

People Against The Pandemic



The Advocacy Project Annual Report 2020

www.advocacynet.org

Girls from Women Advocacy Project in Harare distribute supplies during the pandemic and urge the wearing of face-masks in Chitungwiza community.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Year of Resilience

The theme of our 2020 annual report is resilience in the face of COVID-19. It was a crisis unlike any other that preyed on vulnerable people, devastated communities, and forced us all to confront our own deepest fears.

Some of our own programs were put on hold. For example, we were not able to deploy Peace Fellows abroad. The pandemic also exposed gaps: partners needed money desperately, but with a tiny budget we had nothing to spare.

But other tools were well suited to a global lock-down. Over the years we have built friendships with leaders in many vulnerable communities, most of them women. This proved to be a priceless asset in 2020. We were also well placed to manage remote communications and information. By 2020 our online news service, *Advocacynet*, was reaching almost 6,000 subscribers.

Then there was advocacy quilting. Since 2007, we have given hundreds of disempowered women and girls the chance to tell their stories through embroidery. This proved to be a highly effective form of therapy during a pandemic defined by loneliness and fear. We also launched a new quilt challenge, *Sister Artists*, in late 2019 that blossomed during the pandemic and changed our quilting program forever.

This report looks at how we and our partners used these tools in 2020. We discarded some, doubled down on others and found ourselves forced to be creative at all times. In the process we grew stronger as organizations and people and came to the end of 2020 ready to face the future with confidence.

Our deepest thanks to all who made it possible.

IAIN GUEST

Pitiless Pandemic

COVID-19 preys on marginalized communities, undermines social cohesion, separates families and causes fear in the Global North and South alike



**“Oh God,
when will this
whole drama
be done?”
- Emma Ajok,
Uganda**

The COVID-19 pandemic united the world in misery.

In the Global South, we worked with Ugandans with disability who struggled to navigate lock-downs; in Nepal, with migrants who were expelled from the Gulf and returned to enforced quarantine in isolation centers where many contracted COVID. Rates of infections were also significantly higher among minorities in the Global North. AP met remotely with refugees from the Congo who were among the first to lose their jobs.

Social networks were shattered and families isolated. North and South, the burden fell mainly on women, who found themselves having to educate bored children, protect the family’s personal hygiene and cope with violence from frustrated partners.

Governments panicked. As infections soared in the US, the murder of George Floyd added to the sense of malaise. In Zimbabwe, the government was terrified that the virus would overwhelm the fragile health system and imposed harsh lock-downs on crowded neighborhoods where families live on less than \$5 a day.

Finally, COVID-19 gnawed at our deepest personal fears. Emma Okello, our unflappable partner in Uganda who works with persons with disability, expressed her anguish in a poignant blog: “I was not able to attend my uncle’s funeral. The situation has become very ugly to me. I am, like, “Oh God when will this whole drama be done?”

A Time for Heroes

The pandemic throws up natural leaders who respond with innovative solutions and inspire families, friends and communities. Many are women



"Thanks Caren for the great work you are doing! You are a woman of the people, dear!" - Bintnaas

Bintnaas was one of 25 women in the Kangemi settlement who benefitted from the optimism and leadership of **Caren Mbyaki**, founder of the Kangemi Advocacy Self Help Group.

With governments paralyzed, community leaders offered the first line of defense. It was no coincidence that many were women. Women understood the mortal threat posed to their families and friendships and the need for a community response.

We were fortunate to work with some remarkable women leaders in 2020. None were more impressive than Stella Makena and Caren Mbyaki (photo) who organized women in the informal settlements of Kangemi and Kibera in Nairobi.

Emma Ajok, a program manager at the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU), served as our point of contact with persons with disability. In Zimbabwe, we drew on a long friendship with Constance Mugari, founder of Women Advocacy Project, to mobilize girls against the pandemic.

In western Nepal, Sarita Thapa used skills she had learned through AP to produce face-masks and help other family-members of the disappeared alleviate their anxiety through stitching. Also in Nepal, in Dang District, Pinky Dangi took on a senior role at Backward Society Education (BASE) after BASE's founder almost died from COVID-19.

In Mali we reached out to Aissata Traore and Haby Konate, two skilled trainers who had worked with us on an earlier project and wanted to support young women displaced from the north. These and other leaders provided us with strong and confident partners during the pandemic.

Girls Against COVID-19 in Zimbabwe

Helped by girl ambassadors, Women Advocacy Project draws on its experience of making soap to lift the morale of vulnerable families and protect hygiene



"WAP has truly empowered us as girls!"

- **Trish Makanhiwa**, Girl Ambassador and team leader for the *Clean Girl* soap-making business. Trish is seen here with a customer and **Constance Mugari**, founder of Women Advocacy Project.

Between 2018 and 2020 Constance Mugari, founder of Women Advocacy Project, worked with AP to train 40 girls from poor neighborhoods of Harare to make soap. By early 2020, with personal hygiene one of the few defenses against COVID-19, this strategy looked far-sighted. Constance had also recruited two girl "ambassadors", Trish (photo) and Evelyn, who emerged as strong leaders during the pandemic.

Lesser people would have given up when COVID-19 closed Harare down, but Constance rose to the challenge. She and her husband Dickson raised \$4,500 from friends, including AP, and made 1,950 face-masks and 1,602 bottles of soap from home. The WAP girls then distributed the supplies to clinics and vulnerable families. Trish and Evelyn made sure that their teams promoted personal hygiene and social distancing during the hand-outs.

WAP resumed soap-making when infections eased and by the end of 2020, they had a quality product; a catchy brand name (*Clean Girl*); and enthusiastic customers like Emmanuel Muchingami, seen in the photo with Trish and Constance. Emboldened, Constance set ambitious targets for 2021 - sales of 16,000 bottles and expansion to two new neighborhoods in Harare.

AP helped WAP to secure \$31,000 from a US donor and offered long-distance advice and friendship at weekly Zoom meetings. Dickson produced a new WAP website, and Trish posted her first-ever blog on the AP website. Morale at WAP was high at the end of 2020!

