

THE COVID-19 ISSUE

A message from UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed to UNDEF project implementers everywhere

UNDEF's civil society grantees have shown exceptional creativity and courage in pivoting their projects to meet the challenges of Covid-19. Addressing the epidemic of misinformation that has spread around the virus, advancing media literacy especially among young people, empowering women to take action against domestic violence which has surged amid Covid-19 lockdowns, quarantines, and social and economic pressures -- these are just some of the critical interventions that demonstrate how civil society is at the vanguard of democracy. Their work is all the more inspiring given the shrinking of civic space that existed before the pandemic, and has worsened since. I thank the brave activists who implement UNDEF projects around the world.

Amina J. Mohammed



Source: Global Citizen



UNDEF Board member Mahmood Mamdani appointed Chancellor of Kampala International University



Source: Getty Images

Professor Mahmood Mamdani, a leading Ugandan academic, author, and political commentator as well as professor at Columbia University in New York, has been appointed Chancellor of Kampala International University in Uganda.

Professor Mamdani is the director of Uganda's Makerere Institute of Social Research; Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at Columbia University's School of Government at the School of International and Public Affairs; and Professor of Anthropology, Political Science and African Studies at Columbia University.

He specializes in the study of African and international politics, colonialism and post-colonialism, with a research focus on political identities through the definition of citizenship in post-independence Africa; the history of civil war and genocide in Africa; the Cold War and the War on Terror; the intersection between politics and culture; and the history and theory of human rights.

Professor Mamdani was appointed to UNDEF's Advisory Board in January 2020.

He is married to filmmaker Mira Nair, **both pictured**, director of *Mississippi Masala*, the Academy Award-nominated *Salaam Bombay*, and the new BBC television series *A Suitable Boy*.

Professor Mamdani's appointment was covered widely in the Ugandan media, including [The Observer](http://www.theobserver.co.ug).

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

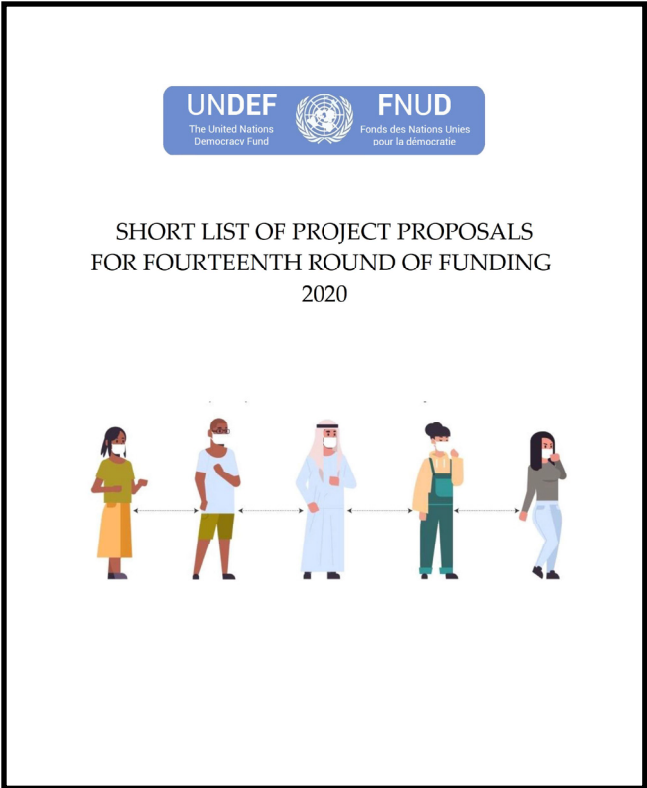
34 new projects shortlisted, all with relevance to crisis

A total of 34 projects amounting to almost eight million dollars have been shortlisted for UNDEF’s 14th Round of funding, all with direct relevance in the Covid-19 crisis – from media freedom, media literacy and fighting disinformation to addressing the economic and social pressures on women and youth as a result of the pandemic.

