



# Annual Report 2020

**Staying Strong and Resilient Together  
During COVID-19 Pandemic**





## ABOUT VAC-NET

Volunteer Action Network (VAC-NET) is a proudly Ugandan non profit making Organisation established in 2005 to advance economic justice, education, health and leadership development opportunities for women and girls severely affected by poverty and injustice in Uganda.

## Our Vision

We envision an empowered society where women and girls are free from poverty and diseases.

## Our Mission

We empower women and girls in Uganda through socio-economic, health education, and leadership programs, creating opportunities while strengthening families and communities. It seeks to offer women leadership development and empowerment abilities required to lead successful dignified lives.

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## Our Program Director's Message

At the time of uncertainty and isolation, global solidarity was more important than ever. As COVID-19 pandemic disruptions dominated the headlines and our lives, it was helpful to remember we are all in this together, reaching out across all boundaries that often separate us. This pandemic, more than any other event, showed us that we are all connected and we needed to respond with solutions.

In our response to COVID-19 Pandemic we focused mainly on vulnerable communities, villages across northern Uganda. As we revised our standard operating procedures and working with the Ugandan government to ensure we are part of the solution.

By taking what we had learned about COVID-19, it was crucial for us to come up with a solution to complement many efforts, thus our team had to reach out and do some research on how to produce a homemade recipe for hand sanitizer and a framework for production, distribution, and use it to support our structures in the program.

Looking back at 2020 we are proud by the achievement realized by our courageous team. We continued to support women economically 1,250 micro loans provided, 17,015 pads distributed to girls and women, provided 4.8 tones of food relief, supported DTF with PPEs and sanitizers, responded to 673 GBV cases, supported 21 women to join the decision making table at different levels.

As we continue into 2021, together, you and I and the people of Uganda are rebuilding our lives, recovering from the shocks and losses of 2020 and the uncertainty to come after, and moving on to making the world a better place. I am honored to have each of you as partners, and friends in this wonderful work and it has never been important than today.

Sincerely,

  
Bukonya Muusa  
Program Director & Co-Founder



# The Transformational Power of Micro-Loans



Lilly is among many amazing women that we support. we stayed in their village for 3 days, trained them in business skills and provided them with micro loans for their agro business. Then she had no food, no business and livestock but she had her family land. After harvests now she has 6 hectares of rice, 2 hectares of cassava, 4 cows, 10 goats, 19 chickens. She is able to educate her children. We are very lucky to have worked with Lilly and many other women on their journey to get out poverty and we do this with a team of committed individuals, partners in Uganda and outside, this achievement is for all of us.

The measure to control the spread of COVID-19 Pandemic, caused many business to close and livelihood lost. to secure families we had to respond by restructuring loan repayment and also providing top up loans women. i total we provided 1,250 micro loans to support families to achieve self reliance



"My tears of joy rolled down, my heart beat First as I visited Lilly in Koro-Gulu. Her warm welcome and embracing me with a real hug was enough to explain her feeling, she said": Monica



Lilly proudly showing the team in her rice Garden of 6 ecrers

"I have kept this gift for you for so long you gave me the means, you made me hopeful again, you made me feel important and helped get a position in my community, you made me realize my resources. The training and small amount money you borrowed me has changed my life I will never forget you" said Lilly





# Adapt, Support and Seizing the Opportunity during COVID-19 Pandemic



*Our Staff distributing PPEs to Omoro District Task Force and community members*

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The hand sanitizer project has become an essential resource in the community, and we supported all District Task Forces, health centers and front liners in our areas of operation.

“During this crisis there are more than 3,000 reported cases of Gender Based Violence some have led to loss of lives. In Gulu alone we have had 5 women and men murdered due to Gender Based Violence” Alice Peer counselor



# Life Before and During COVID-19 Pandemic

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, from 18th March 2020, we focused our urgent response activities to support women, children, District Task Forces (DTFs), and communities. At the grassroots level, we worked hard to curb misinformation and create awareness to help communities to understand the reality of the situation. We provided sanitizers, food relief to over 872 vulnerable families in different districts and supported District Task Forces (DTFs) of Omoro, Gulu Nwoya, and Amuru Districts. We deepened our networking efforts and work with several clusters especially those that work for gender justice.

