



## **Civil Society Statement on Coronavirus (COVID 19)** **19<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Kampala**

### **#StaySafe - Solidarity and Rethinking our Development Paradigms is what will Defeat CoIronavirus**

1. As we witness the unprecedented global lockdown around the world and in Uganda, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) join hands in solidarity with all peoples of the world and citizens of Uganda to fight the spread of Coronavirus. According to WorldOMeter report dated 19 March at 10:12GMT; globally 221,268 cases have been reported, 8,997 deaths and 85,782 people have recovered. We believe that this pandemic represents more than just a health crisis. It represents the need for the world as a global community to rethink its development paradigms. The world today needs to recognize that as a people we are all vulnerable and we must build systems that are truly resilient and citizen-centered – not serving some but serving all.
2. The poor and vulnerable in our communities and across the world will be the ones that will bear the brunt of this lockdown. For example, in Uganda 84.9% of the non-agriculture population is in the informal employment. Informal employment impacts on the adequacy of earnings, occupational safety and health and working conditions. Workers in the informal economy suffer from more uncertain, less regular and lower incomes than those in the formal economy. Their physical and financial vulnerability is increased by the very fact that they work in the informal economy. The informal economy is excluded from and is effectively beyond the reach of social security schemes or safety and health measures and protection legislation.
3. We therefore call for targeted concrete responses from our Government – as a duty-bearer - to ensure that all Ugandans soldier through this pandemic together. We welcome the President's Address on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to the Nation on; *Guidelines on the Preventive Measures for Coronavirus Pandemic*. We also look forward to the Standard Operating Procedures that will be issued by the Ministry of Health for various entities. We would want to urge Ugandans to follow all the procedures and ensure safety of all our people.
4. Above all, as our world dramatically changes on a daily basis, it is important to remember that coronavirus and other catastrophes that are affecting the world like; Desert Locusts, Ebola, Floods and Landslides are all a painful reminder of the folly of turning our backs on society. Our interdependence as members of the human race behooves us to look after and look out for each other. For the state, the duty to look after its citizens is conferred on it when citizens vote for their leaders and pay their

taxes. In turn, when the State receives an election mandate and collects taxes it gains control over public services and infrastructure like schools, healthcare facilities, water supply, electricity supply and roads - among other pooled public goods.

5. We now have to question the existing models that have over the last several decades led to the dereliction of this duty. Around the world, governments have been gradually preferring private sector led development and the attendant actions of handing management of public services to big corporations – in many cases global corporations. The net effect of this global phenomena has been that capital and business-logic now rules the day. Unprofitable ventures in the health sector and other social services have continued to see enormous budget cuts. The widespread privatization of government hospitals and placing healthcare workers on contracts, the paltry investments in preventive medicine, and profit-oriented drug development practices are some of the challenges when intertwined with coronavirus, create a much larger impact of the pandemic.
6. We join the Government and development actors to underscore the short-term health-focused measures but we would urge that these actions go a bit further as follows;
  - a) Government should work with all development stakeholders to build its capabilities to conduct mass testing and treatment without prejudice to people's capacity to pay
  - b) Government should ensure that citizens can access state-subsidized goods such as; masks, sanitizers, and food for those in dire need
  - c) Government should *reconsider* and finance all institutional quarantine to mitigate the risk of people going underground and refusing to report symptoms because of fear of the costs of quarantine
  - d) Government should put in place a contingency fund to offer concrete support for frontline health workers all over the country that will be supporting this work
  - e) Government should put in place measures to ensure food security for vulnerable populations that may be affected by this lockdown
  - f) Government should work with all employers to put in place measures that protect citizens from the effects of temporary layoff, abrupt work stoppage, unemployment and guaranteeing income for all affected citizens

**As long-term measures, CSOs would urge Government to:**

- a) Invest substantially in appropriate public healthcare systems
- b) Intentionally build the domestic economy by ensuring that investment incentives for Ugandans are strengthened
- c) Ensure that we increase the investment in education and research to ensure that Uganda provides quality free education and health care
- d) Uganda must strength its capabilities to take care of its citizens especially the marginalized and vulnerable in catastrophic situations like the coronavirus pandemic

7. CSOs shall continue to participate in all public information campaigns against coronavirus as well as related preventive actions to ensure that we reach all Ugandans especially those that risk being left behind
8. This pandemic enjoins all citizens, their organizations (CSOs) and all development stakeholders to work for a world that unites all of us and put in place policies and programmes that leave lasting impact on people's welfare. This global pandemic clearly shows that political repression, wanton accumulation and the attendant economic inequality, gender inequality, injustice against the poor and vulnerable have no place in the world.
9. Let us work to see the day when COVID-19 will be a memory that inspires all of us to take decisions that will leave no Ugandan behind as well as contribute to rebuilding the social fabric that the dominant world order has so destroyed.
10. COVID-19 is a pandemic that calls for personal, family, community, national and international solidarity.

#StaySafe

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