Fiber Art and Transitional Justice in Nepal

Family members of those who disappeared develop a new and exquisite form of fiber art to describe the impact of COVID-19



The pandemic brought back horrible memories for relatives of Nepalis who had disappeared in the conflict (1996 to 2007). Ram Bhandari, founder of the Network of Families of the Disappeared (NEFAD), was reminded of losing his own father in 2001 after he was locked down in Europe for 9 months: “The world now knows how it feels to be forcibly separated from those you love.” Ram is seen with his father in the photo.

In spite of their anguish, several NEFAD members in the district of Bardiya responded to the pandemic with a burst of artistic creativity. They had become accomplished fiber artists during earlier training with AP and were making Tiger bags when the pandemic struck. We sent \$250 to help Sarita Thapa, their team leader, make 200 face-masks for clinics and commissioned Alina and Kushma, seen in the photo, to describe their experience of COVID through embroidery. Their stories were so beautifully made that we commissioned more village scenes.

We also recruited a Peace Fellow, Beth Alexion, to help Ram research victim-centered transitional justice. Beth and Ram spent hundreds of hours together online and produced a strong report for the UN Human Rights Council. It might well not have been written if Beth had been deployed to Nepal, with all the distractions involved!

AP’s support also gave Ram an incentive to continue his advocacy. He achieved a significant breakthrough when the village of Marsyangdi in Nepal declared a public day of mourning for his disappeared father and allocated 2 million rupees to rename roads in memory of the disappeared. It was another example of innovation, prompted by crisis.

Story-telling for Women in Urban Nairobi

Stitching offers women a creative outlet for frustration and a way to meet with friends, hone their skills and organize for social change

The informal settlements of Kibera and Kangemi in Nairobi are known for inadequate services. In 2020, the long-suffering inhabitants faced a much deadlier threat from COVID-19.

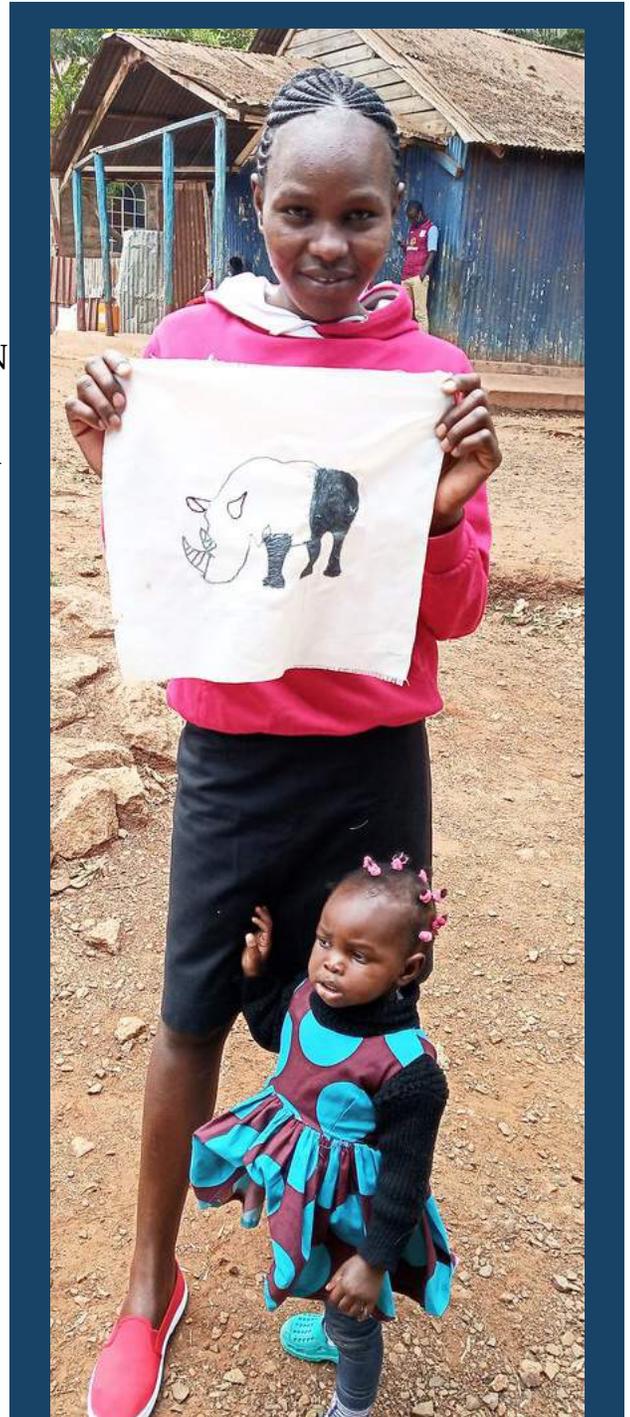
Caren Mbayaki and Stella Makena rose to the occasion. We first met them in November 2019, when they joined our embroidery training at the UN summit on women and girls (ICPD 25). In 2020 they emerged as leaders in the fight against COVID-19 in their settlements, Kangemi and Kibera.

Early in the pandemic we sent \$750 to Caren and Stella. Stella bought a month's supply of food and sewing kits for 9 families in Kibera. Caren trained her team in Kangemi to make and sell cushions.

After the money ran out, the two groups asked to produce embroidered designs of Kenyan wildlife. This became *Sister Artists 2* (page 15). Once that was finished, they decided to tell their COVID stories through embroidery (page 14).

All of this improved stitching skills and gave the women a creative outlet for their anxiety and loneliness. It also helped to build social capital. The two groups formed associations to facilitate embroidery trainings and went on to use them as tools for advocacy and income generation.

Stella's group, *Shield of Faith*, began composting. Caren's *Kangemi Advocacy and Self-Help Group* sought a market for embroidery. We transferred \$3,041 to Kangemi and \$2,175 to Kibera in 2020.



Irene was one of 11 women from the settlement of Kibera, Nairobi, who produced stories of Kenya wildlife for the *Sister Artists 2* project.

