The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2020
Introduction

2020 was a year no one predicted. With the mother-of-all crises rocking every corner of the world, affecting virtually every country and city on earth, COVID-19 upended life as we knew it. Over a million lives have been lost, millions of jobs have been wiped out, extreme poverty has risen and economies have stalled.

As governments in the West struggled with high death tolls, numbers of infections began to rise elsewhere on the globe. When spring came around, the Black Lives Matter protests reverberated around the world, a global call for justice, equality and decency. The inequalities of countries traditionally deemed ‘developed’ were exposed. We learnt that we are all interdependent; our lives and wellbeing are intertwined with the lives and wellbeing of others.

But some things remained the same in 2020. Now in its fifth year, our report continues to highlight the world’s most under-reported humanitarian crises. Although there are new entries on the list, the ranking continues to be dominated by crises in Africa. The Central African Republic, Madagascar, Mali and Burundi have appeared on the list across multiple years, yet the people in these countries don’t get sufficient media attention. The combined news coverage on these 10 crises was less than that of entertainer Kanye West’s bid for the US Presidency, or the Eurovision Song Contest. Further to this, these 10 crises received 26 times less attention – in terms of online news articles – than the launch of PlayStation 5.

In mainstream news reporting, it is the global pandemic that has dominated headlines. Once its potential for widespread infection and health system chaos was understood, countries – and their media – turned their focus inwards; on protecting citizens and preventing the virus from spreading. But as we’ve learnt in 2020, humanitarian crises don’t respect borders, race, religion or global pandemics. For the people surviving in these crises, COVID-19 is simply an additional threat to a host of others – from the global climate crisis; to deadly diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV; to the unavailability of food and clean water; to conflict, violence and abuse. For millions of individuals, COVID-19 has simply made a bad situation worse.

At the end of 2020, the United Nations (UN) estimated that at least 235.4 million people would need humanitarian assistance in 2021. The effects of COVID-19, coupled with the growing impacts of climate change have increased the number of people in need by 60 percent – the single largest increase ever recorded in one year. This historic level is challenged by a marked decrease in bilateral development aid as donor governments attend to the economic and social fallout of COVID-19 in their own countries. As of December 2020, UN OCHA states that the humanitarian response plans and appeals for the past year were only 44.7 percent funded and adds a new estimation of around USD 35.1 billion needed for 2021. Unless these neglected and forgotten crises are attended to, every country on earth is vulnerable – because no one is safe until everyone is safe. To quote UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres: “We are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world.”

Let’s be clear: The quoted “silence” is very much due to the limited perspective of the Global North. While figures outlined in this report may be staggering, in comparison to …

Methodology

Using the media monitoring services of Meltwater Group, CARE International analyzed those humanitarian crises that received the least media attention in 2020. More than 1.2 million online media hits were captured in the time period from January 1 to September 30, 2020.

We identified countries in which at least one million people were affected by conflicts or natural disasters. The result was a list of 45 crises that were analyzed and ranked by the number of online news articles mentioning the crisis, starting with the emergency that received the least amount of media attention.

The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2020

1. Malawi
2. Guinea
3. Madagascar
4. Central African Republic
5. Burundi
6. Guinea Bissau
7. Haiti
8. Niger
9. South Sudan
10. Somalia

We acknowledge, and must bear witness to, the suffering. But we should also all pay tribute to those who survive the silence, fight injustice and overcome the biggest obstacles.

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A relatively peaceful transfer of power following years of political turbulence is seeing an influx of Burundian refugees returning home from Rwanda and Tanzania. In May 2020, Burundi held general elections, marking a major step towards ending the socio-political crisis that had gripped the country since 2015. However, the situation remains fragile as substantive social and political challenges in Burundi and the region remain unaddressed. UNHCR expects at least 50,000 Burundian returnees will return home in 2020. But Burundi, the fifth poorest nation in the world, is having a hard time absorbing returnees. With a surface area of 27,834 km², Burundi is one of the most densely populated countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Being resource-poor with an underdeveloped manufacturing sector, Burundi’s economy is predominantly agricultural. Over 90 percent of the population depends on subsistence small-holder farming.

Extreme weather events, combined with political instability and insecurity since 2015, have uprooted over 135,000 people within Burundi’s borders (of this figure, 83 percent were displaced due to natural disasters). Displacement, high population density, large numbers of returnees, and close to 80,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are contributing to competition and disputes over land. As a result, the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the population, mainly women, are pushed to marginal land.

Given that Burundi is ill-prepared for major emergencies, the country has the highest rates of chronic malnutrition in the world. Pre-COVID (2016/2017), the national average stunting rate was 56 percent – well above the emergency threshold of 40 percent.

In 2020, landslides and floods caused by torrential rains and border closures brought on by the pandemic have corroded livelihoods and led to intense hunger among the poorest Burundians, especially those displaced. As of December 2020, over 2.3 million Burundians are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance, including food aid.

The global pandemic has disrupted trade, especially informal commerce, in border areas and urban centers, and has restricted cross-border movements. This has led to loss of jobs and remittances to rural areas that could finance agricultural production and other commercial activities. Malaria epidemics and the risk of Ebola from neighboring DRC compound an already precarious situation.

As in all emergencies, women and girls are the most affected. Not only do they bear additional financial and domestic responsibilities, but many also endure daily violence and insecurity. Pre-COVID, women played a major role in Burundi’s national economy, representing 55.2 percent of the workforce, with the majority working in the agricultural sector.