We carried out an on-spot impact survey to help us ascertain the impact of the loc down especially in regards to livelihood, and business. Our learning from the survey indicated a very big negative impact on the livelihood and a number of women that we supported for a period to build their business had collapsed, with some who remained standing also needed some top-up microloans to boost their business.

On the other hand, there was a reported increase in domestic violence and abuse, especially among women and children. The wide impact of many children not attending schools has had the worst disempowerment and negative effect on the human development.

We conducted training among our staff and peer counselors about the facts and prevention measures against COVID -19. Well aware that our peer counselors who reside in the community are a key community structure that works every day not only supporting and protecting their families but also the groups that they supervise. We were able to train them and also provided them with protective gear PPEs to enable them to work safely.

"The training helped as a person who was in deep fear of not knowing the basics of prevention but also all members kept asking me a question I could not answer".





# PROVIDING RELIEF AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC



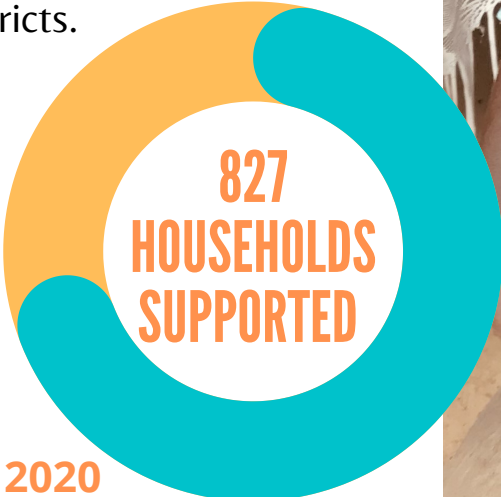
Concy a peer counsellor from Panwala distributes food relief to a disabled family member from her village

During the lock down our grassroots structure of peer counsellors remained active provided key resource roles of information sharing about COVID-19 infection myth, prevention, and provided counseling to many families that were experiencing GBV at the same time they identified and distributed food and other relief items to vulnerable families in their villages

Above is Concy a peer counsellor in Pancwala Village distributing food relief to disable member in her community who source of livelihood was distorted by the effects of corona Virus prevention measure

*"Due to lock down my mother's business which was the only source of livelihood for our family, collapsed, she used all her savings to buy food and family needs, but this couldn't take long and we had run out of options. At first we resorted to one meal a day but it reached a point where we cannot afford to have that meal and a remember some days we slept hungry and this was not only us but also our neighbors were experiencing the same".*

In response we distributed 4.8 tones of food and assorted household to over 827 vulnerable families in Gulu, Amuru and Nwoya Districts.







Prisca- our senior peer counsellor recording and responding to GBV cases during the pandemic

# Surviving Gender Based Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic

“Every day, I receive more than 30 cases that needs counseling and other services many have been stigmatized because they are suspected to be in contacts with some of unfortunate individuals confirmed and battling COVID-19” – says Prisca

As cases of COVID-19 cases increase in Uganda, the emotional, physical and mental toll is also growing. Uganda introduced mandatory lockdowns and restrictions on movements to curb the spread of COVID-19, but survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) many found themselves trapped in their homes with their abusers. Forcing them to face more extreme forms of violence.

Because many GBV service providers were not physically reachable because of restrictions caused by Covid-19, this crisis provided an opportunity for us to deploy our peer counsellors who uses our Toll-free line to conduct tele counseling services and referrals with the District Task force.

With the spread of Corona Virus, survivors were finding it hard to seek help, left isolated from the people and the resources that could help them. Health systems became overloaded, making it more difficult for survivors to access medical, psychological and mental health care in physical spaces.

Through our toll-free line hosted at Gulu Women’s Resource Center, 673 survivors were virtually linked to service providers for support including psychosocial, legal and medical services.







Our Team headed by 28 peer counsellors participating in a peaceful procession demanding the end GBV during the 16 Days of activism 2020

## 16Days of Activism-Mobilizing Communities to Respond

In Gulu 28 of community trained advocates joined with other CSOs mobilizing communities and calling on leaders to respond to ending teenage pregnancy and child marriage which is a common form of GBV inflicted on the girl child. We need to openly speak with girls and boys about the dangers of teenage pregnancy, we need to say NO to child marriage, we need to Sa NO to any form of violence against women and children.

