

# NEWSLETTER

## MARCH 2022

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### From the Deputy Director's Desk



**S**ince March 2020, COVID-19 has changed the world and pushed humanitarian needs to record levels.

As is too often the case at times of crisis, it is the world's most fragile contexts that are likely to be most impacted by the secondary effects of this on-going disaster. COVID-19 has triggered the deepest global recession since the 1930s. Despite its global impact, the poorest and most at-risk population are those most affected by COVID-19's consequences. The pandemic, combined with the climate crisis and the increased impact of armed conflicts, have exacerbated humanitarian needs, pushing them to a record level. The climate crisis continues to affect, exacerbate, and add complexity to the challenges faced by the poorest and most marginalised people that we work with. Floods and water shortages, soil degradation and agricultural failure, locust swarms, and increases in natural disasters all emphasise this.

Climate change had been a theme that INERELA+ is increasingly seeking to address. We are seeking to 'go green' by ensuring that our operations and policies support a sustainable response and a responsible relationship with the environment. Tragically for affected communities, the gap between these needs and the level of funding available to address them is now also at a record level. We continue to find ways to address the economic and climatic challenges that face us all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a dual

set of challenges: a public health emergency resulting from the direct consequences of the virus and, at the same time, a socio-economic crisis resulting from the drastic measures governments have been forced to take to prevent the spread of the disease. COVID-19 is therefore a health, social and economic crisis all at the same time. It is driving many more people into poverty, vulnerability, and displacement, creating major suffering. The economic consequences of the pandemic might be more devastating than the disease itself. Livelihoods have been destroyed at an unprecedented rate and COVID-19 is having a severe impact on global hunger levels. Regressions in gender equality threatens the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and needs a dedicated, bold effort that builds on our breakthroughs, our shortcomings and lessons learnt since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities across all aspects of life for women, girls and their communities. Cases of sexualized violence and femicide in Africa have risen during lockdowns imposed to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated vulnerabilities. A UNFPA report of 10 March 2021 has flagged high levels of gender-based violence by an intimate partner.

The impact of lost education for children, especially girls, is likely to have permanent effects for many. The pandemic has also brought exceptional challenges to the delivery of services especially to key populations. It has also disrupted global supply and transport chains due to border closures, drastic reductions in air traffic, restrictive measures on imports and exports, and soaring costs. Consequently, working in countries already affected by conflicts and natural disasters became even more challenging.

Despite all of these challenges what we have encouragingly seen is that INERELA+ together with its Country Networks and partners have been at the forefront of the pandemic response. Faith has always played a role in the lives and behaviours of 84% of the world's population. INERELA+ faith leaders continued to exercise considerable influence in their communities during the current COVID-19 crisis. They are trusted community leaders with vital social, access and spiritual capital. As learnt during the COVID-19 crisis, they played an essential role in sharing accurate fact-based messages, combating myths, and engaging within their communities to address harmful or unhealthy practices which ensured human dignity. Collaboration with trusted community members such as educational authorities, traditional leaders, healthcare workers, public officials has been essential for efficient outreach to their communities. INERELA+ also leveraged their longstanding partnerships and collaborations with likeminded organisations and national health authorities to share information about COVID-19, to fill the gaps in existing services as efficiently as possible and to activate preparedness activities across different countries.

Raising awareness about the virus and how to prevent its spread is of utmost importance from the beginning of a pandemic. Clear and

accurate communication is therefore key for any successful and effective prevention strategy. As the world navigates COVID-19 pandemic, the INERELA+ Secretariat designed, printed, and distributed educational and consistent messages through multiple channels of communication and materials to fifteen of its country Networks. COVID-19 education is being integrated into ongoing hygiene training for Religious Leaders by different country networks where INERELA+ works. This has been supported by Church of Sweden, Robert CARR and UN Women. The Country Networks have demonstrated their ability to adapt themselves to serve the mission of the network in highly effective ways. Guided by the imperative to reduce suffering and save lives among the most vulnerable and marginalised communities Country Networks have shown great innovation and creativity in continuing to operate, support communities and ensure access to services to those most in need.

