Effective Coordination and Communication to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19

Meeting Overview

On April 28, 2020, the Global First Ladies Alliance, in partnership with The END Fund and global health experts, convened Technical Advisors from First Ladies’ Offices for an interactive discussion on how to respond effectively to COVID-19 in Africa. African countries are taking rapid and critical actions to mitigate the pandemic’s social and economic impact on communities, with First Ladies playing an important role, individually and collectively. As Mothers of their Nations, First Ladies provide compassionate and moral leadership, instilling trust and stability among their populations. The nature of their leadership and broad networks make them invaluable to any crisis response and public awareness campaign about preventive measures.

In this meeting, Technical Advisors received a comprehensive overview of the spread and impact of COVID-19 in Africa, with a focus on its transmission, effects on vulnerable groups, lessons learned from the 2014 Ebola outbreak, and ongoing response measures from a gender lens. The discussion focused on the need for clear and consistent messaging, public-private partnerships, strengthened health systems, protection of healthcare workers, alternative education models, food programs, the continuation of ongoing health services, as well as additional measures to respond to the increase of gender-based violence. Participants shared relevant best practices of governments’ and First Ladies Offices’ active role in recognizing and responding to current challenges while identifying areas for further capacity-building. (See addendum A for annotated agenda)

Participating countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe

Presenters and Facilitators: Ellen Agler, CEO, the END Fund, Wafaa El-Sadr, MD, MPH, MPA, Professor of Epidemiology and Medicine at Columbia, University, Director of ICAP at Columbia University, and Director of the Global Health Initiative at the Mailman School of Public Health, Wilmot James PhD, Departments of Political Science and Pediatrics, Columbia University, Cora Neumann, Founder, Global First Ladies Alliance, Joy Ruwodo, Advisor, the END Fund.

Program Overview

This meeting was the first component in a four-month rapid response program aiming to provide First Ladies’ Offices additional expertise, partnerships, and tools to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 as it spreads across Africa and puts additional pressure on fragile health systems. Through this program, the Global First Ladies Alliance and the END Fund, in partnership with global health experts, and media partners, will provide technical assistance and capacity-building opportunities, collectively and through one-on-one meetings, and raise awareness of First Ladies’ efforts. All meetings and media events will be developed in close collaboration with First Ladies’ Offices.

Program Organizers

For ten years, the Global First Ladies Alliance has worked with First Ladies from over 40 countries (see addendum B) across Africa, Latin America, the U.S., and the U.K. Together, we have set priorities, established strategic partnerships, and developed strategies to further the First Ladies’ agenda and create a positive impact in communities. Learn more at: www.gfla.org

The END Fund is a philanthropic initiative solely dedicated to ending the suffering caused by the five most common Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) - intestinal worms, schistosomiasis, blinding trachoma, river blindness, and lymphatic filariasis - which together account for 90% of the NTD burden in Africa. Learn more at: https://end.org
African countries are taking rapid and critical actions to mitigate the social and economic impact of COVID-19 on communities with First Ladies playing an important role, individually and collectively. As Mothers of their Nations, First Ladies provide compassionate and moral leadership, instilling stability (through their presence) and trust (through clear and science-based messaging) among their people. The nature of their leadership and broad networks make First Ladies invaluable to any crisis response and provides hope to communities at a time when it is most needed. First Ladies’ ability to mobilize leaders at all levels of the society and inspire action make them highly effective at raising public awareness of preventative measures to stem the spread of the virus, most importantly safe hygiene habits.

First Ladies’ rapid reaction to the 2014 Ebola outbreak demonstrated their effectiveness in leading and coordinating messaging efforts. By mobilizing other trusted voices, including mothers, community leaders, faith-based leaders, tribal leaders, the private sector, and government officials, First Ladies enabled wide-spread responses to myths and rumors that put the lives of healthcare workers and response programs at risk. A key lesson learned from this effort was the early development and distribution of clear communications material at all leadership levels, including legitimate messengers at the community level, and the use of various communication channels.

