


2020 ANNUAL REPORT

www.solidarityuganda.org



OUR PROFILE

Solidarity Uganda envisions a liberated Africa where people exercise their power in which all people live in dignity and have the power to secure their rights to equality and justice. We work towards this vision by supporting the oppressed in building their collective power to achieve social and political change. By empowering and equipping those on the frontline of the struggle against oppression and injustices, we help build stronger, more resilient communities and movements that can take on abusive actors— and win. To achieve this, we train and organize communities to wage nonviolent resistance against authoritarianism, oppression, and injustice.

Our Vision

A liberated Africa where people exercise their power

Our Mission

To support the oppressed in building their collective power to achieve social and political change.

Our Values

- Human and Environmental Freedom
- Civil Resistance
- Constructive Alternatives
- Intersectional Organizing
- Solidarity
- Transparency and Accountability
- Shared Leadership and Personal Discipline

MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

Like many other organizations, the pandemic has had very adverse implications on our operations and programs. Several activities and actions were postponed while others were canceled. With several restrictions on movement and gatherings, our staff and chapter members couldn't travel or meet together like before. However, this didn't deter us from doing what we committed ourselves to do- empowering the oppressed and holding those in power accountable. Like our chapters, human rights defenders and activists, we have shown great resilience and commitment to the work of human rights and justice even more.

We are grateful to our funders and supporters for not only maintaining the support they gave us but for also being flexible and understanding in these challenging times. We were able to courageously do our work because of your commitment and belief that we can change this world together as a united force.

Our mission is to support the oppressed in building their collective power to achieve social and political change and we have endeavored to do this by empowering our chapters to stand up for justice and human rights bearing in mind that communities are best situated to tackle their challenges. While we support them with strategic guidance and mentorship, we have learned that it is very important to take leadership from those most affected as they understand their plight more than anyone else.

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges and opportunities altogether. With limited movement as a result of lockdowns and curfew, our staff and chapters could not do as much organizing as before.

Shifting to online platforms was one of the greatest challenges presented since we work with grassroots communities which are mostly composed of technologically illiterate people who also have limited access to smartphones or computers. Those with smartphones can barely afford the expensive internet bundles and the internet infrastructure is also very poor in most rural communities. Amidst these glitches, we were able to create online groups via WhatsApp where chapter representatives shared challenges and ideas of how they could remotely organize. We were also able to support these chapters through the same platform and phone call mentorship sessions. Through these platforms, communities were able to once again organize while keeping safe. Several chapters distributed masks to their communities as a way of sensitization and protecting each other against the spread of the virus.

We were impressively challenged and encouraged by activists and organizers who identified corruption and mismanagement in the government strategies to curb Covid19. These recognized that this was a form of oppression that they needed to stand up to and they did as we shall see later in this report.

We are grateful for our team at Solidarity Uganda. Our staff and volunteers who have selflessly and passionately dedicated their time and resources to work with oppressed communities across Uganda. We see you and recognize that this work wouldn't have been possible without you. Thank you.

Aluta Continua
Management team
Solidarity Uganda.

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead

2020 has been a year like no other. COVID-19 has not only been a public health crisis, but it has also been a crisis for human rights and activism, aggravating inequalities in our societies and the pretext of COVID-19 to crackdown on civil liberties and further restrict the ability of civil society to operate.

The government has subjected the country to unnecessarily dangerous conditions coupled with greed and suppression of human rights and freedoms during these times.

It became increasingly difficult to transport patients and expectant mothers because for one to get to a hospital one had to seek permission from the RDCs who are many times unreachable and extremely slow in their response.

There was a drastic increase in security force brutality to citizens. Activists like Stella Nyanzi and Nana MwaAfrica were brutally arrested for peacefully protesting in demand of food. Several women fruit vendors were beaten and arrested just because they went looking for a little money to fend for their families.

While the government mostly sidelined civil society in the COVID-19 response strategy, Solidarity Uganda managed to organize and respond to some urgent needs of our community. Many individuals were unfairly forced into institutionalized quarantine in expensive hotels under very unhealthy conditions, we provided some food and water to the very first quarantined group to sustain them while they organized themselves to take on a hunger strike which led to their release 14 days later.



OUR WORK WITH CHAPTERS AND AFFILIATES

Our goal for this year was to develop at least 12 semi-autonomous chapters spearheading the national agenda for social and political change in Uganda by 30th September 2020.