CARE Burundi has developed a Women’s Empowerment Program focused on rural areas, but with a nationwide advocacy platform for women’s rights. Additionally, CARE hosts youth programs to improve Sexual and Reproductive Health and to reinforce economic empowerment and gender equality. CARE is supporting youth-led locally-focused innovations for COVID-19. They include: working with community-based women groups to deliver cash assistance, using art to build COVID-19 awareness and prevention behavior practices, as well as working with internally displaced communities to introduce the construction of public showers using recycled plastics. CARE Burundi also promotes social cohesion and initiatives to end gender-based violence and gender inequalities through its ‘model men and model couples’ program interventions.

In Guatemala, whole communities are waving the white flag. Since April 2020, thousands of Guatemalans across the country have begun flying white flags in the streets and from their windows; signaling their dire need for food. For the 10 million people living below the poverty line in this Central American country, COVID-19 has made a serious food crisis worse.

When the pandemic occurred, it was estimated that some 3.3 million people within a population of 14.9 million were in need of humanitarian aid. The Humanitarian Needs Overview, published in March 2020, showed that high levels of poverty, and several consecutive years of drought, had led to high levels of food insecurity, especially along the so-called Dry Corridor—a tropical dry forest region on the Pacific Coast of Central America. According to the 2020 World Risk Report, Guatemala is among the top ten most vulnerable countries prone to natural hazards. Since 2015, protracted droughts and sparse, yet torrential rains have battered the country, resulting in continual crop failures and the death of livestock.
The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2020

3

Central African Republic

The world’s forgotten crisis

The Central African Republic (CAR) marked a milestone in 2020: Sixty years of independence, but there was little to celebrate in this thinly populated country of 4.9 million people. A perennial entry on the Ten most under-reported humanitarian crisis list, CAR remains in the throes of one of the deepest, most damaging humanitarian crises in the world.

Despite its significant mineral deposits that include gold, diamonds and uranium, as well as rich arable land, CAR sits at second last on the 2019 Human Development Index. Pre-COVID, more than 71 percent of its population lived under the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per day. Basic services are lacking throughout CAR, and, in many areas, people depend entirely on humanitarian assistance. Since 2012, the country has been held in the grip of a civil war. Human rights violations are a daily occurrence, including assassinations, torture and rape. The humanitarian situation is further impacted by fragile governance, poverty, and the plundering of natural resources. In February 2019, under the auspices of the African Union, the government and 14 armed groups signed an historic peace deal to bring an end to armed conflict. Despite this, violence is ongoing, with attacks even on UN peacekeepers and civilians.

Conflict continues to force many families to abandon their fields. One in four Central Africans is displaced either within the country or in a neighboring country, and the numbers of returnees have dwindled. These displacements, combined with poor rains during planting season, and along with invasions of fall armyworms and locusts, have put 1.93 million people at risk of starvation. Additionally, difficulties in supplying markets as a result of COVID-19 containment measures, and numerous border controls on goods from Cameroon have driven up the prices of basic foods like rice, oil and sugar.

The pandemic has also exacerbated protection issues. Pre-COVID, the humanitarian alert system – which covers just 42 percent of the country – would receive hourly reports of violence against women and girls. Since the introduction of COVID-19 containment measures, the number of cases has nearly doubled. Children also continue to be at risk of abuse. A quarter of all families fear their children may fall prey to sexual violence, forced labor or recruitment by armed groups. CAR is also one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarians in the world. Between January and the end of September 2020, humanitarian workers were affected by about one incident per day, with two aid workers killed and 21 injured.

Frustrated by continuing violence, groups of women are coming together across the country to forge peace and collective healing at a community level. One group, Femme Debout (Woman Standing), brings together women of all religious and ethnic backgrounds. The group fosters a spirit of entrepreneurship and independence by helping members develop new livelihoods and new lives.

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30-year-old Fanny currently makes a living through CARE’s cash-for-work program in Southern Chad. Her job is to help clear tall bush and grass from the sides of roads to make them safer and prevent traffic accidents. But she has bigger plans: she is saving up her earnings to build her own chicken farm.

“I need this chicken farm to make money for my children’s school fees. I want them to have a better life than my husband and I had one day.”

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In mid-2020, videos of newborns ‘stranded’ in a Ukrainian hotel made world headlines. The babies, children of foreign couples born to Ukrainian surrogate mothers, couldn’t join their parents because of a COVID-19 lockdown. Ukraine is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and while the story highlighted the plight of impoverished Ukrainian women willing to give birth for pay, the larger humanitarian crisis affecting more than five million in the eastern part of the country remained largely ignored this year.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN estimated that 3.4 million Ukrainians in the Donbas region would need humanitarian assistance in 2020. Already enduring so much, the COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the challenges faced by the affected populations. The situation is especially dire along the ‘contact line’ that divides Ukrainian government-controlled land from separatist-run areas. In spite of repeated ceasefire agreements, critical civilian infrastructure, such as water and electricity systems, is frequently damaged. The more than 420-kilometer-long contact line – equivalent to the length of the French-German border – is one of the most mine-contaminated areas in the world.

Civilians, and in particular the elderly and disabled, bear the brunt of the conflict. Many younger and able-bodied people have moved to other parts of the country, leaving more vulnerable groups behind. Senior citizens and people with disabilities make up 30 percent of people living in the conflict areas and account for more than 40 percent of the 70,000 people living in government-controlled settlements. There they are isolated due to insecurity and damage to road infrastructure, and rely on humanitarian aid such as mobile medical care.