Mama Masks in Uganda

A single mother with limited mobility draws on her tailoring skills to make masks for friends with a disability and build a business

While laboratories in the North worked around the clock to develop vaccines, Africans were asked to practice personal discipline by washing hands and wearing masks.

The call was answered by Achola Mama Cave, 36, a skilled tailor and single mother who has difficulty walking. Mama Cave is active in the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU) and proved to be the right person in the right place at the right time.

When the government imposed a lock-down, it created an opportunity for Mama Cave and other tailors by making face-masks mandatory in public. Even the ubiquitous *boda bodas* (motorcycle taxis) were not exempt.

Mama Cave was quick to take advantage, and enlisted four friends with limited mobility to help her make face-masks. AP offered \$400 to get started. The team decided on a brand name, *Mama Masks*, and selected three colors - sky blue, white and green - with an embroidered red logo. Their masks sold at 2,5000 Ugandan shillings (70 cents) and quickly became known for quality and reliability.

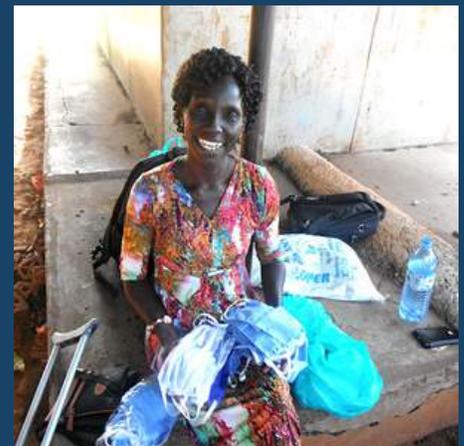
GDPU and AP made a serious investment in Mama Masks in 2020 and transferred \$4,165 to her start-up through GDPU. \$1,438 came from our core funds. We also assigned her an experienced Peace Fellow, Wilson Charles .

By the end of the year, Mama Cave had made 1,100 masks. GDPU had sold 900 and distributed 200 masks free to families with a disability. This was not enough to cover costs, but we were satisfied. Mama Cave had become a canny business woman and inspired her community throughout the dark months of the pandemic.

The Inspiring Mama Cave



(Above) **Mama Cave** helps **Florence** to make her signature Mama masks. (Below) Mama Cave hard at work. Her team made 1,100 masks in 2020.



Clean Wash Soap in Uganda

Freeman the soap-maker shrugs off physical challenges to train persons with a disability to make and sell soap



The lock-down prevented Ugandans with disability in Gulu from working in the informal sector, but it also created opportunities for Sandy (“Freeman”) Oyel, left, a professional soap-maker and member of the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU).

Like Mama Cave, Freeman put his skills to good use during the pandemic. At the request of Emma from the GDPU, AP transferred \$500 to fund a soap start-up. Emma introduced Freeman to Benson, Miriam, Richard and Flavia from GDPU and within a week Freeman had taught them to make soap. Grace McGuire at AP designed a label and we all came up with a catchy name for Freeman's new soap - “*Clean Wash*.”

Freeman’s team produced over 500 liters of soap in the first week and secured orders for 400 liters. The first 20 liters were purchased by Betty Aol Achan, leader of the national parliamentary opposition. AP Peace Fellow Wilson Charles met weekly with Emma and Patrick from GDPU and offered marketing advice.

Freeman proved to be a disciplined manager. Helped by Emma from GDPU, he kept receipts and limited salaries to 150,000 shillings (\$40) a month to keep costs down. We transferred \$2,077 to support *Clean Wash* soap in 2020.

As with *Mama* masks, it was hard to predict if there would be a market for the soap. GDPU had good contacts in schools, which would need soap, but that would require schools to remain open in 2021. We remained optimistic and were happy to have supported another impressive entrepreneur with his community's interests at heart.

Emergency Support for Young People in Palestine

An enterprising community leader draws on his experience with Israeli occupation to navigate the pandemic and provide young people with hope



"Vaccines will take a long time to arrive"

- **Mohammed Sawalha** responded to the pandemic with ingenuity, but feared a surge of infections in Palestine in 2021.

Mohammed Sawalha founded the Palestinian House of Friendship in Nablus to help young Palestinians. Working under occupation had forced him to be inventive and he responded quickly to COVID-19.

Mohammed commissioned a thousand hand-made masks and asked PHF's team of Girl Scouts to reach out to the elderly and vulnerable. PHF also distributed 350 emergency parcels containing brochures, sanitizers, books, stories, crayons, stationary items and chess sets for children in refugee camps.

Frequent road closures were another feature of Israeli occupation, and this had forced Mohammed to use online learning tools which proved useful during the pandemic. PHF offered after-school online education; entertainment for children through WhatsApp, Messenger, and Zoom; music classes through a studio (opened by PHF in 2019); and a YouTube Channel carrying classes in the sciences and history.

PHF also organized a virtual summer camp for more than 340 children and recorded 23 Oral History videos and interviews with widows or divorced women. Sixteen women formed a singing group, ZUNNAR. Their songs were recorded at PHF's music studio.

It was a bravura performance, but Mohammed allowed his fears to surface as infections rose. As he told Katharine Baker, an American friend, in a call: "Hospitals are overflowing and they don't have enough ventilators. Vaccines will take a long time to arrive."

Mohammed would need all of his optimism to weather the storm ahead.

AP donated \$250 from core funds to pay for 400 masks and transferred \$5,384 from PHF's American donors in 2020 in our capacity as fiscal sponsor.

Soap and Masks in Mali

We invest in vulnerable women in Mali and learn that successful start-ups require good communications and sound management

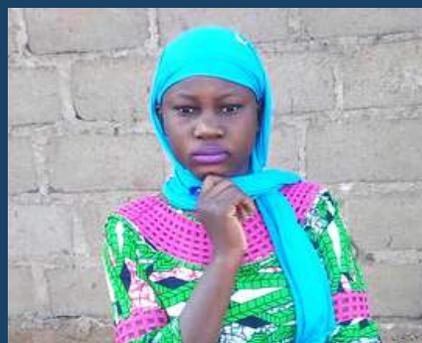
AP has supported women in Mali since 2014. When the pandemic struck we turned to two professional trainers who had helped with the earlier program.