To achieve this, we focused on organizing and strengthening networks of self-affiliating chapters of community organizers and activists with emphasis on youth and women; who subscribe to our core values of Human and Environmental Freedom, Civil Resistance, Constructive Alternatives, Intersectional Organizing, Solidarity, Transparency and Accountability, Shared Leadership, and Personal Discipline.

While strengthening and supporting our vibrant chapters, we also identified and

established nine (9) new chapters across the country.

Some of these requested training and mentorship upon observing what our chapters were achieving in their communities. Amongst these were several women groups focusing on land injustices and others focused on several social justice issues. These new chapters who chose to affiliate with us were introduced to concepts of civil resistance, nonviolent strategies, and tactics through training and mentorship

Our chapters are doing incredible work in the different regions across the country. These communities have expressively stood up for their rights and pushed back against the oppression meted on them. They have courageously held those in power accountable and made sure those who abuse it pay (to a large extent).



THE VUVUZELA CAMPAIGN

The Make Bushenyi Great Again (MBUGA) chapter in western Uganda had a “VUVUZZELLA” campaign where they conducted a series of actions to organize and push back against corruption and impunity in Bushenyi Ishaka Municipality. The organized citizens blew vuvuzelas at the municipal council while calling out names of corrupt officials, they closed the offices and occupied the premises for 5 consecutive days. Following these actions, three corrupt officials including the Municipal Engineer, Procurement Officer, and Municipal Treasurer were interdicted and later arrested. Their cases are pending a hearing.



THE KUMI CHAPTER STOOD AGAINST HOSPITAL MISMANAGEMENT

The Kumi chapter in Eastern Uganda stood up against corruption and mismanagement that was happening at Kumi hospital. Through a demonstration, they called out the senior management of the hospital. Doctors and nurses who were involved in extortion of patients and negligence of duties were fired and others were demoted as a penalty. This hospital whose foundation is community service had lost its vision through selfish individuals whose interest was to satisfy their greed, the chapter members made sure this stops.



Just like in Kumi, the Kotido chapter also held a march demonstrated against the poor state of Kotido Health Centre 4. The blood bank which had been dysfunctional for a long time was restored and restocked with blood while electricity supply was also revamped. Communities continue to recognize corruption as a form of oppression and the fight goes on.

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— Margaret Mead.

Covid19 and the food crisis

The emergence of the Covid19 virus presented the world with a huge pandemic but it is also presented an unanticipated food crisis. Many reports across the world indicate a global food challenge and Uganda is no exception. The government imposed several restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. Amongst which were lockdowns and curfews which restricted movement and organizing. While these restrictions are necessary to curb this deadly virus, we certainly do not have the infrastructure to support social distancing, lockdowns amongst other things. With many people pushed out of work, they remained with no source of income to cater to their daily basic needs.

Most communities in Uganda live below the poverty line and do not have the luxury or resources to stay indoors. Many live on a day-to-day income supported by small businesses which suffered greatly as a result. Nevertheless, the pandemic exposed several injustices and inequalities and even exacerbated already existing ones. With many people going without food and several other basic necessities, the government provided some relief items which included food. However a few people benefited from these while the majority remained hungry. Despite receiving huge amounts of donations from several non-governmental agencies, there was gross mismanagement of the funds and items donated by different state ministries and officials. As these unfolded, several chapters and activists started organizing and demanding accountability and support while highlighting their plight

Communities in western Uganda 'cooked' stones to symbolize their lack of food. Sex workers in the northern part of the country threatened to expose their clients amongst the district officials if they did not receive food. This placed the officials in a decision dilemma. A few hours later they received food moreover on a Saturday! Boda Boda riders in Arua, West Nile organized demonstrations. The resilience and courage of these people has taught us to take power from those most affected. To listen and support them unleash the power and potential within them.



THE NATIONAL LAND DEFENSE LEAGUE

Land grabbing, environmental degradation, and climate injustice are on the rise, this year we supported different chapters under the National land defense league movement to collectively push back land grabbers, government, and multinational agencies who are forcefully evicting and stealing land from communities across Uganda. The National Land Defense league is a farmer-led movement that exists to resist land grabs and land grabbers - businesses, politicians, and military men from home or abroad who steal land from the Ugandan people.

Unfairness in land use, control, and governance has existed for decades now, with corruption, unfair policies, and other injustices embedded in the land tenure system.