Fear of shelling, violent clashes, and the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war are the daily reality for those living on either side of the contact line. Many people are increasingly affected by mental health issues, both due to the fear of violence as well as the long-term socio-economic impacts of the conflict. Once considered the industrial heartland of Ukraine, Donbas has experienced a sharp decline in economic activities since 2014. The stress associated with the conflict has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions, which have limited people’s ability to cross the contact line, access basic services and markets, and receive the humanitarian aid they normally rely on.

In late September, wildfires raged for a week in the government-controlled areas of Luzhanska. Over 12 settlements along the contact line were affected. About 500 homes went up in flames, nine people were killed, and 19 injured. It is feared that those who lost their homes will have to spend the winter in temporary shelters.

Gender-based violence is a serious problem in Ukraine with about three-quarters of Ukrainian women having experienced some form of violence since age 15. According to UNFPA, the situation worsened during the pandemic with the national hotline on domestic violence reporting a 72 percent increase in the second month of quarantine compared to the pre-quarantine period. The government, however, is committed to supporting programs that aid and protect survivors of violence. During the pandemic, many of these services moved to new platforms. For instance, survivors of violence can now get help through mobile apps and other silent channels.

In 2020 alone, the Malagasy people faced several emergencies: COVID-19 across the country; dengue in the central west; and the return of severe drought in the south. While the measles epidemic of 2019 is mostly under control, there is high possibility that a new epidemic could begin again.

In the south of the country, the effects of prolonged drought and COVID-19 have worsened food insecurity, putting close to 120,000 children under the age of five at risk of acute malnutrition, with close to 20,000 at risk of starvation. Pre-pandemic, Malagasy children had the fourth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world, with almost every other child under the age of five suffering from stunting.

Maternal mortality rates were also among the highest in the world, while Madagascar ranks in the bottom four countries on the African continent in terms of access to clean drinking water. With trade and tourism having been disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, economic growth is expected to fall to 1.2 percent, compared to the rate of 5.2 percent predicted prior to the outbreak.

In Madagascar, CARE helps the most vulnerable communities in several regions to prepare and face natural disasters. With its local partner SAF/FRKM, CARE supports innovative financing and insurance solutions against climate risks and disaster to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. CARE supports public services and helps the most vulnerable populations through a cash transfer program, rehabilitations of infrastructures in health centers, access to water and hygiene promotion, especially for school children. In 2020, CARE also provided emergency aid to communities affected by flooding earlier in the year by building or rehabilitating their houses and strengthening their capacities to resume agricultural activities.
Suicides and child marriages on the rise

In this small, peaceful country in Southern Africa, there is growing concern about the rising numbers of suicides. Natural disasters, pest outbreaks, extreme poverty and now COVID-19 are pushing an already highly stressed population to the brink. According to reports from the Malawi police service, there has been a steep (57 percent) increase in suicide rates in 2020.71

The UN estimates that 8.3 million Malawians require humanitarian assistance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.72 In this, one of Africa’s most densely populated countries, seven out of ten people live below the poverty line.73 With slightly over half the population (51 percent) under the age of 18,74 Malawi also has one of the lowest per capita Gross National Incomes in the world, at just USD 320 (2018).75 Its economy – which is heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture – is extremely vulnerable to shocks.76

Malawians are still recovering from the effects of Cyclone Idai, which in March 2019 submerged vast areas of farmland, just a few weeks before the start of the main harvest season.77 In recent years, the country had made significant progress bringing acute malnutrition rates from 4.1 percent in 2016 down to less than 1 percent in 2019.78 COVID-19’s disruption of supply chains is threatening these gains by exacerbating the food crisis.79 The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that about 2.6 million people need food aid as of November 2020.80 Further aggravating the situation are Malawi’s HIV/AIDS infection rates (at 9.6 percent),81 low primary school completion rates (at 51 percent),82 high levels of stunting (at 37 percent for children under five),83 and more than 75,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and other neighboring countries.84

The closure of schools during the COVID-19 lockdown has led to rising rates of child marriage and abuse. Between March and July 2020, there were 13,000 cases of child marriages and over 50,000 cases of teen pregnancies according to a government-led rapid assessment. The figure suggests an 11 percent increase in underage pregnancies since 2019.85

In Malawi, CARE is providing gender-based violence training to service providers across victim support units as well as supplying them with mattresses and bedding, and equipping staff with COVID-19 personal protective equipment, including masks and sanitation supplies. Additionally, CARE is leading a group of international aid organizations on gender and food security programming, and there is continued advocacy on women’s leadership and participation in COVID-19 decision-making bodies. Together with the Ministry of Education, CARE targets out-of-school adolescents via radio programs. CARE Malawi also supports village savings groups to empower women and youth economically. During the pandemic, these groups have begun working with CARE to sensitize the larger community about COVID-19.

53-year-old Fainesi cares for her three grandchildren in Malawi. Years ago, she was struggling to feed her family, and would often go days without a meal herself. Now, she eats twice a day thanks to the skills and knowledge she learned from CARE.

“Before the project, we wouldn’t count seeds. We would broadcast seeds. I learned to plant one seed at a time and 70cm apart. I get a better harvest now.”

