges require unprecedented levels of solidarity and coordinated action from all stakeholders in society. Civil society actors must fully participate in broader action coalitions as key partners in direct response and program delivery, community

outreach and information, awareness and prevention campaigns, as well as policy reform. The current crisis reveals the critical role played by citizens and communities in the emergency response, and the essential contributions of civil society organizations more broadly, on the front lines. With cruelly limited resources, innovative initiatives are emerging all across the continent, having direct impact on people's lives.

That is the reason why this edition will focus on shedding light on some of these ongoing initiatives and the actors leading them.



I wish you an insightful read.  
**Vanessa Moungar**

### A Word from Zéneb Touré, Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement Division

You have all seen it, we have all seen it: almost in the blink of an eye, COVID-19 has changed our lives. The pandemic has changed everything, and more than ever we are able to see the role of civil society organizations as change-makers, policy influencers and first responders to emergencies.

This first 2020 edition of our Newsletter aims at highlighting this crucial role civil society has in this context. It sheds light on how civil society organizations and communities we are working

with are carrying out various initiatives. From Morocco, to Lesotho, solidarity is at the core of the crisis. Food and healthcare distributions to enable the disadvantaged citizens to respect the quarantine like everyone else, awareness campaigns on water and sanitation through community radios, commitment from the African farmers to feed Africa, bloggers and social entrepreneurs mobilizing people for the best: so many initiatives have already been launched and are essential to helping face the virus. Learn more about them in this edition.



We are all in this together and will overcome it together.  
**Zéneb Touré**



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# Civil Society Organizations on the Frontline of the COVID-19 Crisis

## AfDB-AU ECOSOCC: An Innovative Partnership to Engage Civil Society in the Africa Response



Since the beginning of the crisis, the African Development Bank and the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU-ECOSOCC) have been gathering their own experts and civil society actors to inform and update African citizens on this pandemic and combat the spread of misinformation. Throughout this awareness campaign, the focus is very much put on how civil society and populations are coping with the crisis, addressing topics such as health and sanitation measures, gender mainstreaming in the pandemic response, resource mobilization and the role of social media in the crisis.

With attendance reaching up to 1500 participants from Africa and the Diaspora, with as many as 40 000 impressions on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), African citizens have been showing increasing interest for these experience and best practices sharing sessions. The session during which, for example, the Pan African Farmers Organization's CEO explained how African farmers are committing, despite the challenges, to feed African populations generated widespread enthusiasm and prompted an important number of questions.

The constructive and important role civil society organizations are playing is demonstrating how crucial it is for African governments to include them in the national responses plans in order to develop a comprehensive approach to this pandemic. The webinar series will run for several months, addressing further opportunities and challenges of engaging with CSOs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us stay connected to curb the spiral of the pandemic and shape a more inclusive future with high value citizen participation.

Link to the webinars: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7129666>

## Coping with the Crisis: CSOs Share their Experience

**Pan-African Farmers Organization (PAFO)** – PAFO stresses the core role of the agricultural sector and the necessity to place the family farmers' production system and supply of food products as an absolute priority in these times of COVID-19. The statement is a commitment that affirms that "African farmers have always been and will always



*Farmers in the Fouta region in Guinea Conakry continue the farming of potatoes intended for sale*

be engaged and responsible for the continuity of the food production chain from their farm level. African farmers are aware of their responsibility and intend to accomplish their mission while fully respecting the protection framework put in place by governments. We will continue participating in creating awareness on control measures using different media platforms, double our efforts in on-farm activities to produce more food, supply the available markets and feed Africa".