The uncertainty about the human toll from COVID-19, particularly on vulnerable communities, including those with pre-existing conditions (e.g., HIV/AIDS and Neglected Tropical Diseases), and its economic impact, coupled with fragile health systems, call for more partnerships and continued public awareness campaigns focusing on safe hygiene habits (frequent handwashing, physical distancing), and other preventive measures, throughout every stage of the epidemic and the national response plan.
COVID-19: Global Snapshot & African Leadership

The pandemic knows no border, thus, requiring extensive coordination to stem the spread, with the World Health Organization and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa-CDC) playing critical roles. By April 27, 2020, there were 3 million confirmed cases globally, but with experts estimating the total number to be 10-20 times. Of the confirmed cases, 48% were reported from Europe and 39% from the Americas, compared to 1% from Africa. The United States and New York City is currently the epicenter of the pandemic, with much to learn from African countries’ rapid response and leadership.

But any number must be seen in the light of countries’ testing capacity – the more capacity a country has to test and diagnose its population, the more likely it is to report new cases. Securing resources to implement mass testing is, therefore, an urgent global priority. Due to the virus’s varying impact on communities, with low-income communities and people with pre-existing conditions being at a higher risk, tracking and testing programs must focus on the most vulnerable subgroups.

By April 27, 2020, there were 31,000 confirmed cases in Africa with the northern and western regions most severely impacted, followed by the southern, eastern, central regions. African countries’ comprehensive measures to contain the pandemic include the i) closing of schools and other public institutions, ii) limitations on public gatherings and visits to hospitals and prisons, iii) mass screenings and testing, iv) public use of face masks, v) nighttime curfews, partial lockdown, or national lockdown, and vi) enhanced diagnostic capacity and surveillance systems.
Identified Challenges
But challenges to protect the health of communities and preventing people from falling further behind remain. These include the fragile state of health systems, feasibility of physical distancing and frequent handwashing, and limited access to personal protective equipment (PPE), intensive care beds, and ventilators. The biosafety of health workers, both on the frontlines and in the “back office” (e.g., transportation of pathogens), and biosecurity (protection from exposure to pathogens) are of major concern. In informal settlements, where access to space, water, soap, electricity, and the Internet is almost non-existent, measures are expected to have limited impact at best.

The additional pressure on health systems also affects other health priorities, such as services for HIV, tuberculosis, and child health, and puts recent health gains at risk. In line with interim guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO), key parts of neglected tropical disease (NTD) programs – such as community and school mass drug administrations, trainings for health care workers, and community-based surveys – have all been paused. Current “Shelter at Home” policies also make it difficult to distribute resources, provide health and social services, and monitor progress. Other grave concerns that response strategies must consider include the increase in sexual and gender-based violence, the deteriorating mental health situation, rising public tensions, and children’s disrupted schooling. As of March 30, UNESCO estimated 87% of the world’s students – 1.5 billion learners – had been affected by school closures, deepening inequalities due to inequitable access to the Internet and technology platforms needed to continue learning online.

Priorities, Lessons Learned, and Best Practices
For First Ladies, the pandemic is adding urgency to their existent priorities to help ensure access to health services, education, entrepreneurship, and food programs, especially among marginalized and vulnerable groups. First Ladies’ Offices are currently shifting focus to prioritize immediate needs (e.g., protection of healthcare workers), while ensuring the continuation of ongoing services (e.g., sexual and reproductive rights, HIV/AIDS, Neglected Tropical Diseases, and Non-Communicable Diseases).
Priorities, Lessons Learned, and Best Practices

In this new context, it is critical to identify clear goals on both short and long term, while leveraging existing and forming new partnerships. Below is a list of recommendations and best practices shared to respond effectively to the identified challenges.