We sent \$616 to Abi Konate, a skilled tailor who had trained survivors of gender-based violence between 2015 and 2017. Abi formed a team of five young trainees who had been displaced by war and together they made 700 face-masks. Abi distributed 200 masks free of charge and sold the remaining 500 to NGOs and a local clinic for \$248.

Our second partner, Aissata Traore, was a professional soap-maker who had also trained women during the earlier project and was active in *Moussou Kalanso*, a women's group in Bamako that worked with displaced women. Aissata used \$616 from AP to produce 2,496 bars of soap. These sold for \$601 – equivalent to 200 days of paid work for many of the women.

These early results were so encouraging that Aissata and Abi sought funding for a new project to make embroidered bags. AP advanced \$1,500. Unfortunately, language and technology made communications difficult. Another problem was the lack of a project coordinator. Under pressure to move quickly, we assumed our trainers would manage. This was unfair.

By the end of 2020 few goals had been met and we were reminded that friendship cannot substitute for good practice. But how could we develop practice remotely, at the height of a pandemic? This entire report seeks to answer that question.



Photos: (from the top) Aissata Traore, soap trainer; Soap trainee Oumou Coulibaly, displaced from northern Mali; Habi Konate, tailor and trainer; Fatoumata Ongoibi, trainee tailor.

Raising Resources

Generous donors and reduced expenses allow us to invest \$24,868 in 11 start-ups. 2020 is the first year we use core AP income to fund partner projects



"Blue was her favorite color"

- **Connie Moser** was one of 78 donors who inspired us in 2020. A quilter in Wilmington, NC, Connie lost her mother to COVID-19. Undaunted, she made an embroidered tribute to her mother for an AP story-telling project.

The Advocacy Project has helped to raise over \$4 million for partners before 2020 but none came from our own core program. This changed with the pandemic.

Partners found themselves urgently in need of money and with nowhere to turn. We were able to respond on a modest scale because our own donors responded generously and helped us raise \$132,132.30. Costs fell to \$86,446.

The year began with a 2-year grant from Humanity United for our quilt program. In April, we launched a COVID appeal for partners which netted \$2,700 from 25 donors. In June, our online auction of *Sister Artist* quilts brought in \$9,852. We raised \$15,000 on Giving Tuesday, followed by \$6,816 through the Combined Federal Campaign (workplace charity). In December the World Bank took the welcome decision to double match staff donations to its Community Connections Campaign (CCC).

Parallel to this, 78 friends gave \$13,584 to our core program in 2020. They included Connie Moser, a quilter in Wilmington who has worked on two AP quilts (photo above). Another 104 donors gave \$19,272 through four appeals on GlobalGiving for partners in Uganda, Nepal, and Mali. This was a welcome reminder that committed individuals are vital to AP's model and success.

Our 2020 expenses fell sharply to \$86,446.94 as we saved money on travel, insurance, visas and vaccinations. Personnel costs also fell to \$19,409.77 after our Executive Director left us for the UK in late 2019. AP ended the year with \$88,133 and a cushion against another difficult year that lay ahead.

Designing Start-ups and Building for the Future

We design start-ups with partners that address the emergency while laying the foundation for sustainability and social change

AP faced several challenges in transferring funds to partners. Projects would have to be designed and monitored remotely. Also, partners wanted to build for the future while also addressing the pandemic. We responded by creating 3 categories of project:

Phase 1 (start-ups): We assigned a Peace Fellow to each partner and asked them to design a project. Face-masks, soap and story-telling were particularly popular. Once we all approved of the plan we invested up to \$1,000, posted an appeal on GlobalGiving, and publicized the start-up through a news bulletin.

We then asked the partner to set out goals in an MOU, develop a budget, keep receipts and work on Google Drive. This simple process allowed us to transfer almost \$25,000 to 11 startups in 2020 and keep meticulous records. By observing good practice we all became more professional.

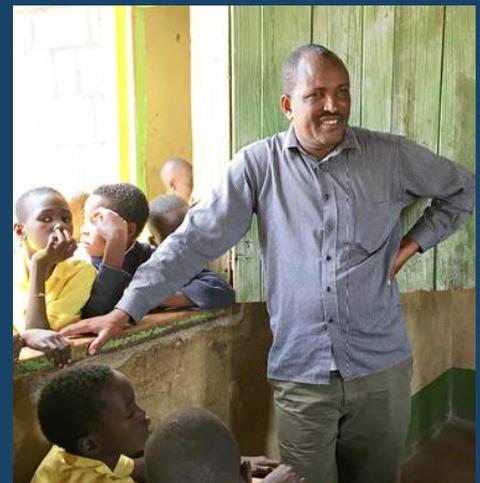
Phase 2 projects: If the partner met the goals of the start-up after 6 months, we offered support for 12 months and asked partners to monitor results every month through an “output tracker” on the Drive.

Phase 3: Looking beyond 2020, we agreed with partners that if the first two phases proved successful, we would raise funds with them for a long-term program aimed at producing social change. Three programs fell into this category in 2020: the installation of toilets in Uganda (GDPU); peace-building with pastoralists in northern Kenya (Children Peace Initiative Kenya); and training girls to sell soap in Zimbabwe (WAP).

Kenyan Heroes

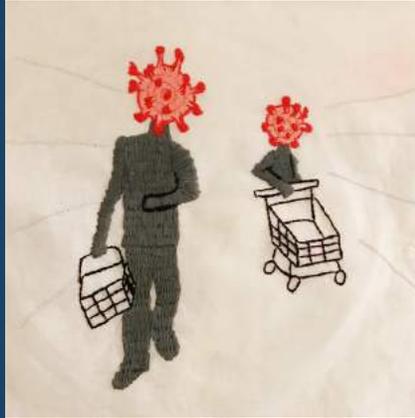


Stella Makena and Hilary Bukuno were shining examples of AP partners who responded to the pandemic with flair and courage. Stella organized women in the Kibera settlement to make embroidery for *Sister Artists 2* and begin composting. Hilary's team from CPIK worked through the pandemic to build peace between warring pastoralists in the north.