**Elizabeth Nsimadala**, President

**Technologies for Economic Development (TED), Lesotho** – "In Lesotho, CSOs have engaged in activities as the country gears up to protect the Nation. Among these activities, TED, which is part of the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Cluster under the Ministry of Water, provided Hygiene Education on Radio Lesotho, which covers the entire country (2,108 million people) and on Radio Maria Lesotho, which broadcasts online and covers Lesotho's 8 of 10 Districts. Via Radio Maria Lesotho, TED also supported Children Programs with Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Education and



*School children collecting their food packages in the Qacha's Nek District in Lesotho*

by providing items such as soap as giveaways to motivate children contributing to the radio program to practice proper hygiene and to become change agents in families. Our organization also worked with the Ministry of Education and Training in collaboration with the World Food Program in the

School Feeding Program, which provided food packages to school children in the Qacha's Nek District. At last, we regularly advise the Ministry of Health to engage health professionals biologists and to build teams to support the Nation in the prevention of the virus".

**Mantopi Martina de Porres Leboga**, Director

**Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO), South Sudan** – "As an advocacy organization, CEPO is undertaking a number of activities aimed at raising awareness in the various communities in South Sudan. We regularly meet with community leaders to update them on any unfolding information,



*Members of Malakia Community Group in South Sudan attend awareness session on COVID-19*

take part in radio talk shows, do community sensitization and door to door campaigns, print information material and make sure communication is done in local languages. In the current context, we observe security forces conduct in enforcing the government declared measures with focus on human rights violations, and lobby for funds and food assistance to help those affected by the government measures. CEPO is an organization that usually operates across the country. However, due to resource challenges in these times, we are only able to conduct these activities in some key parts of the country: Wau in the Bhar El-Ghazal Region, Bor in the Upper Nile Region and Juba, in the Equatoria Region. In other sub-regions we work through partnerships with local civil society organizations and religious institutions. We work hand in hand with the Ministry of Health of the Government of South Sudan, the World Health Organization, Oxfam, Church of Sweden and local media stations. We are estimating that between 7500-10,000 people have been reached through the various ways of raising awareness".

**William Lukudu**, Program Manager



# Digital Influencers Call Out for Responsible Citizenship

## 211CHECK, the South-Sudanese Platform Tackling Misinformation



*Emmanuel Lobijo, a community organizer from South Sudan using the Voice Post Blue bicycle, a COVID-19 Community awareness initiative followed by Nelson Kwaje*

Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter: all these social media platforms are witnessing a high prevalence of "infodemic". As governments and civil society actors continue to tackle the pandemic, the parallel and equally dangerous issue of misinformation is on the rise online.

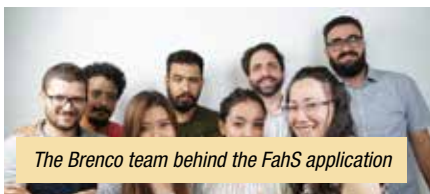
Many African influencers, among which my team and I, are already using their online presence to mobilize their communities to refrain from fake news and misinformation related to COVID-19. We must ensure that we provide factual and accurate information to the public, especially in such times of COVID-19. The authority of influencers is undeniable for the mere fact that they have a massive number of followers that look up to them.

The need to tackle misinformation, in times of crisis or not, is what led to the creation of 211CHECK, a fact-checking and information verification platform that works on countering misinformation and disinformation in South Sudan. Our 120 youth volunteers from various disciplines work on fact-checking misinformation daily and provide accurate data to communities. In this context of COVID-19, we aim at enhancing the quality of health information shared online in the country.

Our fact-checking model is being adopted in Cameroon and soon in two more African countries. We hope this model can be spread out throughout the entire continent.

**Nelson Kwaje**, Team Lead of 211CHECK

## A Self Diagnostic COVID-19 Solution for the Algerian Population



*The Brencro team behind the FahS application*

In Arabic, "FahS" means "examine" or "diagnostic". This is the name of the COVID-19 self-diagnostic application Algerian start-up Brencro created. CEO Karim Broui and his team immediately saw the need for such application and undertook the initiative at a very early stage of the crisis.

FahS' goal is simple: it raises awareness on COVID-19 and communicates on the prevention means, using

information approved by the Algerian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO). It is all the more crucial and practical that it also offers a self-diagnostic test to its users, who enter their symptoms. The collected data is anonymously reported to the authorities to allow them to make better informed, data-based and real-time decisions and monitor positive COVID-19 cases.