- Establish close working relationships with WHO-AFRO, Africa-CDC, and the national Ministry of Health.
- Share and leverage messages by WHO-AFRO and Africa-CDC in public awareness campaigns.
- Develop clear communication materials that target any misinformation, myth, or rumor, and share with broader networks and leaders at all levels.
- Engage trusted voices in the community in public awareness campaigns, including mothers, community leaders, faith-based leaders, tribal leaders, the private sector, government officials, youth organizations, and nationally recognized athletes to ensure the messages reach all demographics.
- Use various communication channels and tailor the messages to the audience using the channel/platform.
- Scale up testing capacities and ensure programs track the virus’ impact on vulnerable groups.
- Support government policies that promote the protection of healthcare workers.
- Promote safe hygiene habits in areas with a high concentration of healthcare workers where the risk of transmission is higher.
- Encourage adequate and evidence-based care practices at hospitals and other healthcare facilities. This includes established practices for handwashing, cleaning, and disinfection, and working with key stakeholders to improve access to WASH.
- Support the development of integrated laboratories and systems, comprehensive national lab policies, as well as strategic plans for these networks.
  - Lessons learned from previous HIV efforts led to strengthened surveillance systems, laboratories, and procurement practices of medications and supplies, better models of care, and inclusive governance structures.
- Leverage existing networks, including private sector partners and the faith-based community, to address immediate needs, including the distribution of PPE and food.
  - Africa-CDC has a platform for private sector engagement, and there are country-specific ones as well. South Africa has two business associations that are playing significant roles, including Aspen Pharmacare that works on PPE supply chains.
- Engage small business owners in the production of PPE, such as masks.
- Provide alternative learning models and feeding schemes for children currently out of school while addressing gaps in access to the Internet.
  - 50% of all Internet users access the Internet through their mobile phones, which makes it one of the most important platforms for any online learning programs.
Summary of Priorities by Country
The summaries below are not complete accounts of the work of First Ladies but intended to serve as a source of inspiration and guidance.

**DRC**
- Develop a comprehensive communication and social media strategy, which also targets communities without access to the Internet or mobile phones.
- Build capacity to respond to COVID-19 from a gender equality lens.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - https://youtu.be/i0agxzOiyZU
  - https://www.fondationdnt.org/#/
  - https://www.facebook.com/DNTshisekedi

**Gabon**
- Meet the primary needs of vulnerable groups, including through food programs and vouchers.
- Protect essential workers by providing PPE, including masks and hand sanitizers.
- Continue to raise awareness of preventive measures, including safe hygiene habits.
- Respond to the increase in gender-based violence.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:

**Gambia**
- Develop a comprehensive communication and social media strategy, which also targets communities without access to the Internet or mobile phones.
- Secure and distribute PPE, including masks and hand sanitizers, feminine hygiene products, and food, especially to vulnerable groups, including women and children.
- Provide alternative education models to ensure children can continue learning.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
Kenya
- Raise awareness of safe hygiene habits (handwashing, wearing of masks, physical distancing) and support vulnerable populations and marginalized groups without access to health services.
- Increase outreach and communication to ensure pregnant women continue to do their health check-ups and deliver in hospitals, and respond to fear about contracting the virus in healthcare facilities.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - https://www.beyondezero.or.ke/

Mozambique
- Raise awareness of preventive measures, including safe hygiene habits, in media outlets and on social media platforms. As part of this work, share messages by the President and the health authority.
- Work with partners to provide PPE to frontline workers, distribute food, increase access to hospital and laboratory material, and increase efforts to respond to the increase in gender-based violence.
- Continue working with African First Ladies and make progress on the Free to Shine Campaign to prevent and address HIV/AIDS by broadcasting the campaign messages widely.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - https://www.portaldogoverno.gov.mz/por/Presidencia-da-Republica

