

**ADVOCACYNET 358**  
**Tuesday January 5, 2021**

## **The Unsettling Pandemic**

**Girls from Nepal, Zimbabwe and the US Express their Fears  
through Stitching**



Bewilderment. Anxiety. Isolation. Fear. Guilt. Sadness. Sympathy.

How do we really feel about COVID-19? We put the question to 22 young women in Nepal, Zimbabwe and the US and asked them to describe the pandemic through embroidery. A sampling of their designs can be seen below. The rest are profiled [on our website](#).



[Kate Lanman](#), pictured above, is one of nine students at the Wakefield High School in Arlington Virginia who have made squares.

Kate hates the way COVID-19 has made her anxious around other people. Normally gregarious, she feels especially insecure in

grocery stores. She has named her square *Paranoia*.

The Wakefield artists are all members of [Girl Up](#). They explain their designs in [podcast interviews with AP's Abby Stuckrath](#). Meet them and [view their squares here](#).

### Separation in Nepal



Sarita Thapa is one of three friends in the Bardiya District of western Nepal who have stitched COVID squares. All three [lost their fathers during the conflict in Nepal](#). The pandemic brings back the deep sense of loss.

For Sarita the worst thing about the pandemic is the separation and isolation. In a society built around families and communities, this has been almost unbearable.

Sarita herself came down with the familiar symptoms and went

to the hospital for a test. She was turned away and told to quarantine with her elderly mother. Sarita's square shows the two sitting sadly at home.

The most poignant image, by Kushma, shows a sick man and his wife while a bulldozer buries COVID victims in a mass grave (photo below). Families are not allowed to attend COVID burials and some Hindus fear that this will prevent their loved one from reaching heaven.

[View the Bardiya squares and meet the artists.](#)

### **Locked Down in Harare, Zimbabwe**



With less than 400 recorded COVID deaths, Zimbabwe has fared far better than the US and Nepal. But for Rosemary Panashe, 17, the cost has been high - a harsh lock-down that has proved devastating for poor families.

Rosemary (photo) is one of ten girls who have made squares under the supervision of Constance Mugari, director of [Women Advocacy Project](#) (WAP) in Harare.

Rosemary's square shows a policeman preventing a woman and her daughter from bringing water back to their home. Other squares show women being arrested for not wearing masks and vendors being beaten and dispersed. "The police don't give them a chance," says Lynes, one of the young artists.

[View the Zimbabwe squares and meet the artists.](#)

### **Crisis, Creativity and Compassion**



The COVID squares are a reminder that crisis can create art. The Nepali artists, who include Alina (photo), learned to stitch while commemorating their fathers for the [Bardiya Memorial quilts](#). Their squares about the pandemic show them at the height of their skills.

These embroidery projects also show how stitching can build morale and create a sense of community. This has been particularly valuable during the pandemic.

Some of the Wakefield artists had never done embroidery and their stitching began with a high-spirited Zoom tutorial with Bobbi Fitzsimmons, AP's quilting advisor. [Layla Kherbouch](#), one of two Wakefield coordinators, said that team members encouraged each other through regular online sessions after the project got underway.



The artists in Nepal have also helped each other through the dark days of the pandemic. In Zimbabwe the girls were finally able to meet outside when the lock-down eased, providing some welcome relief from cabin fever (photo).

The project has even built friendships between the young artists in the US and Zimbabwe and given each group a sense of the other's vulnerabilities.

"Sometimes it's so nice to see that we're more alike than we think," says

[Stephanie Achugamonu](#), from the Wakefield team. "At the same time we recognize the privileges that we have being here in the US."

AP will now seek quilters in the US to assemble the squares into quilts. We will also explore new ways to use the distinctive style of art developed by the artists in Nepal. Other American High School students may want to follow the Wakefield example and stitch their own stories. If so, we will happily help to showcase their efforts.

***Interested in participating? [Contact us!](#)***



***Kushma's square shows a sick man and his wife in Nepal, while a bulldozer disposes of bodies in a mass grave. Families are forbidden from attending COVID-19 funerals.***



*Bubbled by Anne (US)*



*Reflection by Ainsley (US)*



*Escape by Elena (US)*



*Drawing water by Alina (Nepal)*



*Migrants Return by Kushma (Nepal)*



*Shopping by Kushma (Nepal)*



*Domestic Violence by Vimbai (Zimbabwe)*



*Shopping by Trish (Zimbabwe)*



*Hunger by Evelyn (Zimbabwe)*

- Interested in assembling an advocacy quilt? [Email us!](#)
- [Meet the Arlington artists, see their squares, and hear their explanations.](#)
  - [Meet the Bardiya artists and see their squares.](#)
  - [Meet the Zimbabwe artists and see their squares.](#)
    - Check out [past news bulletins](#)