To contribute widely to stemming the spread of the virus, the solution has been made available to the health authorities of the entire continent free of charge. A generous and resilient initiative from which any country on the continent can benefit.

In these times of crisis where African economies and health systems are so severely impacted, my commitment and that of StartupBRICS, which has always been to honor and promote African Tech ecosystems, makes even more sense. We will continue shedding light on initiatives such as FahS, to encourage other citizen-led initiatives and co-build solutions for the current COVID-19 context but also the post-COVID.

**Samir Abdelkrim**, Founder of StartupBRICS and EMERGING Valley

## Internet and Citizen Engagement in Times of Health Crisis



*First AfricTivistes civic engagement workshop in Dakar, in partnership with the University of Kansas*

The speed of the Internet is under increasing pressure in a world that has come to a standstill with states of emergency, curfews and confinement measures. COVID-19 came and changed the rules and rhythms of life of human beings around the world. Like Internet users in Asia and Europe, Africans rapidly hopped in to support joint efforts to stem the spread of the virus with the help of technology. Several individual, collective, voluntary and civic initiatives have been launched as a response plan across the continent. These connected and engaged young people, participate in the dynamics of social and political transformations and have become real agents of change across the continent. They influence their society by making innovation their watchword.

This is how:

- In Senegal, Mamadou Diagne, an open source activist and member of AfricTivistes launches the first "covid19sn.herokuapp" Dashboard to help follow in real time the evolution of contaminations, cures and other analyzes related to government data;
- In Burkina Faso, engineer Adama Sy is developing a mobile application to detect symptoms of coronavirus with a simple smartphone;
- Across the continent, but particularly in West Africa, the citizen initiative of the League of Health Bloggers is working to curb the lack of information in local languages.

The internet and new media seem to enable young people's commitment and active participation in starting off a collective and civic response in this period of health crisis.

**Cheikh Fall**, AfricTivistes President

## Seven Things I Can Do as a Digital Influencer in the COVID-19 Times



*Nnenna Nwakanma, Chief Web Advocate at World Wide Web Foundation*

On Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> of March, news broke in the economic capital of the West African country I call home. 18 Italians, said to have entered the country fraudulently, had been arrested and were being sent to a quarantine camp. The news took off like wildfire in a harmattan season. I got contacted by someone close to the "18 Italians". The conversation that followed:

"Nnenna, we need your urgent help. Please this is fake news. It is not true. They are not Italians. They did not enter illegally. Please can you help counter this online?"

"Okay, let them send me details of their nationalities. I will just stick to publishing the facts".

15 minutes later, I got the information I needed: 1 British, 5 Brazilians, 1 French, 1 Spanish, 5 Germans, 1 Austrian and 5 Dutch citizens.

I published the information first on my Facebook wall, then proceeded to share with my Facebook groups, one which has half a million members. Other notable digital influencers also shared the facts. The next day, news outlets corrected the information.

Times of crises are moments when human sentiments run high and reason runs low. In a West African country where "Italian" had become an almost magnified word, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reversal of discrimination was a reality. Insinuating that 17 tourists caught in the travel ban due to the crisis were Italians was a certain way to fuel hatred, discrimination and possible violence. In a country under a state of emergency, a night time curfew and rampant psychosis, the world wide web becomes a life line. And those of us who are influencers on the web have a responsibility. Here are seven things we can do to champion a digital space that is beneficial to all: Inform, educate and communicate; combat viral misinformation; help interpret complex data sets; raise critical development questions; serve as watchdog; share personal discipline for leadership and finally yet importantly, raise hope and joy.