Namibia
- Raise awareness and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.
- Support youth, including by ensuring sexual and reproductive rights and services, access to HIV/AIDS and pediatrics services
- Support women’s entrepreneurship, especially those who have lost their income by engaging entrepreneurs in the production of PPE.
- Increase support and resources for correctional facilities, children’s homes, teenagers, and healthcare workers, including through case management services and appreciation packages to healthcare workers.
- Engage the private sector and faith-based community in production and delivery of PPE and food.
- Develop and share science-based, relevant, and user-friendly messaging that targets different demographics.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - http://www.op.gov.na/documents/84084/444278/Bridge+Builder/105f09d1-c0c8-4bd8-b73a-56764fd63e9d
  - https://www.facebook.com/OneEconomyFoundation/
Reassure beneficiaries, partners, and stakeholders.
Mobilize resources to be able to respond to challenges in a post-pandemic environment
Support the national strategy by raising awareness of preventive measures, such as safe hygiene habits.
Monitor ongoing projects and help people who are in a more vulnerable position than before during the lockdown.
Restructure programs and efforts so that they have the same impact and develop new strategies that take into account the COVID-19 environment and new way of life.
See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - http://www.imbutofoundation.org/

**Rwanda**
- Reassure beneficiaries, partners, and stakeholders.
- Mobilize resources to be able to respond to challenges in a post-pandemic environment
- Support the national strategy by raising awareness of preventive measures, such as safe hygiene habits.
- Monitor ongoing projects and help people who are in a more vulnerable position than before during the lockdown.
- Restructure programs and efforts so that they have the same impact and develop new strategies that take into account the COVID-19 environment and new way of life.
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - http://www.imbutofoundation.org/

**Zimbabwe**
- Ensure nutrition and food security
- Ensure access to health services to prevent and respond to HIV/AIDS, RMNCH, NCDs and NTDs.
- Raise awareness of preventative measures, including safe hygiene habits
- Increase information sharing, leverage social media for communication, and develop outreach strategies for rural populations where many people lack access to the Internet but have access to cellphones and can receive text messages.
- Address lack of access to WASH
- Address homelessness, especially among the older population
- See more information about the First Lady’s work here:
  - https://aohzim.org/
Draft Joint Statement (see addendum C)
The group discussed the timing and process of a joint statement, coordination with OAFLAD, and suggested adding the increase in gender-based violence among the concerns, and thank the private sector for their help in mitigating the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The group will continue to discuss media opportunities, including broadcasting of a joint statement and a separate virtual Town Hall to highlight First Ladies’ efforts.

Possible Focus Areas for Future Meetings:
- COVID-19 from a gender equality lens, including gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive rights
- Communication, Outreach, and Social Media Strategies
- Public-Private Partnerships with a focus on PPE and strengthening health systems and access to the Internet
- Strategic Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation
- WASH
- Mental Health

Participating and Supporting Partners:
- Columbia University
- Nuclear Threat Initiative
- Harvard Global Health Institute
- Center for Global Development
- Voice of America, Global Water 2020
- Africa Business Coalition on Health
- OAFLAD
Effective Coordination and Communication to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19

Virtual Meeting

April 28, 2020
16h00-18h00 PM
Eastern Africa Time
Format: Zoom
Annotated Agenda

15h45-16h00: Registration and Log-in
Due to Zoom’s increased security measures, please allow extra time to log in and be admitted to the meeting.

16h00-16h15: First Ladies’ Role in Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19
Welcome and Opening Remarks by Cora Neumann, Founder, Global First Ladies Alliance, and Joy Ruwodo, Advisor, The END Fund

16h15-16h50: Best Practices, Challenges, and Opportunities by Region: Recommendations for First Ladies

Featured Experts: Ellen Agler, CEO, the END Fund, Wafaa El-Sadr, MD, MPH, MPA, Professor of Epidemiology and Medicine at Columbia University, Director of ICAP at Columbia University, and Director of the Global Health Initiative at the Mailman School of Public Health, Wilmot James PhD, Departments of Political Science and Pediatrics, Columbia University

16h50-17h45: First Ladies Offices Responding to COVID-19: Updates and Discussion
Updates from First Ladies’ Offices

