



**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.<sup>1</sup> Further to this, these 10 crises received 26 times less attention – in terms of online news articles – than the launch of PlayStation 5.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> The effects of COVID-19, coupled with the growing impacts of climate change have increased the number of people in need by 40 percent<sup>4</sup> – 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

## The world's blind spots

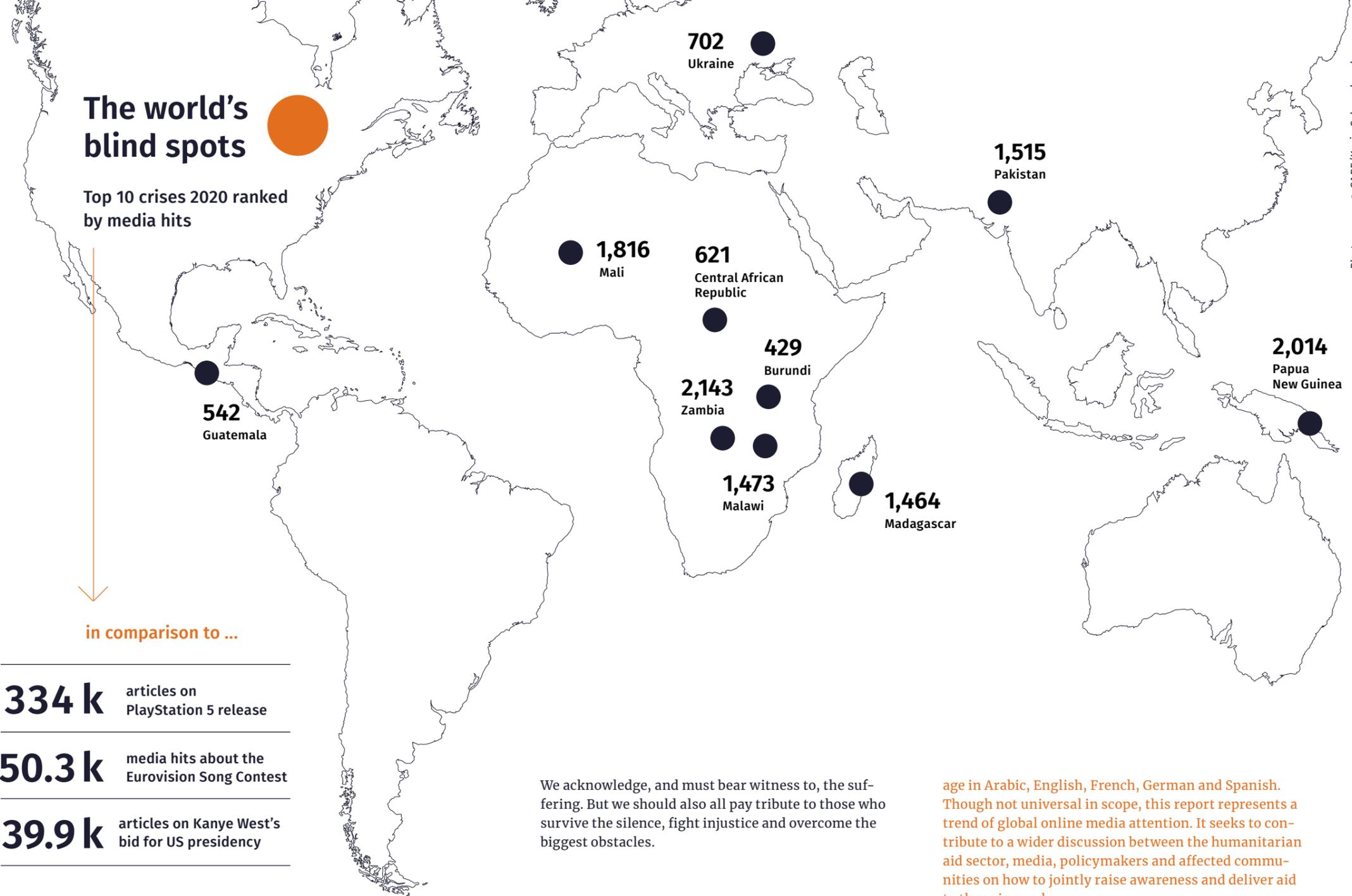
Top 10 crises 2020 ranked by media hits

in comparison to ...