Stitching the Story of the Pandemic

Describing the story of COVID through embroidery offers women and girls a creative outlet for their frustration and a way to socialize with friends



"I had a small panic attack. It bothered me more than I thought it would"

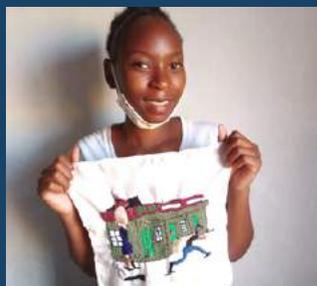
- Kate Lanman on shopping during the pandemic.

In the spring of 2020 we invited partners to tell their COVID stories through embroidery. Seventy-five women and girls from Zimbabwe, Nepal and the US responded with blocks that were spectacular but disturbing.

Kushma, Sarita and Alina in Nepal described loneliness. In one block, Sarita shows herself in quarantine with her ageing mother (photo). In Zimbabwe, twelve girls from the WAP soap project focused on the harshness of lock-down: Rosemary's story is about the alarming increase in theft (photo below).

In the US, nine students at the Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia, helped each other to tell their stories during weekly Zoom meetings (photo below). One design by Kate Lanman captures Kate's fear of catching COVID-19 in the supermarket (photo above). We also introduced the Arlington artists to Evelyn and Trish from the embroidery team in Harare. They found they had much in common.

All of this confirmed that stitching stories with friends, even remotely, is a great antidote for stress. By the end of 2020, scores of women from the US and Kenya had also signed up to stitch COVID stories. We were delighted, but not surprised.



Sister Artists

We launch an initiative to produce art quilts from African embroidery that empowers fiber artists in two overcrowded Nairobi settlements

Early in the pandemic we moved away from telling personal stories through embroidery to a celebration of village life and wildlife in Africa. Known as *Sister Artists*, the origins of this project lay in Mali where we funded embroidery training for survivors of gender-based violence between 2015 and 2018. The trainees made delightful blocks about the villages they had left in the north of Mali and we brought these back to the US in 2018.

We then invited art quilters in North America to turn the blocks into quilts. Forty-one quilters answered the call and by the end of 2020 their quilts had been exhibited and auctioned online.

Sister Artists was such a success that the artists from Kibera and Kangemi requested a similar project and in August we invited them to produce stories of Kenya's renowned wildlife. This gave the artists a chance to refine their stitching skills and benefit from each other's company (right).

Other embroidery assembled by AP in 2020 focused on traditional story-telling. It included the last in a series of blocks from refugees from the Middle East. Unlike earlier images, which had been full of ISIS horrors, these were more wistful and reflective (photo).



"This project eased domestic stress during the lockdown"

- **Stella Makena**, coordinator, on the value of stitching. **Cecilia's** giraffes (above) have been a hit.



After fleeing Baghdad, Jowhara yearns for a life of freedom.

Assembling Quilts in the North

Sister Artists gives art quilters in the north a chance to tell their own stories and learn about the challenges facing women in Africa

Quilters from the Global North, particularly the US, have been assembling advocacy quilts since 2010. In 2019 we put out a call for art quilters to help with the village scenes from Mali.

Forty-one quilters from the US, Canada, the UK and Kenya answered the call and assembled quilts that were ingenious and personal. This was the first time that northern quilters had used blocks from the south to tell their own stories.

Dawn Piasta, in Manitoba, was inspired by her husband's work as a fishing guide when she made *Fish in Still Water* (right). Nancy Hershberger left an old wedding dress on rusting farm equipment to provide the russet material for *In the Fields*.

Colleen Ansbaugh added an uneven edge to her quilt *Hump Day*, to give it a lopsided feel. Ellen Fisher in Massachusetts went in the opposite direction. A graphic designer by training, Ellen used precise dimensions in making her quilt, appropriately named *Study of a Camel*.

Later in 2020, Colleen agreed to assemble the COVID stories from Zimbabwe. We turned to Anne Watson, who herself contracted COVID-19, to assemble the Nepal blocks. Beth Suddaby agreed to take the COVID squares from Arlington. Another long-time AP friend, Merry May, assembled two striking quilts from the refugee stories. 43 quilts were completed in 2020 - more than any previous year.

From this....



....to this



...thanks to....



Dawn Piasta drew on her husband's fishing trips in Manitoba Canada to produce *Fish in Still Water*.

Exhibiting Quilts

An exhibition in Washington on the eve of the pandemic leads to our first-ever quilt catalogue and expresses compassion for GBV survivors in Mali



We were lucky to exhibit the *Sister Artists* quilts at the Textile Museum in Washington before the pandemic struck. The exhibition attracted 127 visitors, including ten quilters who had made quilts. Some came from as far away as California (photo).

The exhibition heard a powerful address from Alimata Diarra, an official at the embassy of Mali who had worked with survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in Mali. Ms Diarra praised *Sister Artists* for offering a lifeline to the Malian artists: "It will empower them morally and economically to face life."

The exhibition was also praised by John Wetenhall, director of the Textile Museum, who wrote: "I'm thrilled about the success of your exhibit, and so pleased that our museum was able to host. Thank you!" The exhibition also resulted in the first-ever AP quilt catalogue designed by Jonathan Bramell, an AP intern. Jonathan's glossy, 90-page publication carried profiles of the 41 quilters and generated over \$1,000 in sales.

As the COVID lock-down intensified we posted 55 new profiles on our website and published several news bulletins about the *Sister Artists* project which received over 4,000 reads. Abby Stuckrath from AP interviewed the nine Arlington student artists about their COVID designs, and posted the interviews as podcasts.

These successful innovations encouraged us to explore new ways to exhibit and promote quilts, in 2021 and beyond.