© Josh Estey/CARE

Conflict, violence and the ‘triple threat’ of 2020

In the world’s fifth most populous country, disasters stem from temporary displacement due to conflict, the effects of climate change, and pervasive poverty. Pakistan is highly prone to natural hazards, including flooding, avalanches, and earthquakes. Each year, at least three million people are affected by natural disasters.86 Weak infrastructure, ineffective warning systems, and remote terrain exacerbate the damage and hinder the humanitarian response.

In 2020, the country faced a triple disaster with COVID-19, locust swarms and unprecedented levels of urban flooding. While in the grips of the pandemic, Pakistan suffered its worst locust plague in history, forcing the government to import wheat for the first time in six years.87 Further decimation of crops and livelihoods occurred when the August monsoon rains submerged large parts of the country, including Karachi, Pakistan’s most populous city and economic hub.88 The floods killed over 400 people and displaced 68,000 others.89

The provinces of Baluchistan and Sindh, which are particularly prone to droughts, floods, cyclones and locust infestations were already highly vulnerable before the floods. Sindh has the highest rate of rural poverty in the country.90 Crops, food supplies and livestock destroyed in 2020’s extreme flooding will take many years to recover. The triple disaster has left approximately 6.7 million Pakistanis in need of food and agricultural assistance.91 A WFP-FAO joint analysis conducted during the pandemic found 25 percent of households (around 46 million people) are food insecure and 10 percent (21 million people) are in urgent need of food aid.92 Even before this, malnutrition was
Violence and COVID-19 fuel the humanitarian crisis

Renowned for being the land of the legendary city of Timbuktu, and several pre-colonial empires, the ancient West African country of Mali is in crisis today. Even before the pandemic, years of conflict, insecurity and poor governance, along with climate shocks and natural disasters had left a mark on this vast Sahelian country.

Eight years ago, an insurgency began in Mali’s north and has since spread to the country’s fragile center. Today, it even rackets neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. The Central Sahel is under extreme stress. Violence, natural disasters and widespread poverty have pushed a record 13.4 million people in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Of these, 7.4 million people are facing starvation and 1.6 million have been uprooted from their homes.107

The pandemic has worsened the humanitarian situation in Mali. Pre-COVID-19, close to half (42.7 percent) of nearly 20 million Malians lived in extreme poverty.106 Mali’s social indicators were among the lowest in the world, ranking it 184, out of 189 countries on UNDP’s 2019 Human Development Index. Security, which is critical for economic recovery and poverty reduction, remains fragile. Mali is currently in the aftermath of a military coup that toppled President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in August 2020. The new transitional government has renewed hopes for peace,108 but years of conflict and violence in the central and northern areas have displaced thousands of people and livestock, and in the rural areas of the south, where population density is highest, nine out of ten people live below the poverty line.109
Less than 10 kilometers from Australia’s most northern islands lies Papua New Guinea (PNG), one of the world’s most culturally diverse and naturally rich nations. It hosts over 800 languages and more than 1,000 distinct ethnic groups. However, in stark contrast to its neighbor, PNG is one of the least urbanized countries globally with the lowest life expectancy in the Pacific region. The island nation is prone to natural disasters. In 2020, it faced flooding, landslides and tremors in addition to the consequences of the global pandemic.

PNG is endowed with a wide array of mineral resources, including crude oil, natural gas, gold, copper, silver, nickel and cobalt, and produces a range of primary commodities such as timber, cocoa, coffee, tea and palm oil. Challenges in development remain to date around the country where the majority of the population relies on subsistence farming to meet daily nutritional needs, malnutrition among both children and adults was further impacted by the closure of fresh food and fish markets between March and June 2020 due to COVID–19 containment measures. PNG’s economy is driven by the extractives industries and agricultural commodities, fishery and forestry. But the economy is prone to shocks and has been negatively affected by COVID–19 restrictions and lower demand for commodities. As a result, Papua New Guineans are witnessing higher inflation and higher prices for basic goods.

Among the population, women have been impacted hardest. Most market vendors are women and many have lost their incomes. Economic concerns put pressure on family relationships and as seen elsewhere around the world, it increases the risk of domestic violence. PNG has also one of the highest rates of sexual and physical violence globally, with nearly two out of three Papua New Guinean women having suffered some form of violence. There has been some progress in gender equality but the change is slow, placing the nation second to last on the UN’s Gender Inequality Index in 2019. The government however, is committed to addressing these challenges and launched a national strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in 2017.

To contribute to positive change, CARE engages in various programs across PNG with a focus on gender equality. We train health workers, strengthen service delivery and provide small-scale infrastructure improvements to remote and rural health facilities. CARE also works with the government, communities and teachers to increase the number of girls who attend school. All of CARE’s programs aim to strengthen the resourcefulness of the people of Papua New Guinea and to increase women’s opportunities to participate and thrive.