<b>334 k</b>	articles on PlayStation 5 release
<b>50.3 k</b>	media hits about the Eurovision Song Contest
<b>39.9 k</b>	articles on Kanye West's bid for US presidency

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<sup>5</sup> and adds a new estimation of around USD 35.1 billion needed for 2021.<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup>

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 every crisis quoted, there is humanity and strength.



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.

## 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 at number one. The overall number of people affected by each emergency is derived from ACAPS, Reliefweb and CARE's own data. The media analysis is drawn from online media cover-

age in Arabic, English, French, German and Spanish. Though not universal in scope, this report represents a trend of global online media attention. It seeks to contribute to a wider discussion between the humanitarian aid sector, media, policymakers and affected communities on how to jointly raise awareness and deliver aid to those in need.

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Women and girls are the most affected in all emergencies, and people in Burundi are changing their attitudes about gender and the power imbalance between men and women thanks to Women's Empowerment Programs and nationwide advocacy for women's rights.

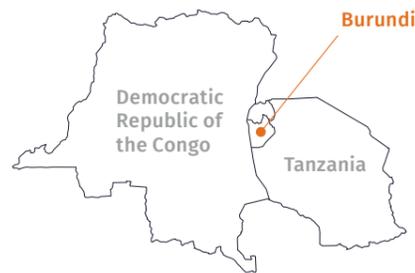
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## 1 Burundi

### Scarcity of arable land and natural disasters drive hunger

A relatively peaceful transfer of power following years of political turmoil is seeing an influx of Burundian refugees returning home from Rwanda and Tanzania.<sup>8</sup> 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 refugees will return home in 2020.<sup>9</sup> But Burundi, the fifth poorest nation in the world,<sup>10</sup> is having a hard time absorbing returnees. With a surface area of 27,834 km<sup>2</sup>, Burundi is one of the most densely populated countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

Extreme weather events, combined with political instability and insecurity since 2015 have uprooted over 135,000 people within Burundi's borders<sup>13</sup> (of this



**5<sup>th</sup> poorest**

country in the world

**2.3 million**

Burundians are in need of humanitarian aid

figure, 83 percent were displaced due to natural disasters).<sup>14</sup> Displacement, high population density, large numbers of returnees, and close to 80,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC),<sup>15</sup> are contributing to competition and disputes over land.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the population, mainly women, are pushed to marginal land.<sup>17</sup>

Given that Burundi is ill-prepared for major emergencies, the country has the highest rates of chronic malnourishment in the world. Pre-COVID (2016/2017), the national average stunting rate was 56 percent – well above the emergency threshold of 40 percent.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> As of December 2020, over 2.3 million Burundians are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance, including food aid.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.

**10 million**

people live below the poverty line



extremely vulnerable to natural hazards



## 2 Guatemala

### Raising the flag of desperation

In Guatemala, whole communities are waving the white flag.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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<sup>26</sup> – a tropical dry forest region on the Pacific Coast of Central America. According to the 2019 World Risk Report, Guatemala is among the top ten most vulnerable countries prone to natural hazards.<sup>27</sup> Since 2015, protracted droughts and sparse, yet torrential rains have battered the country, resulting in continual crop failures and the death of livestock.<sup>28</sup> And now,

at the time of writing, Guatemala is reeling from the aftermath of two back-to-back category four storms, Iota and Eta.<sup>29</sup>

Guatemala – considered a middle-income country by the World Bank – has had continued, moderate (3.5 percent) growth over the last five years. This economic stability, however, has not made much of a dent in poverty and inequality.<sup>30</sup> Even before COVID-19, Guatemala had the sixth highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the world with close to half (47 percent) of all Guatemalan children chronically malnourished and at risk for stunting.<sup>31</sup> Also worrisome is the national maternal mortality rate which stood at 108 deaths per every 100,000 live births pre-COVID.<sup>32</sup> Around thirty-five children out of every 1,000 born in Guatemala die before the age of five.<sup>33</sup>