In this Round, UNDEF received 2551 project proposals from organizations in 139 countries, the vast majority local civil society groups in Africa, Arab States, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. The short list is the product of a rigorous vetting process engaging a team of independent experts, UN Resident Coordinators, UN Country Teams and UN Headquarters entities, the UNDEF Advisory Board and, finally, the UN Secretary-General.

The shortlisted projects all reflect a focus on strengthening the voice of civil society and encouraging the participation of groups in democratic processes -- thus concentrating on the demand side of democracy, rather than the supply side.

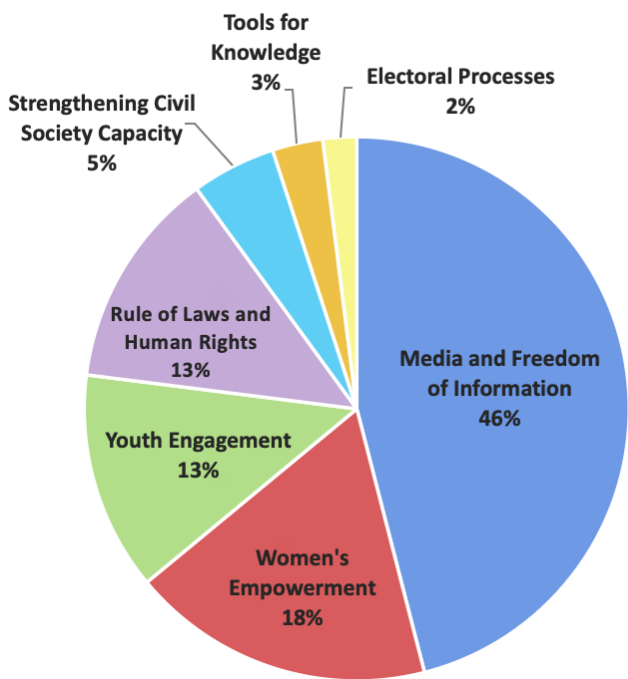
This support for civil society is crucial at a time when the Covid-19 crisis has opened up a toolbox for some Governments inclined to constrain civic space. There is a real risk is that even initially necessary constraints will remain in place for longer than the pandemic warrants. They pose the biggest danger where civil society is already weakened and unable to fight back, as a result of a growing number of restrictive laws pre-Covid-19.



Over the past decade, more than 200 laws proposed or enacted in almost 90 countries restricting civil society’s ability to operate or accept funding, or both. The pandemic has also unleashed an epidemic of disinformation and hate speech, as well as domestic abuse amid lockdowns and economic and social pressures.

The shortlisted project proposals now move into the final stage in the selection process: the negotiation of a project document, which is in effect the contract between UNDEF and the grantee. This requires the applicant to provide a more elaborated project design, and involves comprehensive guidance, input and review by UNDEF. Only upon successful conclusion of this process will the project formally be approved for funding. UNDEF is also required to notify the Government of each country where a project is recommended.

Of the shortlisted project proposals, 29 per cent are in Asia, 26 per cent in Africa, 21 per cent in Arab States, 12 per cent in Europe, and 12 per cent in Latin America. Broken down by key activity, 46 per cent of project proposals are in media, 18 per cent in gender equality; 13 per cent in rule of law and human rights; 13 per cent in youth engagement; 5 per cent in strengthening civil society interaction with government; 3 per cent in tools for knowledge; 2 per cent in electoral processes.



NEWS FROM THE FIELD

UNDEF's existing projects pivot focus to strengthen Covid-19 response of civil society

The UN Democracy Fund is working closely with its civil society project organizations to address and counteract the wide range of ways the Covid-19 crisis may impair democracy and increase authoritarianism.