THE BENET INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The Benet indigenous people along the slopes of Mount Elgon in Eastern Uganda have had a fair share of this injustice. More than 35 years ago, they were forcefully driven out of their motherland by the government through the Uganda Wild Life Authority. Their eviction has been coupled with severe brutality from UWA rangers, who have relentlessly terrorized this community burning homes, beating, shooting, and killing people, women and girls have been raped while several others have been arrested for nothing other than defending their land. We have been working with the Benet for a few years now training and equipping them with strategic nonviolent skills in order to push back. This year, after a series of actions which included demonstrations, the government returned over 8000 hectares of their land. While this may only be a small portion of what belongs to them, they must celebrate. It is these small victories that propel communities to even bigger victories.

Find More about their story here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ps-sZfWfsl4&t=60s>

OUR RAPID RESPONSE NETWORK CONTINUES TO GROW

Total No of Victims Assisted	Female	Male
138	103	34
Total No Solidarity Visits Conducted	Jail Solidarity visits (Kitalya, <u>Sentema</u> & Luzira prisons)	Community/ Family visits
27	20	7

There was an increase in political repression and militarization of the state during this year. Police brutality and arbitrary arrests and detentions of activists, HRDs and community organizers was on a rise. Our staff were intimidated and offices monitored by security operatives while some partners also faced repression due to their support to civil resistance and democratic processes. 138 activists faced repression and were detained either in police cells, or in prisons.

Solidarity Uganda is committed to supporting and ensuring the protection of HRDs and activists even while they are incarcerated. Through these solidarity visits, activists feel supported and encouraged to continue fighting for justice and equality.

Jail solidarity is a tactic for putting pressure on authorities after activists are arrested. “By pushing for activists’ release, or, failing that, for decent treatment and protection from psychological and physical abuse, it seeks to create a strong community of resistance, based on mutual support and unity of purpose that can act against harassment, false accusations, selective prosecutions, strategies of isolation and victimization, and other forms of persecution.” Beautiful Trouble

Our regional coordinators and working groups continued to support the Rapid response department through conducting community visits to oppressed communities, activists, and HRDs. This not only encourages these communities, but also helps us understand the challenges they face every day while confronting injustice, oppression, and repression.

THE SOLIDARITY UGANDA AWARDS, 2020

Standing up against injustices and defending human rights is a risky and stressful task involving speaking truth to power and regularly stepping on the toes of those who have the power, might, and will to destroy anyone standing in their way with no qualms. Most people would rarely want to do this in any given society. The few who sacrifice to fight are usually unappreciated and end up burnt out, with terrible consequences to their emotional and physical health. Every year since 2018, we recognize and appreciate these comrades who daily put their lives on the line in our communities. The awards seek to recognize strategic, courageous, and progressive members of society for their contributions toward social and political change. The first is the Activist of the Year Award given to an activist in Uganda for front-line work on liberating Uganda from the grip of oppression. The Community Organizer of the Year Award is given to an organizer who has mobilized many to practice collective nonviolent civil resistance.

Our 2020 activist of the year award went to Nana Namata Annette Mwafrica Mbarikiwa while the community organizer of the year award went to Alex Kipsang.



Nana has been at the frontline of the “#StopPoliceBrutality” campaign. Even in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic and restrictions she carried out direct actions.

Activist of the year -2020

Nana Mwafrica is an embodiment of courage and resilience. She has been consistent in the struggle against police brutality in Uganda. She has been at the frontline of the “#StopPoliceBrutality” campaign. Even in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic and restrictions she carried out direct actions. Braving the streets and unafraid of her oppressor. She has been arrested several times yet her spirit remains unshaken. Many would have given up. By organizing occupations and nonviolent protests on the streets, she has inspired both women and young people to fight injustice and take action. She has also stood in solidarity with other activists and victims of police repression through jail solidarity. Nana is an inspiration to our generation.

Community Organiser, 2020

Alex Kipsang, has been at the forefront of mobilizing and organizing the Benet community against the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) that has committed several atrocities against the Benet indigenous people. UWA has committed several atrocities against this community including burning their homes, raping women, shooting and killing several people including their cattle, and forcefully evicting the Benet from their ancestral land. Alex Kipsang spearheaded the organizing of over 300 locals in the Benet community to occupy the Uganda Wildlife Authority offices in Kween Sub-county for over a month to protest against the atrocities committed by the UWA rangers against the locals. He continues to coordinate this struggle while encouraging other victims to share their stories.



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