In April 2020, the UN warned that COVID-19 lockdown measures were aggravating the seasonal hunger in eastern Guatemala. Among the most affected households, many have lost all or part of their incomes as a result of curfews and business closures. Most Guatemalans work in the informal sector without any social protection.<sup>34</sup> The decrease in remittances from family members working abroad has been an additional blow for many vulnerable families. Remittances are a lifeline, particularly for women, who make up 69 percent of the recipients.<sup>35</sup> In desperation, migrants continue to seek a way to the United States,<sup>36</sup> despite the pandemic, and despite American law which in effect bars their entry. Pervasive poverty, high homicide rates driven by gang violence, and corruption – factors that pushed migrants to flee Central America pre-COVID – have not eased during the pandemic. Despite COVID-related blockades, it is reported that criminal groups are using confinement to strengthen their control; intensifying extortion, drug trafficking, and violence.<sup>37</sup> Violence against women and girls has also increased during the pandemic, with 319 women killed, and over 5,600 reports of sexual violence between January and October 2020.<sup>38</sup>

Women and girls typically suffer the most in emergencies, yet they are often at the frontline, providing humanitarian support to their communities. In Guatemala, local women’s organizations have partnered with civil society organizations to identify families in need, collect donations and distribute basic food items to marginalized communities.<sup>39</sup> CARE Guatemala is implementing its COVID-19 response plan and is providing necessary support in the areas of food security, economic recovery, and gender-based violence. Together with partners such as Movimiento de Mujeres Tz’ununija and CICAM, CARE Guatemala is also supporting communities affected by the tropical storms Eta and Iota with food, water, hygiene items including personal protection equipment to prevent COVID-19, and protection services.



Central African Republic

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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> Pre-COVID, more than 71 percent of its population lived under the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per day.<sup>42</sup> Basic services are lacking throughout CAR, and, in many areas, people depend entirely on humanitarian assistance.<sup>43</sup>

Ravaged by decades of armed conflict, rampant poverty, an unending spate of natural disasters, and a global pandemic, CAR today stands on a precipice. The UN warns that in 2021, 2.8 million Central Africans – more than half of the population – will need humanitarian assistance and protection. Of these, the survival of 1.93 million people is at risk.<sup>44</sup>

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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Photo: © CARE/Sebastian Wells



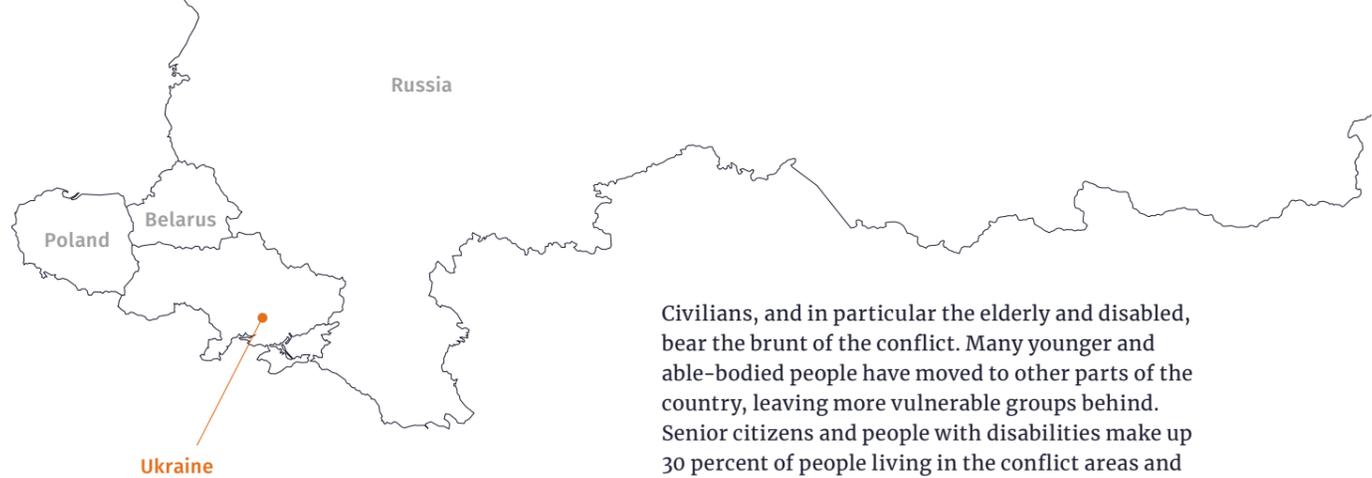
Since 2012, the country has been held in the grip of a civil war. Human rights violations are a daily occurrence, including assassinations, torture and rape. The humanitarian situation is further impacted by fragile governance, poverty, and the plundering of natural resources. In February 2019, under 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.<sup>45</sup>