17h45-18h00: Discussion re: Next Steps & Joint First Ladies Statement
A joint statement on COVID-19 by First Ladies would carry immense weight and symbolic value in this time of uncertainty and help tackle misinformation by providing a clear message. Media Partners, Voice of America (confirmed), BBC and Multichoice (pending), have offered to broadcast a statement and host a separate virtual Town Hall to highlight First Ladies’ efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. A draft will be shared before the meeting.
First Ladies: Africa
- Mrs. Ana Paula dos Santos, Angola
- Mrs. Chantal Boni Yayi, Benin
- Mrs. Chantal Campaoré, Burkina Faso
- Mrs. Denise Nkurunziza, Burundi
- Mrs. Lígia Dias Fonseca, Cape Verde
- Mrs. Adélcia Barreto Pires, Cape Verde
- Mrs. Hinda Deby Itno, Chad
- Mrs. Hadidja Ikililou, Comoros
- Mrs. Antoinette Sassou-Nguesso, Congo Brazzaville
- Mrs. Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi, Democratic Republic of Congo
- Mrs. Roman Tesfaye, Ethiopia
- Mrs. Sylvia Bongo Ondimba, Gabon
- Mrs. Zineb Jammeh, Gambia
- Mrs. Lordina Mahama, Ghana
- Mrs. Margaret Gakuo Kenyatta, Kenya
- Mrs. Ida Betty Odinga, Kenya
- Mrs. Mathato Mosisili, Lesotho
- Mrs. Callista Mutharika, Malawi
- Dr. Getrude Mutharika, Malawi
- Mrs. Keïta Aminata Maiga, Mali
- Mrs. Traoré Mintou Doucoure, Mali
- Mrs. Toure Lobo Traore, Mali
- Mrs. Isaura Nyusi, Mozambique
- Dr. Maria da Luz Dai Guebuza, Mozambique
- Mrs. Penehupifo Pohamba, Namibia
- Mrs. Monica Geingos, Namibia
- Dr. Malika Issoufou Mahamadou, Niger
- Dr. Patience Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria
- Mrs. Jeannette Kagame, Rwanda
- Mrs. Viviane Wade, Senegal
- Mrs. Marieme Faye Sall, Senegal
- Mrs. Sia Nyama Koroma, Sierra Leone
- Mrs. Fatima Maada Bio, Sierra Leone
ADDENDUM B

List of Participating First Ladies and First Ladies' Offices: 2008 - 2020

**First Ladies: Africa**
- Mrs. Mary Ayen Mayardit, South Sudan
- Dr. Sibonelo Mbikiza, Queen of Swaziland
- Mrs. Salma Kikwete, Tanzania
- Mrs. Janet Kataha Museveni, Uganda
- Mrs. Esther Lungu, Zambia
- Dr. Christine Kaseba-Sata, Zambia
- Mrs. Thandiwe Banda, Zambia
- Mrs. Auxilia Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe

**First Ladies: Global**
- Mrs. Sophia Martelly, Haiti
- Mrs. Akie Abe, Japan
- Mrs. Cherie Blair, United Kingdom
- Mrs. Sarah Brown, United Kingdom
- Mrs. Laura Bush, United States
- Mrs. Rosalynn Carter, United States
- Secretary Hillary Clinton, United States
- Mrs. Michelle Obama, United States
ADDENDUM C

DRAFT Joint Statement on COVID-19
(Suggestions by Technical Advisors in bold.)

We, the First Ladies of X, are coming together in this time of hardship and uncertainty to:

Recognize the unprecedented challenges that COVID-19 poses on our communities, in particular marginalized groups, including women and girls, and emphasize the extraordinary strength of our people.

Applaud the heroic work of essential workers on the frontlines of this pandemic and the support from private sector partners who are protecting our communities and helping meet basic needs.

Share our concern about the increase in sexual and gender-based violence endangering the lives of women and girls, as well as the spread of misinformation about COVID-19, and its risk of exacerbating the impact of the pandemic on all of us, not least our fellow sisters and brothers on the frontlines.

