When her parents could not afford to buy schoolbooks for their children in the midst of lockdown and job loss, 13-year-old Madhu, from Nepal, broke open her piggy bank. By pooling their savings, Madhu and her siblings could buy books and stationery, and continue their studies. Education, and its precarity for young women around the world, is a major theme in the UNICEF video essay series, “Coping with COVID-19”, which invited 16 adolescent girls from nine countries to film their lives under lockdown—“unfiltered, unscripted, 100% real”.

Even in Niger, where almost 90% of children live in poverty, some girls have access to mobile phones. These have proven to be an educational lifeline as schools have closed as a result of the pandemic. Through their phones, from countries all over the world, these young women share insights into their homes, life in lockdown with parents and siblings, and the challenges of continuing with school. Most powerfully, they share their fears, hopes, and goals for the future. The eloquence, gravity, and passion of these young women is so moving that a review of their videos cannot be important enough, for their sake. But the cascading consequences of their individual choices—relating to the ecological imbalance of floods, droughts, and pandemics, and the whip-smart spirit that many of these young women possess—may also help to save the world.

Kelley Swain