



HLANGANISA

INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY & CIVIL SOCIETY VOICE

MESSAGE AS WE START THE NEW YEAR

Looking back, to help us **look forward**

Dear Partners,

It is difficult to usher in the new year without reflecting on the one past. For many of us, 2020 was challenging on several fronts. We were faced with the struggle to adapt in a rapidly changing environment with insufficient knowledge and little predictability. The world as we knew and understood it was slipping away and the challenges increasing in complexity.

Despite this, great work was achieved, and we must not lose sight of that. While the first half of 2021 will be perhaps even more challenging than the year past, we must continue this work into 2021. Working with communities, we can help the country to prepare for a successful vaccine programme and a better year ahead.

For those of us in the fight against violence against women, the Covid-19 pandemic challenged us to find new ways of reaching women in distress, renewed our efforts to challenge patriarchy and abuse, and collaborate in engaging the state to step up their efforts to manage a pandemic that has taken the lives of so many people. We fought relentlessly amidst the uncertainty and with limited resources. Well done to all of us!

For those of us fighting inequality and economic deprivation, the challenges were elevated. The Covid-19 pandemic put inequality on the spotlight, as we saw how access to basic services such as water and housing become a determinant for one's ability to prevent and mitigate infection. The state of our health system was a significant decider on whether or not one had a chance at fighting the infection.

We suffered many losses and although the virus knows no race, its impact was most severe amongst black people because of low socio-economic status.

For those of us whose income comes from hustling, this pandemic brought endless suffering, as many of us lost our livelihoods. It is estimated that over 3 million jobs were lost in the formal sector and over 85% small and micro enterprises were negatively impacted. Families went without food as bread winners were forced to stay at home, many of these were already strained by the poor performance in the economy. Migrants found themselves stranded in a foreign country with no social nets.

Despite all this, we have also seen that great work is possible in the fact of major challenges. Many of us adapted to the new environment, finding new ways to build resilience and to reach marginalised communities, helping them cope.

Covid-19 has also reminded us of the critical importance of community-based organisations. The proximity of CBOs to communities positioned them favorably in the prevention and mitigation efforts. They had a reach and footprint in communities, thus playing a critical role in communicating accurate messaging, dispensing much-needed supplies including food parcels, and offering psychosocial support to those affected. They were the conduit used to reach communities in distress. All these factors suggest an urgent need for increased focus on community-level responses, for bolstering the capacity of communities so they can play a greater role in mitigating the outbreak.

We must continue this work into 2021. The first half of 2021 will be perhaps even more challenging than the year past. There is no end in sight for the second wave currently ravaging our communities. The debate on vaccine equity continues – and the capacity of our public health care system to roll out a mass vaccination program is also being questioned. However, there is light ahead. As change agents working with communities, it is our collective work that will help the country to prepare for the mass rollout and the challenges of the year ahead. We need to champion the delivery of accurate messaging and dispel myths about the vaccine.

“ Let us not give up. Let us take the lessons from 2020 – coupled with our renewed energy and determination – to build the future of the region. ”