Commit to leading by example by providing clear and consistent messaging and encourage partnerships to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, ensure the health and safety of our communities, and make life more bearable for those most affected by the pandemic.

Encourage everyone to be a leader in this time of crisis and join our efforts by,

- Only sharing information from trusted sources, [such as public health agencies], inform your family members, and engage youth in the conversation;

- Practicing safe hygiene habits when you can; including washing your hands with soap or hand sanitizer, wearing masks in public, sheltering at home, and practicing physical distancing as your environment allows.

Together, we can inspire others to take action that will help protect both loved ones and communities at large.
ADDENDUM D

Resources
April 28

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

GFLA is collaborating with the U.S. COVID-19 High-level Strategy Task Force of global health experts that is working with governments to reduce the impact of COVID-19, and that has access to suppliers of PPE. Let us know if your Office would like to be connected to our PPE partners.

Task Force Experts include: Dr. Rebecca Katz, Professor and Director Center for Global Health Science and Security, Georgetown University; Dr. Elizabeth Cameron, Vice President, Global Biological Policy and Programs, NTI and Former Senior Director, Global Health Security and Biodefense, National Security Council staff, the White House; Jeremy Konyndyk, Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development and Former Director of Foreign Disaster Assistance, USAID; Ashish Jha, Director, Harvard Global Health Institute, School of Public Health, Jennifer Nuzzo, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, and more.

Promote Public Health and Safe Hygiene Habits

Example of Global Social Media Campaigns:

- #SafeHandsChallenge: challenge your partners to wash their hands and share on social media
- #SaferAtHome, #TogetherAtHome: encourage people to stay at home to keep everyone, in particular essential workers, safe.
- One by One: Target COVID-19: Encourage partners and communities to join the coalition uniting governments, the private sector, philanthropists, and individuals to help put a stop to COVID-19 and bring Africa closer to securing Health for All. On the campaign website, you can find the latest data, facts, and efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 in Africa.
- Guides:
  - Guide to tackle misinformation and myths with social media posts.
  - Guide on infection prevention and control of the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19 with partners.
  - UN’s official COVID-19 Response Creative Content Hub. Here, you can search for, download, and share work that communicates the UN’s six key messages.
- Social Media hashtags: #BeInformed, #SocialDistancing, #LockDownNam #SafeHandsChallenge, #BeFreeFromCOVID19 #FlattenTheCurve #agentsdesante #restezchezvous #sauvezdesvies
ADDENDUM D

Resources
April 28

Advance Gender Equality in the COVID-19 Context

Example of Global Social Media Campaigns:
- Join UN Secretary General and UN Women in raising awareness of the increase in domestic violence and the need for rapid response to gender-based violence by sharing their video. The HeForSheAtHome campaign, launched by UN Women, aims to highlight this unfair burden on women and encourage men to do their equal share. Read the announcement and see Instagram, #HeForSheAtHome.
- Rise for All is a global advocacy effort to support the UN roadmap for social and economic recovery from COVID-19, and to fully fund the UN Response and Recovery Trust Fund, convened by UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed.

Guides:
- UN: Every Woman Every Child has a platform with information about the areas below from a COVID-19 lens. On this platform you can find guides, technical briefs, a video expert series, and social media packs.
- Information management, Child health, Maternal health, including pregnancy and breastfeeding women, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (see Gender section), Adolescents, Education, Vaccines, Mental Health, Economics.
- Guide on how to promote positive gender roles in marketing and advertising that can be shared with private sector partners and others. Developed by UN Women.
- Guide on how to avoid social stigma in communications, developed by UNICEF.

Engage Youth in Disease Response

Example of Global Campaigns:
- The United Nations Secretary General Youth Envoy, Jayathma Wickramanayake, will introduce ten young people weekly fighting the coronavirus in their communities, highlighting how young people are rising up to meet the challenge of the pandemic.

Guides:
- Get ideas on how to engage youth in COVID-19 Disease Response in this guide, developed by UNICEF.