The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2020

Located in Southern Africa, Zambia, a large, peaceful country known for its copper mines and scenic beauty, is bearing the brunt of the global climate crisis. A total of 10.1 million, or about 56 percent of Zambians are in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of severe drought and flooding.110 Temperatures in the region have increased by 1.3 °C since 1960, while annual rainfall has decreased by an average of 2.3 percent per decade.112 Recurrent droughts are putting the famous Victoria Falls under threat of drying up,113 and Lake Kariba – the world’s largest artificial lake and Zambia’s primary hydropower power source – has dropped six meters in just three years.114

Whilst frequent power outages have negatively impacted the business sector,115 the impact of drought has been particularly devastating for Zambia’s agricultural sector. The country has long been a large maize producer for the rest of Southern Africa. This year however, the Zambian government was forced to ban all exports of grain,116 while its neighbor, Namibia, declared a state of emergency.117

Zambians themselves are staring at acute hunger and malnutrition. As of July 2020, an estimated 2.6 million people were in urgent need of food aid.118 Consecutive droughts, locust plagues and floods have left no crops to harvest. These, combined with livestock disease outbreaks,119 and the adverse effects of COVID–19 movement restrictions,120 have negatively impacted livelihoods. Presently, the country is battling a locust invasion that is putting 88,700 households in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.121 A single swarm of locusts – and already multiple swarms have entered the country’s southern region – can eat as much food as 2,500 people in a day.122

COVID–19’s disruption of world commodity markets has also pushed down the price of copper, of which Zambia is major producer.123 The World Bank expects that the Zambian economy will contract by about 4.5 percent in 2020.124 This will likely further hamper the delivery of social services in the country. As it is, about 70 percent of urban dwellers live in highly dense informal settlements with poor water supply and sanitation.125 According to the 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, only 31 percent of Zambians had access to basic sanitation services.126 In the event of a drastic increase in COVID–19 cases in Zambia, pregnant and breast-feeding mothers would be particularly at risk as the country has the highest fertility rate in Africa with an average of 2.062 births per day.127 The country also has some of the highest child marriage and teenage pregnancy rates globally.128

CARE is providing a gender-sensitive approach in its drought response and resilience programming to ensure the most vulnerable groups such as women and girls are prioritized and empowered, and that their specific needs are met. This includes working with women to set up savings cooperatives. CARE Zambia is also training 210 people in protection monitoring for food distribution in six districts, as well as assisting in rehabilitation and drilling of boreholes, hygiene promotion and provision of hygiene items for women and girls; as well as supporting the nutrition of 130,000 children under the age of five.129

Zambia
Extreme weather causing food shortages

Over 10 million
people in need of humanitarian assistance

33% have access to basic sanitation services

2.6 million
need food aid
How to help shine a light on forgotten crises amidst a global pandemic

COVID-19 continues to spread its tentacles in a world where humanitarian need was already widespread and growing. Before the virus hit, over one billion people were affected by long-term crises such as conflict, forced displacement and the effects of climate change. \(^{54}\) The pandemic is compounding these challenges. As COVID-19 rages on, governments and institutions that have traditionally supported international humanitarian efforts have shifted their attention to the immediate healthcare needs of their own citizens and their own ailing economies. Given the trend, global aid will likely decline further as world economies continue to take a beating.

So, with all attention on COVID-19, what can we do to highlight other severe humanitarian crises affecting millions of people around the globe? A wide range of groups and individuals in the countries on the 2020 Suffering in Silence list are doing what they can to alleviate the situation, but they cannot do it alone. Failing to help these vulnerable countries puts us all at risk. Without solidarity we all lose.

How then do we beat the silence? We offer no magic solution, but rather a variety of possibilities of where to start. Doing nothing is not an option. Every action counts. What is important is that we continue to bring attention to suffering wherever it happens in the world.

Here are some of the ways we can all make a difference:

Ten things that we can do

48-year-old Stephen participated in CARE’s Southern African Nutrition Initiative, in which he and his wife learned about the importance of nutritious foods, hygiene and sanitation, as well as the importance of sharing responsibilities with his wife.

“SANI has changed the mindset between me and my wife on how we should treat each other. We are now able to do joint planning at household level and I have equal involvement in carrying out work at home with my wife. We have seen our children’s health improve, we now know how to, and are able to, feed them nutritious foods.”

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What can we do?

1. **Allow access for journalists**
   - Since the start of the pandemic, journalists have been battling domestic agendas, disinformation and misinformation. Nevertheless, they’ve stayed on the frontlines of the response to the crisis, sensitizing the public and helping to prevent mass panic. Accurate information is essential in the fight against the pandemic and governments can make it easier for journalists to do their important work by improving data quality and ensuring full and unimpeded access to critical information. Allowing access also means disallowing censorship and intimidation – both online and offline. Most importantly, it means protecting the lives of journalists and making it less dangerous for them to report the news. Between 2006 and 2019, close to 1,200 journalists were killed, and many more were injured, tortured, kidnapped, illegally detained, intimidated or harassed simply for doing their jobs. In the murder cases, nine out of ten times, the killers went unpunished. Free flow of information is necessary for healthy democratic systems and it is even more critical in times of crisis. Impunity for crimes against journalists must end.

2. **Address the critical funding gap**
   - According to UN OCHA’s recently released Global Humanitarian Overview, 235.4 million people are in need of lifesaving assistance in 2021, requiring an unprecedented total of USD 35.3 billion to provide aid. This comes as donors are having to fund economic rescue packages and safety nets, while supporting access to vaccines and treatments in their own countries. 2021 will be a test for donors torn between responding to domestic challenges and demonstrating global solidarity. In the spirit of multilateralism, we urge donors to reconsider how they can increase their commitment to ensure that humanitarian needs are met. Humanitarian and development donors must work together to better leverage each other’s investments and prevent further loss of development gains. International financing institutions should cancel debts and hold recipient governments accountable for putting these funds towards humanitarian needs, including free and equitable access to a COVID-19 vaccine and treatment for all.