A covid mitigation grant was raised by INERELA+ Secretariat in December 2021 which has yielded a partnership with Phambano Technology. The partnership has just seen the implementation of the first phase at INERELA+ Secretariat which has addressed a number of digital challenges. The package of this partnership includes support to INERELA+ country networks and plans are in place to roll out this initiative to improve data capturing, reporting, sharing of lessons

learnt and challenges between the INERELA+ Secretariat, its Country Networks, and partners.

Additionally, the Covid mitigation grant is being utilised to review and update the second edition of the INERELA+ SAVE toolkit against the Fast Track Strategy and integrate it with other existing tools such as Framework for Dialogue, whilst retaining its own integrity. Also, the review will significantly focus on the inclusion of the recently developed political declaration and the new UNAIDS strategy taking into consideration the newly allocated targets. INERELA+ will incorporate additional materials with a mental health and COVID lens in the reviewed SAVE toolkit since we are now operating in the new normal era. This process will better position the SAVE toolkit to include current trends in HIV prevention technologies and HIV treatment.

Without creative, concerted, and collective action, my fear is that the gap between humanitarian needs and the resources to address them will continue to grow, leaving an ever-greater number of people in acute risk.

**Enjoy your reading!**

**Munya Mandipaza**  
*Acting Executive Director*

## INERELA+ Ghana: Training of Religious Leaders on SGBV in Accra

From the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, INERELA+ Ghana held a three-day capacity building workshop for selected religious leaders in Accra. The main aim of the workshop was to educate participants on the best ways to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) for women and girls, HIV and Counselling and, mental health issues in their line of work. The INERELA+ Ghana National Country Coordinator, Mrs Mercy Acquah-Hayford said the workshop was necessitated by the need to equip Religious Leaders with requisite skills to reduce the high rate of SGBV and divorces in the communities. After the workshop, the participants were expected to form an advocacy group to hold community outreaches and lobby for policy changes against societal norms that are harmful to the vulnerable and the underserved communities.

Ghana, like most countries in recent years has experienced a sharp rise in SGBV. It is estimated that about 641 million women worldwide have experienced at least one incidence of physical



and sexual violence from a romantic partner. Mr Cephas Essiful-Ansah, a Legal Officer at the commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), in his presentation on specific laws on GBV in Ghana said globally, one in three women have been beaten or

abused by their partner.

It is against this background that INERELA+ Ghana appealed to churches and Religious Leaders to assist by providing safe spaces for GBV victims across the country, encouraging

women to speak out and report perpetrators of GBV. For her part, Ms Paulina Louisa Essel, the Deputy Chief Registrar at CHRAJ stressed the need for Religious Leaders to seek mental health care when confronted by life challenges and stressful conditions. She further urged all to take

their mental health seriously by reducing anxiety, improved moods, and clear thinking. Ms Juliet Ewurasi Koomson, a participant of the workshop thanked INERELA+ Ghana for organising such an insightful network. "I now have a clearer understanding of how to handle HIV stigma

and discrimination issues, I have learnt to overcome and how to address the fears related to exposing people who abuse their partners" she said.

## INERELA+ Malawi Saved My Life



**B**arton Phiri (36), a husband and a father of four (4) was diagnosed with HIV and AIDS

at Mpemba Health Centre. Phiri decided to taste for HIV/AIDS after attending an awareness meeting organised by young people who were trained in Faith Healing and Adherence organised by INERELA+ Malawi. Before testing for HIV and AIDS, Phiri struggled with his health, he was always sick, and he couldn't work effectively. He survived on antibiotics, but he was not getting any better. "I took as

a normal life, and I spent a lot of money on things that could be avoided." Said Phiri while thanking MANERELA+ for training youth on the importance of getting tested and sharing the news with other community members. Phiri further explained "I had to choose life and not death; I must live positive at any cost. I explained my status to my wife who also went for testing, but her results were negative"