Conflict continues to force many families to abandon their fields.<sup>46</sup> One in four Central Africans is displaced either within the country or in a neighboring country, and the numbers of returnees have dwindled.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup>

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.<sup>51</sup>

**One in four** Central Africans is displaced in country or in a neighboring country, 7 million people live below the poverty line



## 4 Ukraine Elderly left to fend for themselves

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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

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.<sup>57</sup>

In late September, wildfires raged for a week in the government-controlled areas of Luhanska. Over 32 settlements along the contact line were affected. About 500 homes went up in flames, nine people were killed, and 19 injured.<sup>58</sup> It is feared that those who lost their homes will have to spend the winter in temporary shelters.<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup>

**One** of the poorest countries in Europe

**3.4** million people in need of humanitarian assistance



## 5 Madagascar Battered and bruised by climate change

Geologists believe that 165 million years ago, Madagascar was connected to Africa, but began to drift over time. As a result, it evolved in isolation as evidenced by its unique fauna and flora. The Indian Ocean island appears on the *Ten most under-reported humanitarian crisis list for a third year in a row.*

Every year, thousands of Malagasy people are affected by natural disasters but their situation is rarely reported in the international media. In this country, where three quarters of the population (or around 20 million people) live under the poverty line,<sup>63</sup> it would seem deprivation is the norm. Yet the grave challenges faced by the island nation hardly ever make world headlines.

Madagascar is blessed with a wealth of natural resources including vanilla, cloves, titanium, cobalt and nickel, and a tourism industry driven by its unique environment. Over 90 percent of its wildlife is found nowhere else on earth. However, the country is also severely affected by climate change; experiencing recurrent, protracted droughts, and an average of 1.5 cyclones per year – the highest rate in Africa.<sup>64</sup> An estimated one fifth of Malagasy people – around five million people – are directly affected by recurring natural disasters, including cyclones, floods and droughts.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, due to its low vaccination rates and poor sanitation and hygiene, Madagascar is regularly hit by epidemics. Malaria as well as bubonic and pneumonic plague are endemic to the country.<sup>66</sup>

In 2020 alone, the Malagasy people faced several emergencies: COVID-19 across the country;<sup>67</sup> flooding in 13 districts<sup>68</sup> that killed 35 people;<sup>69</sup> malaria in the

southern regions that killed 398 people;<sup>70</sup> dengue in the central west; and the return of severe drought in the south.<sup>71</sup> While the measles epidemic of 2019 is mostly under control, there is high possibility that a new epidemic could begin again.<sup>72</sup>

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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup>

In Madagascar, CARE helps the most vulnerable communities in several regions to prepare and face natural disasters. With its local partner SAF/FJKM, CARE supports innovative financing and insurance solutions against climate risks and disasters. 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.