At VAC-NET we continue to be hopeful and confident. We’ve been innovating and supporting sustainable empowerment thru programs that address inequality, marginalization, and poverty we are certainly not stopping

“During this crisis there are more than 3,000+ reported cases of Gender Based Violence some have led to loss of lives. In Gulu alone we have had 5 women and men murdered due to Gender Based Violence”

Alice- Peer counselor







*Grace- one of the beneficiaries of the free distribution of Sanitary Pads During the COVID-19 pandemic*

# Periods don't Know Pandemic

Most girls in Northern Uganda relied on free sanitary pads that were distributed at their school but with the schools shut and community lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, many had no access to sanitary pads putting them at a great health and social risk.

The measures imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda resulted in economic stress in families which ended up putting girls and women at a disadvantage. Many were cut off from essential sexual and reproductive health services, economic activities, and social networks.

Periods don't stop for pandemics. It's critical to include menstrual health and hygiene in COVID-19 emergency response interventions and policies across sectors, including health, education, SRHR, WASH, and gender. Specifically, we called on all relevant actors.

On our part we invested a great deal of our resources in the Through the HPI initiative doubled our production, and distributed 17,015 sanitary pads to adolescent girls locked up homes.

"When the government announced lockdowns my family used their savings to stock on food and supplies, but sanitary pads were not considered. Those are normally considered a luxury. I am always glad to go to school as we can get the lucky girl pads from school," Milam explains.







*21 Women participated 2020 and won elective positions at different levels*

## Leadership Development amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

Women continue to play a major role in local and regional government, ensuring women's voices are included! The impact of the up coming elections in the year 2021 was not easy given that COVID-19 and political violence continued to threaten democracy and the health of the nation. This however, did not scare off women in our leadership development program to participate at different levels.

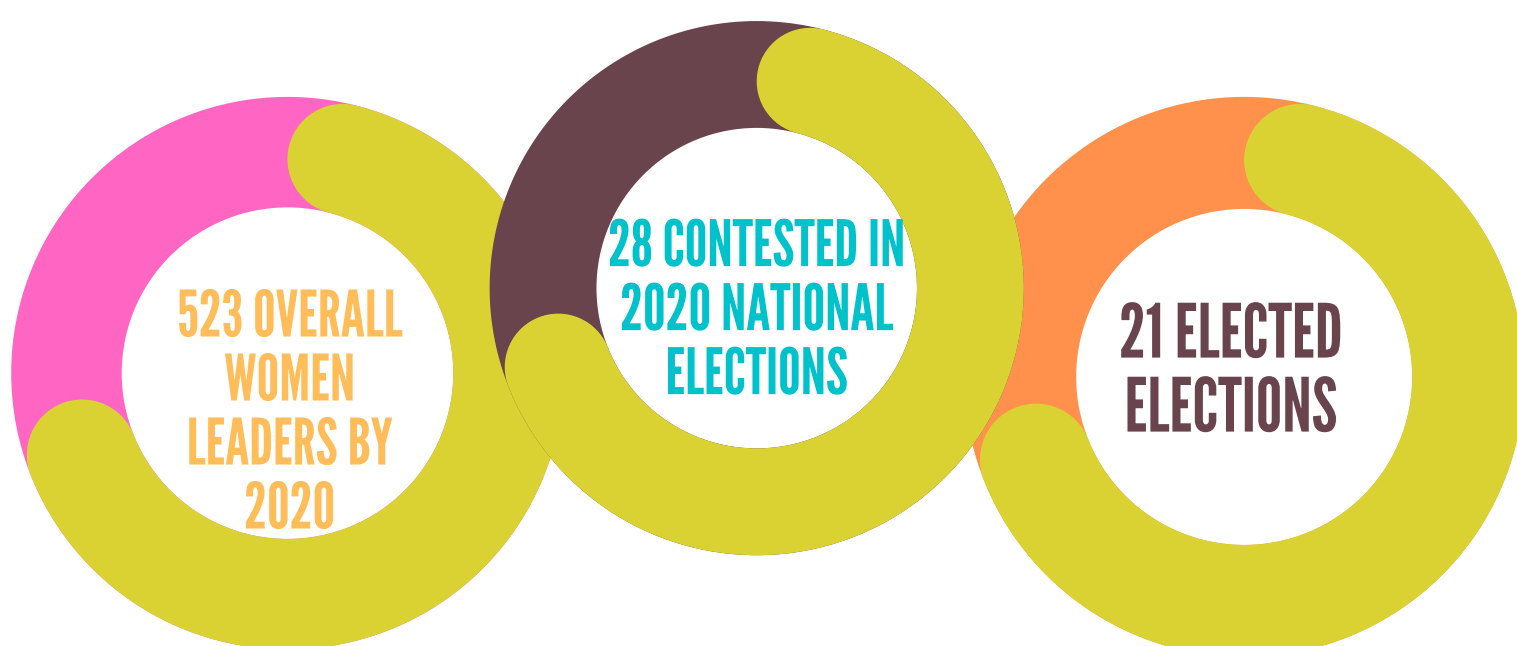
28 leadership development program participants were courageous, committed participated and contested for elected positions to represent their communities, regions, and at district level.