Our civil society partners have swiftly answered our call to action and are pivoting their work to address a range of acute Covid-19 issues and needs:

- developing media literacy and digital safety, more critical than ever as activism is forced online, so as to address the risk of suppression, interference and closing of civic space;
- fighting misinformation, hate speech and disinformation, which have mushroomed in the crisis;
- training journalists remotely to report on the impact of the pandemic with in-depth, fact-checked coverage, while staying safe on the front line;
- empowering women against gender-based violence, which has surged amid Covid-19 lockdowns, quarantines, and social and economic pressures;
- helping to highlight the challenges of inequality and weak service delivery made worse by the crisis, with specific focus on the needs and rights of women, youth, minorities and other marginalized populations, so as to help hold governments to account.



This also means making the best use of UNDEF's more than 800 civil society project organizations as a dissemination network for UN messaging on the crisis, and as a feedback mechanism for Covid-19 actions on the ground.

As always, we are generating, developing, and designing civil society proposals for projects to foster good governance, democratic processes and human rights amid the crisis.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

UNDEF's projects take action against Covid-19 misinformation

A range of UNDEF civil society projects have responded to UNDEF's call for action against falsehoods, conspiracy theories, disinformation and hate speech -- what UN Secretary-General António Guterres has described as "a dangerous epidemic of misinformation":



Gambia: An UNDEF project with [Gambia Press Union](#), pictured, works for free and responsible journalism in response to the Covid-19 crisis, amid a dearth of local media expertise in fact-checked, in-depth coverage of health issues, even more so in a public health emergency. This includes training journalists to report on the impact of the crisis, whether remotely or in person while staying safe on the front line. Capacity-building workshops train journalists in techniques and methods of investigative journalism, advocacy campaigns and writing extensive series of articles.

Guatemala: An UNDEF project with [Cooperación Mesoamericana para el Desarrollo y la Paz](#) works with young and indigenous people against discrimination and stigmatization of returning migrants forced back by the Covid-19 economic crisis. An information and awareness programme with youth groups using WhatsApp disseminates a message of prevention against hate speech and discrimination blaming migrants for infections. A community radio and television programme promotes solidarity, respect and community coexistence in times of crisis, as well as verified guidelines for precautions and mental health.



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

Mali: An UNDEF project with [Journalists for Human Rights](#) works with local community-based reporters to build accurate reporting and combat disinformation about the pandemic. The reporters are using skills and credibility they developed while covering Mali's series of armed conflicts for the past eight years. The project draws on lessons learned from previous epidemics in conflict zones: keep the public health messaging as clear as possible, while acknowledging that, as information about the virus changes, understanding evolves. Share community concerns about how pandemic responses are affecting lives and human rights, and ensure officials respond to those concerns. The project also builds capacity of local media to report on good governance and human rights issues, and help journalists and civil society actors work together on data projects.

Mexico: An UNDEF project with [Nosotrxs](#), pictured, works to collect data from student and resident doctors in hospitals on the frontline against the pandemic on working conditions. The data helps to inform a dialogue with media and the federal government on challenges to safety conditions and the need for better protection. The project also engages with domestic workers who face insecure employment during the pandemic, or need better information on coronavirus precautions.



NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Projects in more than 15 countries take action against Covid-19 gender-based violence

UNDEF's civil society projects in more than 15 countries have swiftly answered UNDEF's call to empower women to take action against gender-based violence, which has surged amid Covid-19 lockdowns and social and economic pressures. The call follows UN Secretary-General António Guterres appeal to all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19, highlighting the role of civil society organizations in this effort. Read the Secretary-General's appeal [here](#).

Afghanistan: An UNDEF project with the [Community Center for Disabled](#), pictured, is conducting awareness campaigns for women with disabilities at risk of domestic violence. A call center is being set up, and training of trainers will enable campaigns to inform some 10,000 women with disabilities about Covid-19 prevention, gender-based violence, and support resources. The Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan is preparing radio and TV programming focusing on Covid-19 gender-based violence.



Benin: An UNDEF project with [Ligue LIFE](#) is adapting its community mobilization project against trafficking of young girls in Benin by disseminating information on Covid-19 gender-based violence through awareness-raising and advocacy activities.