≈ **50%**

Almost every second child suffers from stunting

## Malawi

6

### 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.<sup>77</sup>

The UN estimates that 8.3 million Malawians require humanitarian assistance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>78</sup> In this, one of Africa's most densely populated countries, seven out of ten people live below the

poverty line.<sup>79</sup> With slightly over half the population (51 percent) under the age of 18,<sup>80</sup> Malawi also has one of the lowest per capita Gross National Incomes in the world, at just USD 320 (2018).<sup>81</sup> Its economy – which is heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture – is extremely vulnerable to shocks.<sup>82</sup>

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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> COVID-19's disruption of supply chains is threatening these gains by exacerbating the food crisis.<sup>85</sup> The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that about 2.6 million people need food aid as of November 2020.<sup>86</sup> Further aggravating the situation are Malawi's HIV/AIDS infection rates (at 9.6 percent),<sup>87</sup> low primary school completion rates (at 51 percent),<sup>88</sup> high levels of stunting (at 37 percent for children under five),<sup>89</sup> and more than 75,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and other neighboring countries.<sup>90</sup>

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 40,000 cases of teen pregnancies according to a government-led rapid assessment. The figure suggests an 11 percent increase in underage pregnancies since 2019.<sup>91</sup>

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.

## Pakistan

7

### 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.<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> The floods killed over 400 people and displaced 68,000 others.<sup>95</sup>

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.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> A WFP-FAO joint analysis conducted during the pandemic found 25 percent of households (around 49 million people) are food insecure and 10 percent (21 million people) are in urgent need of food aid.<sup>98</sup> Even before this, malnutrition was

# 2.6 million

people need food aid, the majority lives below the poverty line

 Rising rates of child marriage and abuse: 11 percent increase in underage pregnancies since 2019

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

prevalent across Pakistan, with four out of every ten children under the age of five suffering from stunting.<sup>99</sup>

For vulnerable communities food insecurity is heightened by pervasive poverty and an overburdened health system.<sup>100</sup> And there are nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees in the country<sup>101</sup> – one of the largest displaced populations in the entire world – adding pressure to already strained public infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. In 2019, an HIV outbreak was declared in the district of Larkana in Sindh province but according to UNFPA, Pakistan does not have sufficient supplies of anti-retroviral medications; making the spread of the disease a continued threat.<sup>102</sup>

Pre-COVID, Pakistan was among Asia's five fastest emerging economies according to World Bank statistics. But COVID containment measures have contributed to a decline in Pakistan's real GDP in 2020. The virus is also widening the gender imbalances in the country, raising concern that some of the gains that women have fought to achieve will be lost.<sup>103</sup> Pre-COVID, Pakistan ranked 136 out of 162 countries on the Gender Inequality Index.<sup>104</sup> Many Pakistani women cannot easily access basic health, legal and social support services. And although Pakistan has enacted legislation against gender-based violence, implementation of these laws is a challenge.<sup>105</sup> According to the 2017-2018 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, more than a quarter (28 percent) of Pakistani women have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence.<sup>106</sup>

CARE Pakistan works in some of the most remote and logistically-challenging areas to address the underlying causes of poverty, with special focus on women, children and the most marginalized. CARE and its local partners responded to the locust infestation in Pishin, Baluchistan province. CARE has also supported the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen the public health sector and to improve water and sanitation facilities. Over 40,000 people have been reached with radio messages on virus prevention in Peshawar city and newly merged districts. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, CARE provided food and hygiene kits to over 13,000 of the most vulnerable individuals. CARE Pakistan's regular programming supports health care, sanitation and clean water for vulnerable populations.

**49 million**  
people – 25 percent of the households – are food insecure



## 8 Mali 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 rattles 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.<sup>107</sup>

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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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,<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup>

Almost two-thirds of Malians are employed in the agricultural sector. With farming and cattle rearing severely disrupted by violence, natural hazards, and COVID-19 prevention measures, the number of people in need of emergency aid spiked from 4.3 million to 6.8 million between January and August 2020. In other words, according to the UN, one in three people in Mali need humanitarian assistance.<sup>112</sup> This includes 1.3 million people on the verge of starvation.<sup>113</sup>

The pandemic has also aggravated the situation for women and children. Mali is one of the most unequal countries in the world for women. It ranked 158 out of 162 on the Global Gender Equality Index pre-COVID.<sup>114</sup> Given that Mali is a landlocked country, COVID-19 prevention measures such as border closures are severely hampering regional trade, reducing women's opportunities to earn money for themselves. Social distancing and movement restrictions in country add to the burden.