## INERELA+ Secretariat Attends a UN Women Webinar on Resiliency to Crisis

**O**n 1 March 2022 INERELA+ Acting Executive Director Munya Mandipaza had a chance to participate in the in the discussions between Civil Society and other stakeholders on resilience to the continuing impacts of Covid and other crisis in efforts to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls co – hosted by UN Women Trust Fund to end Violence Against Women and Spotlight Initiative Secretariat. Vesna Yardage the Acting Chief of the interest on violence against women co-hosted the webinar together with Erin Kenny head of the technical unit of the Spotlight initiative (the world's largest investment which was launched in partnership with United Nations and European Union 2017 to end violence against women and girls)

The webinar which focused on resilience in crisis lessons from the civil society organizations in the prevention of violence against women and girls was a learning forum organised by UN Women to share some practices on prevention of violence against women and girls. It presented an opportunity for the INERELA+ Acting Executive Director to discuss critical issues and to share lessons on what she had learned on the continuing ongoing and negative impact of the COVID 19 crisis on women and girls. She also shared on how INERELA+ is mobilizing communities through Religious Leaders to prevent violence and how their work is positioned across the spectrum of prevention and response to meet the urgent needs of beneficiaries. This learning platform

was also essential for her to highlight the effect of intersecting and coinciding crisis like climate change related disasters and the impacts of the intensifying environmental degradation to women and girls as well as promising practices.



*Ms. Munya Mandipaza, Acting Executive Director*

This event was also hosted when another major crisis was unfolding and occupying people's minds with concerns for the safety and wellbeing of all civilians who had suffered from death, destruction, and displacement in Ukraine. Women and girls were also disproportionately affected by this conflict. It gave participants the opportunity to showcase strategies that are potentially transferable to other intersecting and compounding crisis settings.

INERELA+, a grantee of UN Women has continued to pivot and adjust its operations to support women and girls' survivors of violence in challenging circumstances through use of its faith leaders who have always made transformative change within their communities by facilitate change in attitudes and behaviours

that enable violence. Throughout the COVID crisis INERELA+ has invested in organizational resilience of its Country Networks which are implementing Projects covering three broad outcome areas namely preventing violence against women, providing safe adequate multifactorial services and supporting effective implementation of laws policies and reforms. This has been essential to enable them to adapt and to the rapidly changing context so they can be able to support women and girls' survivors throughout the challenging times.

After the interactive panel discussion amongst civil society partners participants were introduced to the interactive virtual safe space/ knowledge hub by the name shine. Shine is a new online hub for knowledge exchange that UN Women created for global learning exchange on ending violence against women and girls. This was developed in a partnership with the Spotlight Initiative and the UN Women Trust Fund as a way of adapting to the new normal and securing a space for ongoing and continuing conversation in over 50 languages on various topics related to violence against women and girls. Shine gives an opportunity to organisations to connect with other networks related to the work of ending violence against women and girls. It is a convening platform and multilingual tool to inform global policy programming and advocacy on ending violence against women and girls. Its aim is to connect a range of partners and change makers, civil society and women's organizations. Shine offers a spirit of



inclusiveness and accessibility whilst overcoming language and time zone barriers through instant translation for everyone engaged. The platform provides opportunities to collaborate across networks and to share knowledge to co create

and improve resources and tools. It allows networking and convening of opportunities that connect partners across the globe, to advocate for and influence programming and policies which end violence against women

and girls. Anyone is allowed to join, so they can share their own experiences and collectively increase knowledge and meaningfully influence programming and policies on ending violence against women and girls.