Democratic Republic of Congo: An UNDEF project with [Caritas](#), pictured, is disseminating and broadcasting educational programming on Covid-19 gender-based violence through community radio stations; building partnerships with local clinics for referral of potential gender-based violence cases; training local staff and local committees on gender-based violence response and referral.



Ecuador: An UNDEF project with [Fundación Esquel](#) engages young leaders to become civic activists against Covid-19 gender-based violence, and for peaceful and respectful attitudes towards women. Young men and women are trained in tools for advocacy and outreach, including concerts, murals, TED talks, videos, rallies, which are assembled in an awareness-raising campaign to reach at least 10,000 residents of Quito.

Egypt: An UNDEF project with the [Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights](#) is building awareness-raising through media, mobilizing civil society, and providing legal consultations for exposed women.

Guatemala: An UNDEF project with the [Women's Justice Initiative](#), pictured, is conducting advocacy and awareness raising on Covid-19 gender-based violence translated to the Kaqchikel language, broadcasting through community radio and other traditional community means; strengthening a dedicated hotline for gender-based violence cases; providing legal and psychological counselling to victims.



Haiti: An UNDEF project with [Fanm Deside](#) is working to create intervention units to support women exposed to Covid-19 gender-based violence during the crisis, and to disseminate awareness through local media.

Kyrgyzstan: An UNDEF project with the [Community Media Association](#), pictured, is broadcasting Covid-19 gender-based violence information in their community radio programming, and will hold virtual round table discussions focusing on the topic. The project covers all regions in Kyrgyzstan and works with key stakeholders: journalists, women activists, rural women and government officials.



Lebanon: An UNDEF project with [Abaad](#) is preparing to launch a project on strengthening victim protections and realigning social attitudes on gender-based violence during Covid-19 and its aftermath. The project will build on a recently completed first UNDEF Lebanon project in this area, implemented by the same organization. This contributed to agreement to repeal Lebanon's Article 522, which exempted a rapist from punishment if the survivor married the perpetrator -- a provision grounded in social norms that often resulted in a victim being coerced by family to marry her attacker.



Lebanon's Syrian refugee community:

An UNDEF project with [Mandat International](#), pictured, is conducting surveys among women refugees to identify abuse and develop awareness; and working with legal experts on women's rights to address gender-based physical, psychological, economic abuse.



Liberia: An UNDEF project with the [Liberia Women Media Action Committee](#) is disseminating and training women in the use of a free offline mobile app that can be used to report gender-based violence and find help for women in emergency situations.

Namibia: An UNDEF project with the [Women's Action for Development](#) is preparing radio programmes on gender-based violence facilitated by their regional community voice members.

Nepal: An UNDEF project with [DEC-Nepal](#) is broadcasting radio programming among its target ethnic Chepang communities to inform vulnerable women about Covid-19 violence helplines, quick response and self-protection – including government crisis management centres at district hospitals. The centres provide free treatment, collection of medical evidence, psycho-social counselling, shelter and security guidance.

Palestine: An UNDEF project with the [Women's Affairs Center](#), **pictured**, is providing case management services for Covid-19 gender-based violence, including Individual legal, mental health and psychosocial counselling, court representation, referral to shelter services and family or couple therapy.



Russian Federation: An UNDEF project with [Focus-Media](#) is working with crisis centers for women to develop an algorithm for advising women on issues of violence; providing online 24-hour support and information; adding psychologists to support women who have applied; disseminating information among target groups.



Rwanda: An UNDEF project with the [Community of Potters of Rwanda](#), **pictured**, is conducting monthly radio broadcasts on Covid-19 gender-based violence prevention; disseminating documentaries on ending domestic violence and on impact faced by potters community Nyaruguru; offering referral services and discussion sessions in women safe spaces; holding monthly safe space meetings with facilitators to share information on prevention; launching a competition on innovative, sustainable and independent actions to fight gender-based violence.

Somalia: An UNDEF project with the [Somali Birth Attendants Cooperative Organization](#), **pictured**, is adapting its radio and TV programming to create awareness of Covid-19 gender-based violence.