**Nnenna Nwakanma**, Chief Web Advocate at World Wide Web Foundation

# African Development Bank: Shaping a More Inclusive Future for Communities

## Civil Society Engagement in the Bank's COVID-19 Response

In addition to its health, economic and social impact, COVID-19 has triggered a funding crisis for CSOs/NGOs when they are needed most. Leaving these "front line soldiers" aside now would be catastrophic, given their ability to respond to the crisis both immediately and on the long term. Among potential solutions, an anticipatory internal funding mechanism to mobilize funding, revise existing budget lines within the organizations to address immediate needs, and to evolve and adapt as those needs and contexts change. This appears as a prospect of dialogue with respective donors and for synergies with other civil society organizations. Although most of them already engaged this way readjusting material, human, logistic, physical resources, establishing a COVID-19 response investment vehicle remains critical.

The African Development Bank on top of its contribution to the World Health Organization global response has adopted a COVID-19 Response Facility to assist Regional Member Countries (RMCs) in fighting the pandemic. Country Offices will be the entry points for CSOs/NGOs and these RMCs with possible support to leverage national responses with required delivery capacity. Consideration will go to organizations that have the capacity to offer humanitarian relief while building social enterprises and community resilience. The Bank's Staff Council has likewise set up a Corporate Social Responsibility Fund for CSOs to reach out to the most vulnerable populations in countries.

This crisis shows that there is a need for Africa, as a continent, to come up with innovative ways to fund civil society's impactful interventions at the local level. Building together today a better Africa for tomorrow has never been more necessary than now and civil society will play a major role in this emergency response and in shaping a more inclusive future.

**Luther Yaméogo**, Principal Civil Society Engagement Advocacy Officer, AfDB

## The Pandemic: A Gendered Perspective

Women make up about 90 % of the nursing staff worldwide<sup>1</sup>. In Africa, like in the rest of the world, women are the bulk of the health care sector. Nurses are on the front of this pandemic: they are the care providers in the health institutions and their influence reaches into the communities, raising awareness about the virus, sometimes lacking protective gear. Such exposure is extremely dangerous for society: women are the backbone of communities, supporting for the family, looking after children, and investing their earnings in their health and education. With the lockdowns and restrictions of movement, women are even more at risk when it comes to domestic abuse.

Authorities are aware about the increased abuse and must alert their populations and undertake measures to protect women. Most importantly, although Africa might currently have a low death toll and fewer cases than in Europe or the United States, protective gear for health workers remain insufficient and should be made available in countries. It has become clear to the world the crucial role health workers have in such context and their pay should reflect that.

The Bank's Gender, Women and Civil Society Department is working closely internally with different departments and engages in all emergency operations to ensure that the gender lens is applied. The aim is to guarantee gender sensitivity of different interventions such as targeting female health care workers for safety training, targeting women as part of social response teams and, targeting women in vulnerable employment and informal trade as part of national COVID-19 response strategies.

**Amel Hamza**, Manager, Gender and Women Empowerment Division, AfDB

## The Need for a Multi-Pronged Approach

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the collective vulnerability of all the countries of the world. Despite even the most developed countries having highly advanced and well-resourced health delivery systems, the rising cases of people infected by the virus continues to overwhelm and

overstretch their medical facilities and personnel. Millions of people have lost their jobs and their incomes due to the lockdowns, gender-based violence incidences have risen to alarming levels, and cases of civic unrest and looting of food stores have been reported.

The African Development Bank believes that by engaging civil society in its operations, a window of opportunity for transforming the untapped CSOs expertise into a civilian-led socio-economic growth, and managing risks of failure opens. In all of its interventions, civil society will play a critical role in providing humanitarian services to communities, creating awareness and shaping policy decisions that will be taken to address the needs of the people.

Civil society organizations themselves are already responding to this crisis under extremely difficult circumstances where they get exposed to the risk of getting infected, and with very limited resources that they have at their disposal. As experienced development practitioners with a presence in most of the poor and marginalized communities in the continent, it is imperative that governments and development partners ensure that they are well integrated into the national response and recovery plans they will come up with and have them do what they do best, deliver services to especially the most poor and vulnerable populations.

**Njeri Kinyoho**, Senior Civil Society Officer, AfDB



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