Building Partnerships Through Quilts

Sister Artists opens up a novel approach to North-South networking by connecting fiber artists in Africa directly with quilters in the North

The idea for *Sister Artists* came to us from Allison Wilbur (photo), a long-time AP partner and gifted quilter who had founded her own organization - *Quilt for Change* - to help quilters put their skills to good use. Allison suggested making the Malian blocks into art quilts and encouraged her network to sign up. Most were also members of the Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA).

Sister Artists took our networking to another level by connecting quilters from the North with artists in Mali. Several northern sisters agreed that the experience had broadened their understanding of the challenges facing women in Africa. Diane Clapes felt a sense of solidarity with her Malian sister: "It helps to see the person who inspired you."

Sister Artists also strengthened AP as an organization by drawing our different quilt activities into an integrated program. This was made easier by a grant from Humanity United, awarded on the eve of the pandemic.

We turned to Bobbi Fitzsimmons to coordinate. A renowned quilter, Bobbi sits on the AP Board and visited Nepal and Kenya in 2019 to train women in embroidery. She slipped naturally into her new role and brought focus to our quilt initiatives. We came to the end of 2020 with a new program and a network of skillful quilting friends like Merry May (photo right).



Top: Allison Wilbur (right) with quilter Ellen Fisher. **Middle:** Bobbi Fitzsimmons, left, with Alimata Diarra. **Bottom:** Merry May, right, with quilters Ginny Cooper and Elisabeth Ohlson.

Generating Income From Quilts

Sister Artists earns money for women in Mali and resolves a long-standing puzzle – how to reward quilt artists in the Global South



Hump Day by
**Colleen
Ansbaugh**
fetched \$700 at
the auction of
Sister Artists
quilts

We have long dreamed of generating money for fiber artists in the South from their quilts. *Sister Artists* showed us how it could be done, even in a pandemic.

The *Sister Artists* quilts had reached us by March 2020, and we asked one of our talented assistants, Sneha Raj, to create an online auction. We then posted a daily photo of each quilt on Instagram to whet appetites and sold all 40 quilts during a hectic two weeks. The bidding even generated excitement among the quilters, several of whom entered bids for their own quilts. Ewa Sobczynska, a former AP Peace Fellow was delighted with her purchase: "I LOVE looking at it every single day!"

The auction generated \$9,892 and presented us with a dilemma that we had not expected – how to spend the money. We had hoped to invest in the Malian artists who had made the original blocks. But they had wanted to remain anonymous and had long since returned home. So we sought advice from Abi and Aissata, who had made good use of our emergency funding earlier in the pandemic. As explained above on page 12, we attempted to develop a new bag-making project but it did not go well.

In spite of this, *Sister Artists* had shown us how to sell quilts and by the summer of 2020, our friends in Kibera and Kangemi were hard at work designing blocks for *Sister Artists 2*. And we still have money in the bank for women in Mali.

International Service During the Pandemic

We recruit 19 students to support partners remotely and emerge from 2020 with a leaner and more efficient fellowship program

The pandemic halted the deployment of Peace Fellows abroad and raised tough questions. How would we support partners without a field presence? What could we offer to students wishing to do international service?

The answer turned out to be - plenty. We provided partners with year-round support without any loss of quality, while offering 19 students a rich experience.

We had made offers to 7 graduates before the pandemic and three continued with us for a stipend of \$1,000. We also recruited 16 undergraduates from the Washington area and the universities of Illinois, Pittsburgh, St Benedict in Minnesota, and Elon in North Carolina. We also extended offers to Prabal Thapa in Nepal and Grace McGuire, 18, in her final year of High School.

Our 2020 team was more diverse than in previous years. It included Wilson Charles, an accomplished graduate student at Georgetown University who is legally blind and brought an entirely new perspective to our work with disability. Originally from Haiti, Wilson produced superb blogs about disability and established a deep friendship with the Gulu Disabled Persons Union in Uganda. The relationship did not suffer from working remotely (page 21).

The 2020 team also included first-generation Americans from Argentina, India, Vietnam and Uzbekistan. One recent arrival to the US, Ezoza Ismailova (photo) wrote a subtle blog about being bullied on arrival from Uzbekistan. It struck a chord at a time when the US was in turmoil after the murder of George Floyd - an event which shocked our young team to their core.



"I consider myself very lucky to have been able to have worked with The Advocacy Project even if remotely. I (used) WordPress, a program I had never used before. Yet, with the aid and patience of the rest of the team, I got the hang of it. Thank you to the summer 2020 team for being so amazing. I miss you all!"

- **Ezoza Ismaelova**
(University of Pittsburgh)
on her remote summer
with AP.

Service as Friendship

Peace Fellows offer friendship as the pandemic deepens. Working remotely allows AP to provide sustained, year-round support

Early in the pandemic we assigned a Peace fellow and assistant to each partner organization. Wilson worked with the GDPU in Uganda, with help from Grace. Beth and Taylor teamed up to support NEFAD in Nepal.

Brigid (St Benedicts and St Johns College, Minnesota) made sure that everyone attended meetings on time.

This talented team helped partners to keep receipts, thank donors, make budgets, and use Zoom and Google Drive. But their most important offering turned out be friendship, given the anxiety caused by the pandemic.

It was a productive summer. Wilson helped the GDPU in Uganda to consolidate the two start-ups, Mama masks and *Clean Wash* soap. Beth produced a policy paper on transitional justice in Nepal for the United Nations.

Our undergraduates also excelled. Abby Hack redesigned the WAP website in Zimbabwe. Abby Stuckrath produced podcast interviews with the Wakefield students. Gio edited a video of the soap project in Zimbabwe which helped to secure \$31,000 of funding. Grace designed labels for *Clean Wash* soap in Uganda. Sneha and Jonathan designed a catalogue of the *Sister Artists* quilts and managed the auction.

For these students, working remotely could not compare with the field. But this capable team redefined our model of international service by acting as confidants, advisors and cheerleaders during a terrible year. Meeting weekly with partners throughout the year also allowed us to provide them with sustained support instead of relying on Fellows during the summer.