## INERELA+ Zimbabwe: Pushing for Improved Safer Practices for Sex Workers Through Economic Empowerment Projects



*Sex workers Empowerment Project in Zimbabwe*

There are over 44,500 females sex workers in Zimbabwe, around 40% of whom are living with HIV. This is concerning in an environment where sex work is illegal, condoms are being confiscated and gender inequality makes condom negotiation difficult. Sex workers' vulnerability to HIV is exacerbated by police intimidation, harassment, and unjustified arrests. This creates fear causing sex workers to stop accessing health care services. It is against this background that INERELA+ Zimbabwe organised sensitization meetings for Religious Leaders and sex workers in Harare and Gweru. The main aim of the meetings was to reduce violence against sex workers at community and national level in Zimbabwe. The meetings were funded

by AidsFonds through the Hands-Off project. INERELA+ Zimbabwe reached out and engaged community leaders and gatekeepers so that they could be sensitized on sex work issues. In collaboration with Sex Workers' Organization and The Centre for Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Research (CeSHHAR), INERELA+ Zimbabwe reached out to at least 500 sex workers.

Individual Religious Leaders and sex workers were identified for further trainings and sex workers support groups were established. INERELA+ Zimbabwe reached out to and trained 100 Religious Leaders on reduction of violence against sex workers in Zimbabwe through HIV prevention, care, and support. Over 500 sex workers were sensitized on the need for sex

workers support groups where they can help one another on issues related to practicing safer practices while conducting their business. The trained sex workers went on to form support groups and support young sex workers when they are in trouble with the law. In 2021 a Good Samaritan paid a visit to Hopley to meet sex workers. In 2022 through this Good Samaritan a young Swiss couple managed to help 10 sex workers with income generating projects in Hopley. The sex workers are now into raring projects, flee marketing and fish marketing. They have stopped going out to sell sex as a means for survival.

One of the leaders of sex workers support group, Vengai Hadji transformed positively. She is now a full-time business owner and para legal champion who is championing the welfare of the girl child and women who are sexually abused in Hopley. Using skills, she has gained from INERELA+ Zimbabwe trainings, Vengai now provides sex workers with accurate knowledge on condom use, pre-expose prophylaxis, post exposure prophylaxis and sex work communication skills, how to report to police when abused during work and all these are safer practices that the sex workers need to know about.

## INERELA+ Secretariat Conducts Annual Planning Meeting – 21 – 23 February 2022

INERELA+ Secretariat annual planning meeting was held from 21st - 23rd of February 2022 at Birchwood hotel. As part of INERELA+ strategy, the organization plan for the year and put programmes,



finance, and projects implementation by country networks into an Operational Plan. The meeting utilized a hybrid approach where seven staff members physically attended the meeting from the conference center and virtually connected

to the Acting Executive Director (chairperson) who was working from another location. The physical meeting gave a chance to the team to reenergize and revitalize the momentum in preparation of the year. The annual planning meeting came at the right time as it coincided with the Acting Executive Director's theme for the organization which she shared at the beginning of the year during the first staff meeting, "2022 Year of Restoration: Job 19 v 25". Drawing from INERELA+ theme of the year, the

Acting Executive Director opened the meeting by devoting the word of prayer from Mathew 19 v 26 -29.

One of the key highlights from the meeting

was that the execution plans required documentation of priorities focusing on year 2022 targets. The annual planning meeting ended by developing a 2022 Action Plan which captured tasks and responsibilities for every

portfolio at the Secretariat to oversee and implement through the year with a possibility of the organization having an MTR to review and assess the implementation, success, and challenges of the Action Plan.