We are pleased to report to you, 21 women from our program were elected and entrusted with leadership roles at different levels. What is clear is that women are identified with natural gift of good communication skills and budgeting skills thus putting them at high position of trust with such roles when prepared and encouraged.

"If I have been able to be elected to the division council, I'm sure many women can only they need a little support and encouragement" says Prisca.

In 2021, we are prepared to engage, lobby, network and pass policies that with change the many unequal gender norms and those that affects the social life of every individual. This is the only opportunity to develop our community, we are grateful for the training and encouragement.

Says:- Prisca







*Harriett- Our ATJ officer marking bridges with the Police force as a partner in ending Violence agaist women and children*

## Women's Participation and Voice During COVID-19 Pandemic

The potential and strength of women is undeniable. From supporting their families to running businesses and leading classrooms, it's clear women can do anything.

But the effects of COVID-19 exacerbated the long-standing issues that women face, including job loss disparities, increased violence, and the added responsibility of full-time child care while schools are closed.

On Sunday 8th March 2020 we joined the world to make every voice heard under a common theme "An equal world is an enabled world' International Women's day 2020 is here. Volunteer Action Network together with women in Northern Uganda who actively believe and practice equal access to opportunities to make a difference in the world

We constantly demand and strive towards a society where all women and girls, men and boys are equal, in all areas of life, to make the equal and able world for all

"There is no limit to what we, as a women, can accomplish"

Says  
Michele Obama







*Our Team- Distributing Hand sanitizers to health centers in Omoro, and partner Organisation Terrarenisence*

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIP

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## PARTNERSHIP AND SOURCES OF FUNDING

We would not achieve much about our mission of empowering women to walk their way out of poverty with dignity without the Support from extraordinary organizations and individual donors.

VAC-NET works together with Women's Global Empowerment Fund (WGEF) in program Designing and implementation in Northern Uganda. This strategic partnership supports both the organisation to create a more effective, responsive and inclusive program to support women and girls in Uganda



[www.wgefund.org](http://www.wgefund.org)

We are grateful with our partnership with The Greater Contribution TGC which supports women with micro loans, business skills training, literacy and supports the HPI program enabling us to produce sanitary pads that are distributed to young girls in Schools enabling them to concentrate with their education