"Disability is not disabling"

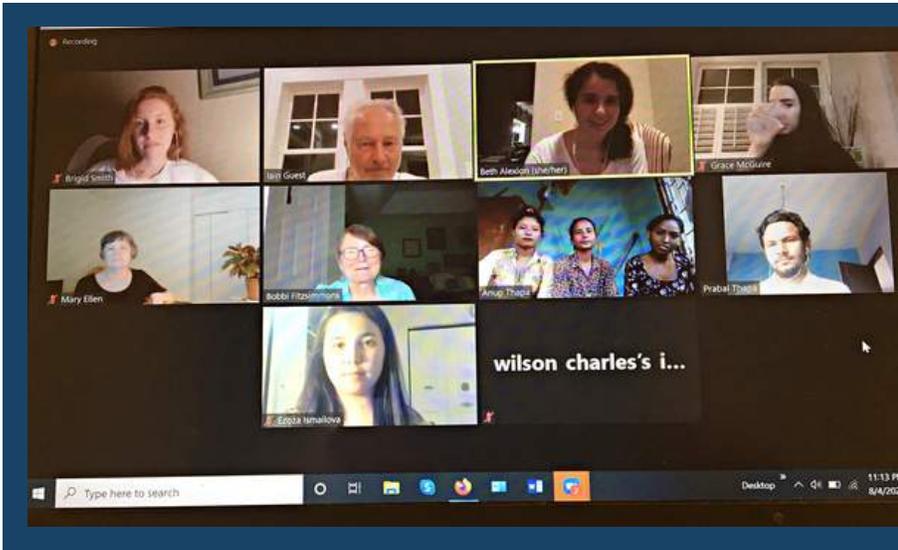


"Considering that every human being lives with some innate limitations, why does society stigmatize those with certain noticeable conditions?"

- **Wilson Charles**, 2020 Peace Fellow, brought a unique perspective to his fellowship with the Gulu Disabled Persons Union in Uganda and used his blogs to dispel myths about disability.

Communications Under Lock-down

The lock-down changes the way we communicate with each other and with partners and leads to more face to face meetings that in the past



"To join this meeting....."

Zoom connected Sarita, Alina and Kushma in central Nepal (center) with seven members of the AP in the US and Prabal in Kathmandu

We assumed that working remotely would be challenging but then came Zoom. The platform appeared at the right time and allowed us to organize weekly staff meetings for our far-flung team as well as regular face-to-face meetings with partners.

This left us grey with fatigue after many hours of talk, but greatly improved the quality of work. Young members of the team were able to put faces to names and hear directly from Africa and Asia. Zoom also allowed us to record important meetings and produced audio files for podcasts. But if communications improved they also became more important - two assistants who missed meetings were politely asked to leave.

The pandemic forced other technological changes on us. With postage suspended, and in-boxes bulging, we turned to Google Drive. This enabled Fellows and partners to work on the same documents. We also upgraded Dropbox (which allowed us to download video clips from partners), and discovered new features in Constant Contact, the email marketing platform that disseminates our news bulletins.

Our use of social media improved. We found a better balance between Twitter and Facebook, and used Instagram to post daily photos of the *Sister Artists* quilts in the run-up to the auction.

All of this added to the workload, but by the end of 2020 AP had better grasp on online technologies that could only benefit ourselves and our partners.

Information Dissemination

We publish 22 news bulletins and attract more readers. Partners use our site to blog for the first time and assistants blog about racial turmoil in the US

The pandemic turned our online news service *Advocacynet* into an indispensable tool. We published 22 bulletins in 2020 which were opened 21,033 times - an increase over 2019 (17,304 opens).

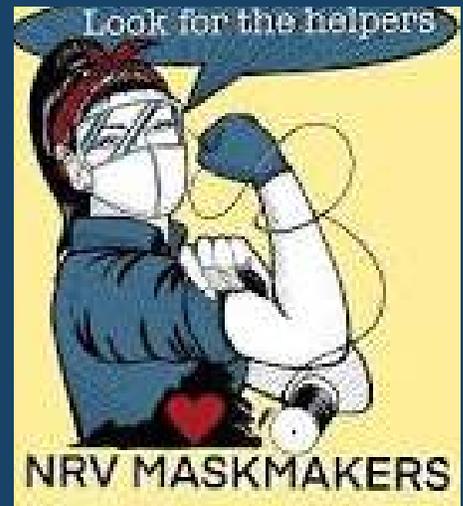
We also opened up our blogging page to our young team members, who were deeply shaken by the pandemic and murder of George Floyd and needed a way to express their distress. Grace blogged about racism in her high school. Beth (who had served with the Peace Corps in Ethiopia) wrote about racism in development aid. Brigid recalled living in Germany and Saudi Arabia. Iain blogged about racism and refugees, the power of face-masks (box) and the loneliness of teachers under lock-down.

Beth and Iain also produced a podcast about disappearances with Ram Bhandari for International Day of the Disappeared (August 30). Iain followed up with a blog and bulletin about family-members of the disappeared in Nepal and Argentina.

Many blogs were later disseminated as news bulletins, ensuring a wider audience. The most widely read blog was about the US treatment of refugees. Our video about soap-making in Zimbabwe was also popular.

We also opened our blogs to partners. Emma's blog from Uganda, quoted above, was a cry from the heart: "Oh God, when will this whole drama end?" Ram and Prabal blogged from Nepal and Trish blogged from Zimbabwe.

All of this made our site more democratic and accessible to partners.



Mask of Empowerment

The New River Valley Maskmakers of Virginia made 12,000 masks for rural clinics during the pandemic. One widely-read AP news bulletin took issue with politicians who sneered at masks and argued that initiatives like the NRV mask-makers give quilters a sense of purpose.

Paula Golden, a well-known quilter, agreed: "What a beautiful article. Thank you!"

Networking

The pandemic fosters networking directly between AP partners



Claire Brophy, left, in the US and **Evelyn Sachiti** in Zimbabwe became long-distance friends during the pandemic and laid the groundwork for a partnership between their clubs,



The pandemic changed our approach to networking. Instead of thinking of AP as a centralized organization with partners at the periphery, we began to see ourselves as part of a community that initiates ideas and interacts directly instead of through AP.