## INERELA+ Congo: Advocacy for Open Access to HIV Testing for Minors without Parental Consent

In DR Congo, the law on the protection of people living with HIV and affected persons in its article 37 states: The HIV test on a minor or on any other incapable person is practiced with the consent of the parents or guardian, except if his or her best interest requires it. Over the years, several civil organisations partnered and organised campaigns for free access of adolescents to HIV testing without the consent of the parents or guardianship, but they failed to influence the policies, or change the narrative of article 37. The barrier for adolescents continued. INERELA+ CONGO (CONERELA) through the

National Coordinator Cesar Mombunza Azuba in collaboration with Réseau des Associations Congolaises des Jeunes (RACJ) youth network and Réseau des journalistes et communicateurs pour la population et développement (RCP) which is a network of journalists and communicators for population and development organised an advocacy TV show (link: <https://youtube/gql88j2ZSrE>) to remind parliamentarians and parents the importance of adolescents HIV testing without their consent. This was funded by Robert CARR Foundation RCF – EOF grant. The advocacy was driven by an argument that

besides the provisions of article 37, there was need for authorities to consider, prioritise and encourage adolescents voluntary HIV testing as the age of first sexual intercourse in DR Congo is around 13 years. Furthermore INERELA+ CONGO (CONERELA) and its partners wants to mobilise all the actors on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) to take a leaf from the TV show initiative and continue with the campaigns or advocacy that may influence policy makers to relook into article 37.

## INERELA+ Ghana: Taking Responsibility of Children to Reduce Violent Crimes



responsibilities and ensure they protect their children.

In support of the statement, Nima Police Commander appealed to the community leaders to assist the police to prosecute perpetrators of criminal cases in the area, to deter others. Mrs Mercy Acquah-Hayford, Country Coordinator of INERELA+ Ghana said as a human group, INERELA+ is aware of the number of abuses that occurred in the Nima community and its surrounding, adding that, the engagement was, therefore, an effort to educate the community on the need to report such case to the relevant authorities.

While participating in a meeting organised by INERELA+ Ghana on the 12th of February on reduction of violent crimes which included perpetration of GBV in the communities, Chief Baba Issah, Chairman of the Ayawaso Council of Zongo Chiefs, called on parents in Nima and its surroundings to take keen interest in their children to protect them from social evils. He further urged police to ensure the prosecution of all domestic violence cases especial rape and defilement. His call came after a recent alleged defilement of a 5-year-old girl in Nima by a 52-year-old teacher.

The engagement was organised by IERELA+ Ghana, with funding from United Nations Women Trust Fund (UNTF). The aim of the engagement meeting was to sensitise community members on the need to protect the vulnerable members of society, women, and girls, through eradication of domestic violence in the communities. In attendance were Imams, queen mothers, and various leaders including law enforcement agencies. In his speech the chief noted that those recent violent crimes, including rape recorded in and around Nima were results of parents' disinterest in their children's welfare. He urged parents to take up

## INERELA+ Hands Off Programme Mid-Term Review (MTR) Workshop

From the 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, Ms Munya Mandipaza, Acting Executive Director and Bobo Chazireni, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor at INERELA+ Secretariat attended the Hands-off Mid-Term Review (MTR) Workshop. The aim of the MTR Workshop was to provide space for reflecting on sex workers' movement(s), collective exploration

of areas of potential improvements, offer an in-person space to reconnect and enable dialogue among Hands-Off project implementing



workers with the aim to ultimately influencing favourable law and policy reforms in Southern Africa.

partners. The Hands-Off Programme, coordinated by Aidsfonds, focuses on the reduction of violence against sex workers in Southern Africa through prevention, care, and support. The programme works with sex worker-led groups, law enforcement, health, support services and other key stakeholders towards achieving safer environments for sex

The purpose of the MTR was to provide a participatory review of the programme. In the MTR the focus was on analysis and documentation of the progress of the Hands-Off programme, as well as to provide recommendations to sharpen the strategic direction and operation for the remaining years. The MTR workshop was facilitated by Balise Trading. The consultant after the MTR process is expected to deliver

MTR report, including a set of four case studies on each of the Hands-Off outcomes and a set of recommendations to inform the strategic direction of the programme, including recommendations for Hands-Off partner programming per country, sustainability of the programme and on increasing programme impact on the cross-cutting themes and stakeholder engagement.