3. **Invest in media relations**
   - We’re in the midst of a global crisis, yet new crises continue to rear their heads and old ones grow bigger and more protracted. Most aid agencies are already working with the media to understand how editorial choices are made and how new stories can be put on the agenda. With journalists stretched thin in the current environment, these efforts are now more important than ever. Agencies can continue to assist journalists by providing quality research, insight and context, to shine a light on lesser known, yet important stories. Sustained engagement with the media also comes about when agencies establish themselves as trusted sources for contacts and content, and when they help journalists dig deeper and understand structural causes by linking them to trustworthy and accurate sources, translators, photographers and experts.

4. **Put partners first**
   - Amplify the positive efforts and untapped potential of local partners. International agencies can support their local partners by assisting them with media and public relations training to help them take a strategic approach to their communications; connecting them with media houses outside of their countries; accepting communications micro-grants for local photographers and storytellers in project proposals; and helping them harness the power of social media. The media must also play a greater role in telling the story of women’s organizations at the frontline. Many women’s rights organizations struggle to survive as a result of COVID’s impact on their funding base. They urgently require funding to continue to deliver lifesaving services to the most vulnerable and to women and girls.

5. **Invest in citizen journalism**
   - Digital solutions have become an all-important tool for media reporting. Access to sources is now cheaper, faster and safer. More importantly, digital technologies allow for affected populations to inform both the humanitarian response as well as media coverage. Aid agencies can facilitate these new developments by encouraging diverse citizen groups – and in particular, women, girls and other typically marginalized groups – to tell their stories from their unique perspectives. Support can come in the form of providing phones and/ or money for connectivity and small supplies; providing training in news writing and reporting from a gendered perspective; and by acting as a bridge between citizen journalists and mainstream media. Reporting on conflict and disasters is often a sensitive and dangerous assignment. In all this, it is critical that aid agencies approach citizen journalist partnerships with a ‘do no harm’ mindset and conduct regular risk assessments. Governments, donors and the business community can offer their support by ensuring that the gender gaps in digital literacy and access have been addressed and that technological change have triggered the rapid spread of hate speech, misogyny and ‘fake news’. Combating this requires putting partners first.

6. **Protect civic space and space for a free and independent media**
   - In times of crisis, access to reliable information and freedom of expression are paramount. However, the spread of disinformation and misinformation has been matched only by the proliferation of misinformation about the virus. Instead of alleviating the situation, emergency measures taken by governments for the protection of public health have stifled media freedom and shrunk civil space. In their efforts to combat misinformation, some countries have resorted to unduly repressive laws that have unfortunately been used to curtail basic human rights such as freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly. Media freedom is protected under international human rights law, and donors as well as civil society should continue to push governments to ensure that this right and other fundamental freedoms do not become casualties of the virus. Rather than using censorship and criminal sanctions to deal with misinformation on the pandemic, governments should use approaches that emphasize transparency and media freedom.

7. **Disrupt the narrative**
   - In the face of the terrible times we’re in, people are switching off from doom and gloom ‘crisis of the moment’ reporting. They are looking for stories of objectivity and hope, and even in the most challenging of places there is always good news. There is much we can learn from the resilience and strength of communities who are dealing with compounding impacts of conflict, entrenched poverty and disease. International media should use the pandemic as an opportunity to change the current narrative and amplify the voices of those typically kept silent. Consider partnerships with diverse local media organizations that actively seek out women and girls’ voices. There are numerous excellent initiatives that strengthen women’s agency, their decision-making power, and their access to information.

8. **Don’t expect excellent journalism for free**
   - As nations increasingly turn inward, the media is following suit, focusing on domestic news at the expense of international news. And while more individuals have access to content than ever before, the combination of digital literacy and access has not changed. The media themselves can also up their game by enabling these diverse voices and giving them a regular platform.

9. **Go beyond the hashtag**
   - Influencers, local activists and citizen journalists have the widest platform through social media channels to share, like and broadcast information coming out of crisis-affected areas. Social media has the power to quickly spread awareness and information to huge numbers of people virtually. Since the start of the pandemic, ‘social media activism’ has been taken to new heights especially as it allows individuals to continue to advocate for their causes from the safety of their homes. However, what remains as yet untapped is the use of social media to engage and communicate with – and not just about – affected people in all their diversity.

10. **Prioritize women**
    - Last but not least, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls should be at the forefront of every humanitarian effort and its communications. If anything has been made clear by the pandemic, it is society’s utter reliance on women who have carried the burden of care at home and on the front line. Ironically, it is this same demographic that is disproportionately impacted in times of crisis, as conflicts and emergencies amplify the pre-existing inequalities present in virtually every sphere of life: from health to the economy. Crimes also diminish hard-fought gains for women’s rights. Not only has COVID-19 had a negative impact on economic impact on women and girls, including many who dropped out of school or have forcefully been married, but it has also unleashed a raging shadow pandemic of gender-based violence across the world. According to the UN, since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a 40 percent increase in violence against women in some countries. Any humanitarian response, whether to the pandemic or long-standing crises, should therefore not just be about rectifying systemic inequalities, but also about building a more just, gender equal and resilient world. For this to happen, women and girls must be at the center of all recovery efforts. Supporting them to co-lead the response at all levels, including the media sector, is critical. As journalists face mounting pressure and shrinking space, women journalists face additional barriers and risks. If the media is a mirror of society, then women need to be fairly represented in the news and in the newsrooms. Donors should continue to fund women-led organizations and other initiatives that strengthen women’s agency, their decision-making power, and their access to information.
2020’s list of most-underreported crises covers a wide array of humanitarian contexts. With this report, CARE keeps calling for more media coverage and ‘off the beaten track’ reporting. But how is this done? What are the main obstacles and rewards? We asked journalists from various countries to tell us about their job and how they go about covering humanitarian affairs. We invited professionals showing a continuous engagement for topics and regions that usually do not make the headlines. The stories featured here are not necessarily affiliated with CARE’s programs. This chapter is simply a call to ‘unwrite the silence’ and we hope to inspire journalists to engage more in bearing witness to neglected crises.