The pandemic is also aggravating the situation for children. The UN in Mali recorded 745 serious viola-

tions against minors in 2019 – the highest number since 2017. The violations included killing, maiming, rape and other sexual violence, as well as recruitment by armed groups. The total for the first three months of 2020 alone was 228 incidents. The UN also noted a sharp increase in forced displacement with over 137,000 Malian children removed from their families between January and May 2020.<sup>115</sup>

CARE and its partners such as the Malian aid organization YAGTU have been helping communities affected by drought, disaster and conflict with food security and nutrition. Between 2013 – and 2019, CARE's water, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition projects reached over 3 million people in Koulikoro, Segou and Mopti regions. As a result, children show a healthier body weight and stunting has decreased by 40 percent. Families are now 43 percent more likely to have clean drinking water. They are also twice as likely to treat their drinking water. Last but not least, women have more say: they are three times more likely to be involved in decisions on child health and on spending at home.

**1.3 million** people are on the verge of starvation

**90%** live below the poverty line



CARE supports women in Mali to start businesses and become economically independent.

When the coronavirus struck, these women saw the opportunity to start sewing protective masks. CARE recruited professional tailors to provide training and ensure masks were high quality. Now, women are helping to stop the spread of the virus, and making an income at the same time.

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## 9 Papua New Guinea Resourcefulness in the face of challenges

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 because of the rugged territory which makes transport difficult. The country's population of more than 8 million is largely rural (87 percent) and highly dispersed; spread out across the highlands and over 600 islands and atolls.<sup>116</sup>

In 2020, the UN estimated that about 4.6 million people in PNG (more than half of its population) are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>117</sup> Only 46 percent of the population has access to improved drinking water and some parts of the country face challenges in nutrition, lacking a balanced diet.<sup>118</sup>

Pre-COVID-19, PNG's health system was already operating beyond capacity.<sup>119</sup> In July 2020, Port Moresby General Hospital – the country's largest – launched a public appeal for face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and even blankets and laundry detergent.<sup>120</sup> Authorities are concerned that if COVID-19 were to take hold of the

country, it would further weaken the healthcare system and derail efforts to combat endemic diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/Aids, malaria and polio, which reemerged in 2018.<sup>121</sup>

Also endemic to PNG is malnutrition. Pre-COVID, almost one in two children (49.5 percent) were stunted.<sup>122</sup> This means that an estimated half a million children in PNG will never reach their full growth potential. In a country where the majority of the population relies on subsistence farming to meet daily nutritional needs,<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup>

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.<sup>125</sup>

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.<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup> 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.<sup>128</sup> The government however, is committed to addressing these challenges and launched a national strategy to prevent and respond to gender based violence in 2017.<sup>129</sup>

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.

**Only 46%**  
have access to improved drinking water, almost every second child is stunted



## 10 Zambia Extreme weather causing food shortages

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.<sup>130</sup>

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.<sup>131</sup> Recurrent droughts are putting the famous Victoria Falls under threat of drying up,<sup>132</sup> and Lake Kariba – the world's largest artificial lake and Zambia's primary hydroelectric power source – has dropped six meters in just three years.<sup>133</sup>

Whilst frequent power outages have negatively impacted the business sector,<sup>134</sup> 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,<sup>135</sup> while its neighbor, Namibia, declared a state of emergency.<sup>136</sup>

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.<sup>137</sup> Consecutive droughts, locust plagues and floods have left no crops to harvest. These, combined with livestock disease outbreaks,<sup>138</sup> and the adverse effects of COVID-19 movement restrictions,<sup>139</sup> have negatively impacted livelihoods. Presently, the country is battling a locust invasion that is putting 88,700 households in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>140</sup> 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.<sup>141</sup>

COVID-19's disruption of world commodity markets has also pushed down the price of copper, of which Zambia is major producer.<sup>142</sup> The World Bank expects that the Zambian economy will contract by about 4.5 percent in 2020.<sup>143</sup> 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.<sup>144</sup> According to the 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, only 33 percent of Zambians had access to basic sanitation services.<sup>145</sup> 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.<sup>146</sup> The country also has some of the highest child marriage and teenage pregnancy rates globally.<sup>147</sup>

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 people. CARE has also provided food, water, sanitation and hygiene support, other emergency relief and livelihoods support.