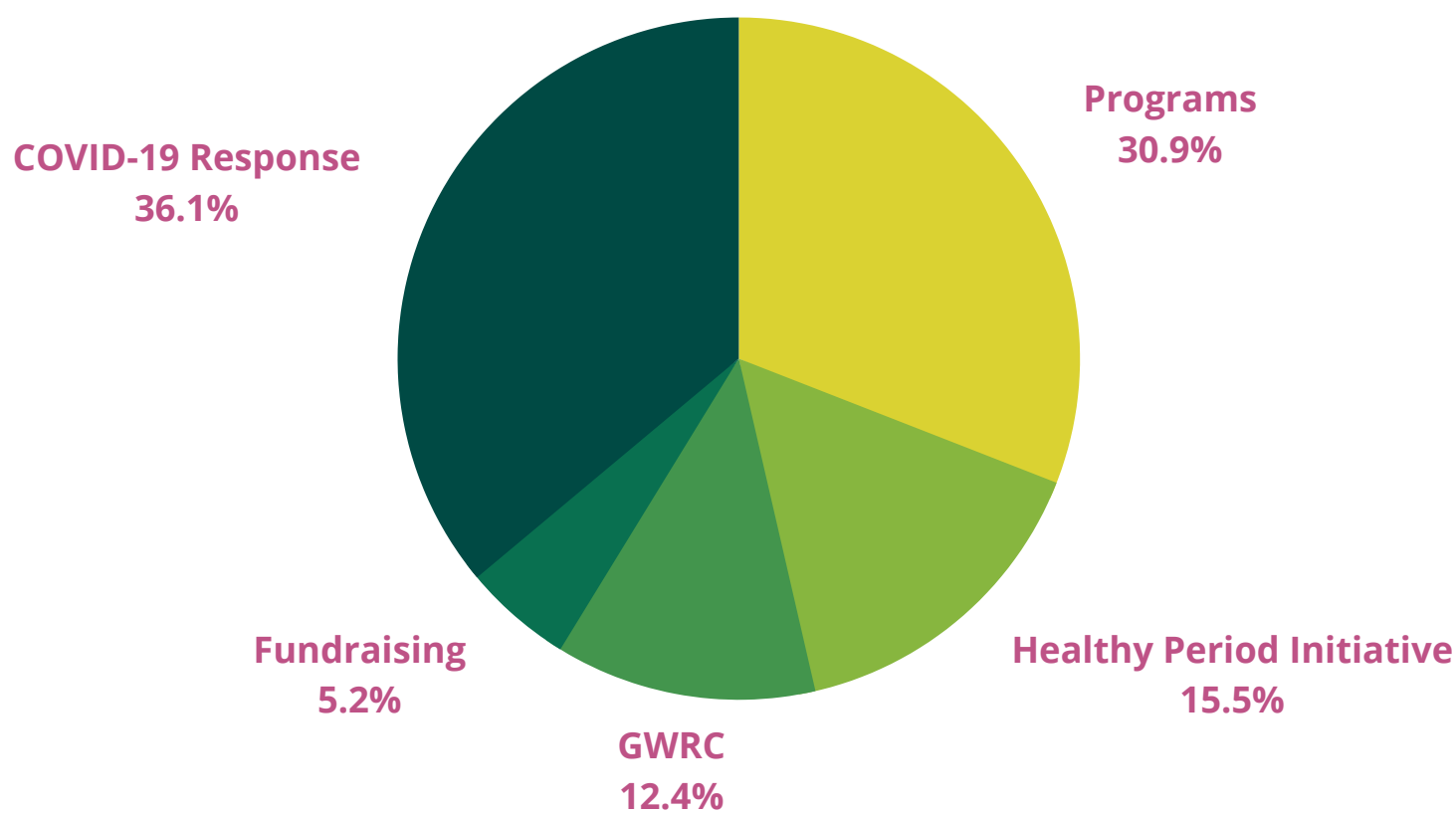
[www.thegreatercontribution.org](http://www.thegreatercontribution.org)

Locally we work closely with all Districts and have signed Memorandum of Understanding with each District we are operating to contribute to local development plans and advance economic justice for women and girls we are an active member of the Gender Working Group a member of Gulu NGO Forum. a member of Women Human rights Defenders Network, Member of the CSOs Coalition against Teenage pregnancy, child marriage and any form of abuse against children

Another great partnership is Global Giving Foundation (GGF) that has supported providing us a cloud fundraising platform and enabled us to receive and process online donations. We are hugely humbled by the our individual donors who support our activities through the global giving platform to support different projects



# Income and Expenditure



We are a nonprofit organization that focuses at creating sustainable approaches that can empower women and girls to alleviate poverty. Our programs are sustained through grants and individual donations and IGA we ensure that the highest percentage of fund go to direct implementation of our programs such as fund our micro loan, train women in business skills, support young girls in school to access Sanitary Pads, support leadership development for women and providing access to justice for women. For the year 2020 a big percentage of our resources were deployed to responses of COVID-19 pandemic activities.



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT !

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