Kalolaine Uechtritz Fainu
Papua New Guinea

How do you find your stories?
I have been travelling back and forth to East New Britain province in Papua New Guinea for the past 12 months. Then I found myself caught on the remote island when the country entered a lockdown and all flights were grounded. I often walk around with a camera and make short video content for various blogs or social, but I found bigger stories worth pitching to The Guardian through my local investigations. I need to connect with a story to bring it to life.

What challenges do you encounter during your research?
Moving around was challenging, although it helps to have good connections within the community. I am usually accompanied by a guide who takes me into various villages and introduces me to people. Communication is always difficult in PNG; getting in contact with people sometimes requires driving to a village and asking a local shop keeper if they know this person and getting vague directions to turn left at the big mango tree... and when you get there there’s a whole row of mango trees. But these moments are the exciting part of my research and often these winding roads will lead you to discovering a lead you didn’t know about.

What is the feedback you get for your stories?
The first COVID-19 related story I wrote was from the perspective of a nurse who shared the everyday challenges faced by health staff, even before the virus came along. Her story was honest and raw and spoke of the terrible state of the health department in one province. The Facebook commentary was quite overwhelming; I was named a ‘toilet paper head’ by some Papua New Guineans who saw the story as an insult and my own opinion, rather than the experiences of a frontline worker. Others even threatened me. But it was heartening to read supportive comments saying that the story rings true for clinics across the nation.

How do you work under COVID-19 restrictions?
The pandemic has been very beneficial in some ways. I have been contacted by many international organizations and media to provide production services as their own staff are grounded. As far as working on the ground, I have been lucky enough to be able to move around and have access to most things I am researching. If you connect with the right people, you’ll always find a way and technology has also allowed us to connect with and interview people.

Do you have a tip to share for humanitarian reporting?
It pays to shake hands and connect with as many people as you can. Networking opens the doors to finding the right people. Spend time with people first, let them become familiar with who you are before you barge in with a camera and start asking questions. Most people want to share their story, but they want to trust you first.

Pierre Cochez
France

How do you find your stories?
I oversee humanitarian and development issues at La Croix, so I look at how communities in developing countries deal with crises, organize themselves and so on. The people I meet are truly impressive and full of energy. Recently I did a report on Haiti because the earthquake in Port-au-Prince happened 10 years ago and it’s a country in chronic crisis. No media covered the situation.

What challenges did you encounter?
The main challenge was security. Before leaving to Haiti, the editor-in-chief wanted to make sure that I left knowingly and with all possible precautions: I had a driver already known by the editorial staff from a few years ago, a safe hotel, I was not supposed to go out on foot alone, I had to lock up the room at night, and could not leave the capital.

What type of feedback do you get for your stories?
Most of the time, readers tell me: “It is terrible what these people are going through.” But I don’t really like this reaction. I write with the intent to let everyone know about the strength and resilience of people faced with a crisis. We once did a two-page interview with a homeless man in France. We treated him like a VIP and did a great studio photo shoot. Later, our editorial staff received a donation of several thousand Euros to be handed to the association the man volunteered at. This is amazing feedback. But in the end, what counts most for me is that the people I meet and portray tell me: “Yes, you wrote the truth. This is our reality.”

Omardine Omar
Mozambique

How do you do your research and reporting in times of COVID-19?
I wrote one report about Cyclone Idai that occurred in 2019 and looked at the issue of donations that did not reach needy families in the city of Beira. The challenges I encountered were enormous, including having to enter flooded areas and houses with ceilings in danger of collapsing at any time. I found it hard to deal with the emotions of survivors who had no food and other material things. There is a thin line between being a journalist and turning into an activist.

What reactions did you get for this story?
The feedback was positive, as the publication helped many families who had not received any support. As a journalist, I am happy to see that an uncovered issue serves to bring justice to those usually marginalized. But uncovering such issues can bring about major problems as well, namely political pressure and persecution. Even in the face of people’s suffering, some prefer to hide the truth. This trip to Beira was my first as a staff member of the media company “Carta de Moçambique”. Since then I have been asked to report on many more stories.

How has your reporting changed due to COVID-19?
When the pandemic broke out, I was attacked several times by government agencies for exposing the dramatic circumstances of families living inside and outside of Mozambique. On June 25, I was arrested and wrongly convicted for reporting extortion and bribery committed by the Maputo police. My arrest suggests that the government is using the pandemic to persecute people or troublesome journalists. Currently I continue to follow cases, although travel restrictions and lack of funding due to the pandemic are obvious. To be honest, our finances as a newspaper have dropped dramatically, although we continue to work more than before.
What challenges do you face during your research? The biggest challenge is the collection of valid information. This becomes a lot harder when there is no more aid organization working on the ground. Sometimes it is also difficult to judge the local sources, as we do not know their intentions and background.