The soap-making project in Zimbabwe (page 6) was a shining example of this. It began before the pandemic in 2019, when we were contacted by Claire Brophy, president of the Girl Up club at the Wakefield High School, Virginia (photo left). Could her club produce *Clean Girl* soap as an act of solidarity with the girls in Zimbabwe?

We put Claire in touch with Evelyn Sachiti in Zimbabwe (photo right) and the two took to WhatsApp. After soap-making was halted by the pandemic, the two teams shifted to embroidery and told their stories of COVID-19. This gave them a shared interest and by the end of 2020 several were meeting regularly by Zoom.

The *Sister Artists* quilt challenge provided another example of innovative networking (page 19). AP and *Quilt for Change* provided the framework for cooperation, but the drive and energy came from the fiber artists. This will be our model in the future.

AP will continue to serve as a resource. When the *Shield of Faith* group in Kibera took up composting, we connected them to an American specialist and began to seek out High Schools that compost food waste. Networking like this is built into our DNA and is certainly made easier by communications technology. We were also pleased that our network of (313) former Fellows remains in touch. Many read our news bulletins. Several sought references and over twenty donated to their former host organizations.

AP People

2020 staff and contractors: Iain Guest (ED), Mary Ellen Cain (Administration), Gio Liguori (Video), Josh Nichols and Matt Heinrich (Web maintenance), Mehedi Doha (Web developer), Beverly Orr (Accountant), Jonathan Bramell (design), Gio Liguori (video), Ray Conlon (Auditor).

Board: Scott Allen, Tom Carver, Karen Delaney, Colleen Denny, Talley Diggs, Bobbi Fitzsimmons, Devin Greenleaf, Iain Guest, Larry Ingeneri, William Lorie.

Partner organizations: National Network of Families of the Disappeared, Nepal; Gulu Disabled Persons Union, Uganda; Children Peace Initiative, Kenya; Women Advocacy Project, Zimbabwe; Moussou Kalanso, Mali; Palestinian House of Friendship, Nablus; Kangemi Advocacy Self-Help Group, Nairobi; Tandaza Trust/Shield of Faith, Nairobi; Girl Up chapter at Wakefield School, Arlington.

Peace Fellows (graduate): Wilson Charles, Beth Alexion; Alex Meyer.

Assistants and interns (undergraduate): Luisa Beltran Rey; Milagros Karamanos; Sneja Raj; Jonathan Bramell; Karran Mehta; Malien Tingpalpong; Abby Stuckrath; Gio Liguori; Brigid Smith; Ezoza Ismailova; Taylor Rudtner; Abigail Hack; Riley Toennies; Oriana Betancourt; Prabal Thapa; Grace McGuire.

High Schools: Layla Kherbouch; Stephanie Achugamou; Kate Lanman; Elena Cura; Ann Kumashiro; Sofia Reecer; Nathalie Manlove; Ainslet Pollock; Leah Aiken.

Quilters: Bobbi Fitzsimmons, Merry May, Gill Rebelo, Dawn Piasta, Patricia Rennau, Susan Charles, Ellen Fisher, Sue Willows-Raznikov, Cathey Lebonte, The Salama Mamas, Glenda Mah, Rhonda O'Keefe, Betty Warner, Suzanne Munroe, Janice Jones, Allison Wilbur, Tricia Deck, Nancy Hershberger, Colleen Ansbaugh, Julie Zaccone Stiller, Veronica Mayes, Deborah Elouahabi, Deborah Weir, Diane Clapes, Jackie Heupel, Sandy Snowden, Katherine Wilson, Wendy Overly, Eleanor Levie, Karen McCann, Sue Bates, Barbara Eisenstein, Karen Pulaski, Elizabeth Greene, Judy Miller, Pam Shanley, Edith Gross, Ellena Georato, Linda Kim, Hope Barton, Kathleen Paduano.

2020 FINANCIALS

Income

Unrestricted Contributions:	\$113,826
Restricted Contributions:	\$18,862
Inventory and publication sales:	\$10,268
In-kind contributions:	\$46,500

Total Revenue **\$189,456**

Expenses

Accounting	\$13,133
Depreciation	\$83
Fundraising	\$2,820
Grants	\$26,632
Information technology	\$10,223
Insurance	\$ 2,253
In-kind services	\$46,500
Meetings and conferences	\$290
Miscellaneous	\$803
Office expenses	\$8,265
Rent	\$13,224
Stipends	\$3,000
Travel	\$4,947

Total Expenses **\$132,173**

CHANGE IN NET ASSET: **\$57,283**

Benefactors

ORGANIZATIONS

Global Giving; Humanity United; North Kingstown Rotary Club, Rhode Island; Pepsico; Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Dublin, Ohio; Zonta Club of Washington

INDIVIDUALS

Rebecca Barefoot, Eric Biel, Anna Bliss, Jeff Carmel, Courtney Chance, Margaret Chisholm, Shelly Clay-Robison, Charles Dougherty, Lloyd Feinberg, Barbara Fitzsimmons, Rosa Goldsmith, Carole Grbin, Margaret Greenwood, Margaret Haughey, Jackie Heupel, Thomas Hill, John Hirschboek, Leslie Hogan, Richard Huntzinger, Erin Lapham, Joyce Leader, Judy Leff, Eguiar Lizundia, Will Lorie, Susan Louis, Matilda Marchese, David McCarthy, Jane McDermott, Donald McKinnes, Kathy Miller, Constance Moser, Vanessa Navarro, Ingrid Rasch, James Redmond, Mikaela Romero, Emily Sample, Elisabeth Sandberg, Sandra Scialodone, Sandra Shaw, Anne Sinclair, Alison Soldano, Peter Sollis, Summer Stringer, Elizabeth Tinsaman, Barbara Vanslyke, Chris Vasquez, Christine Ward, Elizabeth Warner, Jere West

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