**2.6 million** need food aid

**Over 10 million** people in need of humanitarian assistance

**33%** have access to basic sanitation services



## 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.<sup>148</sup> 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 **Struggling 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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## 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.<sup>149</sup> 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 35.1 billion to provide aid.<sup>150</sup> 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 maintain, and where possible, 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 budgets 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 support 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 digital access are removed. The media themselves can also up their game by enabling these diverse voices and giving them a regular platform.

## 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 the COVID-19 pandemic 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's stories and those of minorities and other diverse groups. Not only do they better understand the context, they also tend to have better connections on the ground.

## 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 rather slow political reactions and technological change have triggered the rapid spread of hate speech, misogyny and 'fake news'. Combating this requires

that citizens engage; that they actively demand more from their news media; and that they hold media companies accountable for untrue, unfair, biased or stereotypical coverage. There are numerous excellent (digital) journalistic projects that provide critical reporting on topics behind the headlines.

## 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 globally. Since the pandemic began, '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. Crises also diminish hard-fought gains for women's rights. Not only has COVID-19 had a more negative social and 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.<sup>151</sup> 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.<sup>152</sup> 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 media organizations and other initiatives that strengthen women's agency, their decision-making power, and their access to information.

# Unwrite the Silence



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.

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## 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 and 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."

### How do you do your research and reporting in times of COVID-19?

I wrote articles when the whole world was in lockdown, calling contacts from all over the world. For the first time, we were all going through the same thing. Everyone was afraid. But for me, my job is to go out in the field and report what people do and what they think. Right now, I can't, but I know I will again. I am still curious to learn about and from people. I would tell every journalist: Stop doing the job if you think you know the answer before asking the question.

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## Omardine Omar Mozambique

### What challenges do you encounter during research?

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.

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## Sam Mednick Burkina Faso

### How do you usually find your stories?

For several years I have been based in countries experiencing severe humanitarian crises and this has allowed me to do more in-depth reporting on the driving factors contributing to these crises. I try to take every opportunity to travel the country and speak with as many people as I can from different vantage points to give the stories more nuance and context. This also helps me find important stories that are often underreported.

### What challenges do you encounter during research?

For one story about Syrian refugee women battling abuse amid COVID-19, which I did for the New Humanitarian's 'She Said' series, it was initially hard to find women willing to speak about their harrowing experiences and to do so over the phone. Reporting on gender-based violence is something that needs to be done with sensitivity and respect and it's hard to establish trust with people remotely.

### Do you have a tip to share for other journalists?

Put people's stories at the heart of the reporting. It's hard to get people to care about places they've never been to and contexts that are hard to understand, especially with so many crises going on in the world. But it's easier for people to connect if they can relate to or empathize with someone's individual experience. Also, never assume that just because a crisis is not being covered extensively (or at all), that media outlets are not interested. Neglected crises become more neglected when people think they're not worth covering.

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## Gunther Lichtenhofer Austria

### How do you usually find stories on forgotten crises?

I receive a lot of my information from aid organizations. They are often the only ones working in crisis regions and the ones in contact with both civilians and authorities. It is always helpful to have been to a region myself before, since it enables direct contact with the locals and creates a more complete picture.

### 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 to do it in the same way I did before. But it becomes harder since my time is often needed for other topics.

Web: <https://apa.at/>



## Neha Wadekar Kenya

### How do you usually find humanitarian stories?

Since starting to work in East Africa more than four years ago, I have developed a network of sources and contacts, ranging from staff at various nonprofits, to government officials and most importantly, people on the ground. Often, my story ideas come from the most unexpected places – an Uber ride across town or a conversation at a cafe, for example. I also take time to read reports, news briefings and coverage from other reporters working in the region. These can be important sources of information and inspiration.

### What challenges do you encounter?

One of the biggest challenges I face when reporting humanitarian stories from East Africa is getting funding and support from grantors and publications. It can be difficult to convince a funder or editor based in New



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.

© Karin Schermbrucker/CARE

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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## Endnotes

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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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