Do you receive feedback on your stories? I receive most feedback from my sources which are often aid organizations. I sometimes ask journalist colleagues to proofread my stories. And then of course I get some feedback once the story is out and published. But generally, I find there is way too little feedback, given the importance of these topics.

How does COVID-19 affect your work? A story needs to be of extreme relevance to cut through in the media cycle. Everything is focused on the pandemic, every story has to connect to it at least in some way. However, this creates a vicious cycle: Take Africa, for example. The continent doesn’t show large infection numbers and therefore receives less coverage. But there are reasons for this and those should be covered: limited testing capacities, weak health systems, ‘bigger’ issues such as conflicts. Reporting in times of a pandemic: I continue do to it in the same way I did before. But it becomes harder since my time is often needed for other topics.

Web: https://apais.at/

Unwrite the Silence

At 23 years old, Marriet is already a leader in her community in Zambia. She heads the Water Point Management Committee, ensuring the water pump in her community is looked after and maintained so that they will always have access to clean water.

And she drives her community’s hygiene and sanitation goals, to ensure her family and friends are free from illness.

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York or London that a particular crisis, especially a gender-related crisis, is worth the money, investment and space.

What feedback or reactions do you get for your reporting?
I spent this year covering issues ranging from teenage pregnancy to abortion access to child marriage and female genital mutilation. The response from nonprofits, experts, humanitarians and individuals has been overwhelmingly positive. People are relieved and grateful that these important stories are finally getting the coverage they deserve. The most rewarding feedback is when story subjects, or people like them, reach out to express thanks for highlighting their experiences in a humane and respectful way. Of course, I occasionally receive feedback that criticizes the stories, especially when they touch on controversial topics like abortion. But these are rare.

How has COVID-19 affected your work?
When COVID-19 was ramping up in Kenya, I did as much research and reporting as I could via phone, WhatsApp, Skype and Zoom. This was to ensure that I was not putting anyone, especially my most vulnerable subjects, at risk of contracting the virus. As we have learned more about the transmission of COVID-19, I have begun field reporting again. But I operate cautiously and carefully, always wearing a mask, washing my hands, keeping a distance and taking every precaution to protect myself, my sources and my reporting team.

Do you have a tip to share for other journalists interested in covering neglected crises?
Perseverance! These types of stories are some of the most underreported, undervalued articles in the media world. They are also some of the most important. If you believe a story is worth telling, then keep pitching. Keep pushing. Keep applying for funding. Keep making your case. Eventually, you will find fantastic editors and supporters of your story who will believe in it as much as you do and who will help you bring these important issues to light.

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Fritz Schaap
South Africa

How did you find the main protagonists for your report on Mali?
We originally went to Mopti to cover the story of a former commander of a jihadist militia, who now tries to steer fighters away from militias and integrate them back into society. With mixed results, one must say. Apparently, those ex-fighters staying in his camps continued to pillage the neighboring villages. This man was supposed to accompany the Malian prime minister to Ogossagou, a place where at least 31 people had been brutally murdered. And it sadly was not the first time the town faced such terror. In 2019, around 160 people were killed in a massacre, this led to a massive international outcry. A UN special advisor back then warned of a growing ethnicization of the conflict. In the end, multiple factors lead to the original story not working out and we decided to concentrate our reporting solely on Ogossagou. We then met the leaders of the different groups in Sevaré.

What challenges did you encounter?
The biggest challenge in central Mali is security. The situation in Sevaré further escalated while we were there. There was continuous fighting between different militias and jihadists. Military vehicles belted down the roads at night. The jihadists try to build a corridor through Mali, from Mauritania down to Burkina Faso in order to divide the northern region from the south and the capital Bamako. Two small ‘caliphates’ already exist in the Mopti region: one in Youwarou and one in Tenenkou. Security tends to be a bit better in these places. The government starts to slowly lose control of this region.

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Unwrite the Silence

How people grow, prepare, and share their food affects their community’s ability to grow and prosper. All around the world, women are taking charge of those decisions, and helping to to create sustainable change for their community’s future.

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About
CARE International

Founded in 1945, CARE International works around the globe to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. We put women and girls in the center because we know that we cannot overcome poverty until all people have equal rights and opportunities.

In 2020, CARE International worked in 104 countries to assist more than 92.3 million people to improve basic health and education, fight hunger, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity, confront climate change and recover from disasters.

To learn more, visit www.care-international.org
West's candidature for US presidency was mentioned in 39,900 online articles.

The Southern Times, Jeff Kapembwa, Zambia Bans Export of Fish, 13. July 2020:

Reliefweb, UNICEF, Madagascar Country Office: Humanitarian Situation Report No.3, Reporting Period: 01 January to 30 September 2020:

Endnotes
When one woman is lifted out of poverty, she will bring four others with her. That’s why CARE puts women at the heart of everything we do - because women drive communities forward, keep them together, and time and again, prove they won’t stand by while others in their circle need help.

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Cover Page:
At her home in Zambia, 68-year-old Mary produces enough vegetables and maize to provide her family with a diverse diet - a lifesaving measure through the uncompromising drought. “I look after all my grandchildren who used to be underweight, but now they are shown to be growing well.”

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