CRS Recommendations

GUIDANCE ON AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This document is intended to provide guidance to country programs and partners in determining whether and how to carry out Agriculture and Livelihoods (A/L) activities safely in the context of COVID-19.

PRINCIPLES FOR COVID-19 RELATED GUIDANCE

In undertaking programming activities, CRS project staff and partners should:

- **Assess risk of transmission**: At this stage in the pandemic, testing remains limited. This means that data on positive cases is unreliable. CRS recommends that teams assume wide community spread and adjust programming accordingly. Keep in mind that CRS programs should operate under the assumption that anyone they encounter is a suspected COVID-19 case.

- **Ask ourselves how critical it is to carry out the activity against risk to staff, partners and participants and weigh the risk to project participants of not carrying out the activity. Life-saving (e.g., emergency food distributions, clinical care for emergency conditions) and life-sustaining (e.g., malaria prevention and treatment, vaccinations) activities should be prioritized.**

- **Adopt a “Do No Harm” approach**: CRS and partners need to understand how COVID-19 is transmitted and implement general basic preventative measure to both protect themselves and reduce the risk of spreading the virus during program implementation (See guidance at [WHO - COVID 19 - General Information and WHO - COVID 19 - Prevention measures](#)). These measures include the following for all people with whom we work, including CRS staff, partners, volunteers, program participants and community members, service providers, vendors, etc.
  - **Do Not Participate in Program Activities when Feeling Unwell**: anyone who is feeling unwell should stay home; if exhibiting signs/symptoms of COVID-19, they should follow Ministry of Health (MOH) protocols for seeking medical support/advice (e.g. calling before seeking medical care)
  - **Maintain Physical Distancing**
  - **Follow Recommended Hygiene Practices**, especially proper hand washing, respiratory (cough) etiquette and not touching your eyes, mouth and nose
  - **Wear nonmedical masks** (cloth masks or face cloth covering) when in line with host country government and/or WHO guidance.
  - **Make special considerations for populations who are most-at-risk** of developing severe illness (e.g. elderly, immunocompromised, those with existing health conditions, pregnant women)
  - **Maintain transparent communication** with communities about activities, changes, and the community’s comfort level and needs related to the health implications of continued programming.

- **Consider protection of the most vulnerable and include safeguarding measures**

- **Keep up to date on and follow WHO and Government/Ministry of Health (MOH) protocols and messaging around COVID-19:**
- Follow government restrictions and request authorization for carrying out essential services/activities, as needed
- Work with local health actors/cluster to ensure health messaging related to COVID-19 is consistent and contextualized

- **Adapt programming guidance to your context and be ready to further adjust as the situation evolves:** Elements of the guidance may need to be modified based upon community risk levels, types of programming activities undertaken, social norms and perceptions, local capacities, operating environment and feedback from donors in each country we work in. For assistance, please contact the COVID-19 focal points in your Region and/or on HRD or the relevant programming technical advisor.

This document provides additional recommendations from CRS, to be used in conjunction with and to supplement guidance provided by Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), WHO and the local MOH as relevant.

**Disclaimer:** CRS COVID-19 program resources and guidance are developed after consideration of international guidance from relevant international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and other humanitarian bodies. CRS COVID-19 program resources and guidelines are updated regularly as new information becomes available. Partner and peer organizations wishing to refer to and use CRS resources and guidance should ensure that they are also referring to the latest information available from WHO and IASC.

**EVALUATING ACTIVITIES AND IDENTIFYING MODIFICATION OPTIONS**

- **Define activities as essential or non-essential**
  - Programs should review their implementation plans for the next month and quarter and use the UN Criticality Framework to classify activities as (1) lifesaving; (2) life-sustaining; (3) life-dignifying; and (4) life enhancing.
  - In general, non-essential activities should be postponed or cancelled if they cannot be held remotely/using safe social distancing.

- **Communicate with participants about program status**
  - Use participant contact lists, community focal points, and IEC to communicate with program participants about what is happening to the program.
  - Empower and sensitize PSP/PASP staff. Directly contact PSPs/PASPs to sensitize them about new restrictions on face-to-face interactions and give guidance on alternate approaches that ensure social distancing. They may be using remote communication approaches that can be fostered and shared with other PSPs/PASPs. For SILC PSPs, specific guidance can be found here.

**Potential Activities to Postpone/Cancel**
- Farmer Field Schools/Farmer Learning Centers
- Vocational training (unless COVID-response critical)
- Group building/strengthening programming
- Natural Resource Management programming
- Collective marketing programming

**ADAPTING EXISTING PROGRAMS**

- **Limit face-to-face interactions and group activities**
  - Use remote communication options. While face-to-face interactions and groups should not be convened, ICTs can still allow crucial or time-bound messaging (e.g. extension guidance tied to the agricultural calendar) to be shared without delay. Lists of partners, beneficiaries, Lead Farmers, etc. should be updated and operational to allow effective remote communication. More ICT4D guidance can be found through CRS.
  - Leverage Lead Farmers. Lead Farmers or other key contacts/leaders that already exist in communities can share messages, in place of CRS and partner field
staff, provided this too can be done remotely. This will require deliberate backstopping and regular communication, and messages may need to be simplified in both technical content and scope (i.e., more but simpler messages) to ensure Lead Farmers can deliver the key message consistently to male and female community members. Lead Farmers will also require deliberate sensitization and training in COVID-19 prevention approaches before they can safely continue operations.

- **Replace FFS and Farmer Learning Centers with individual activities.** Trainers can encourage trialing and micro-experimentation on participants’ own farms (safely, not in groups) and manage these activities remotely, so that farmers can continue to produce their crops and livestock products.

- **Include appropriate health messaging** in any ongoing activities, to contribute to awareness-raising about COVID-19 transmission, social distancing, handwashing, and hygiene. These should align with messages promoted by the WHO and host governments.

- **Modify market-focused activities**
  - Programs should recommend farmers minimize person-to-person interactions in value chain activities, avoid travel on public transport and avoid crowded markets and other locales where transmission of COVID-19 could be high. One idea is to support aggregators to scale up services, bringing them closer to the community or to individual farms, which could also address women’s physical and social constraints in accessing the market.
  - **Support to affected producers** should be considered, especially when farmers cannot sell their produce and lack storage options or local markets. In addition to sharing guidance on food storage, programs could explore options for crop insurance and/or crop guarantee schemes for affected sellers where feasible, especially those facing debt implications.

### ADAPTING PROGRAMS FOR LIKELY COVID-19 IMPACTS TO SYSTEMS

- **Conduct Market Monitoring** to track COVID-19 impacts on markets and supply chains
  - Monitor markets to determine changes in prices and availability of livestock, key staples such as maize, rice, wheat, beans, and other nutritious foods.
  - **Collaborate** with the HRD markets team, Country Program assessments, and other organizations monitoring the market situation from a food security perspective.
  - **Coordinate with governments and other actors doing market assessments** to get needed data when possible, rather than conducting separate market assessments.
  - Market assessments should consider broader COVID-19 effects and how planned activities might be affected by changes in input availability (e.g., seeds, fertilizers). Consideration to larger food security issues and the need for emergency food assistance is also paramount, guidance is available from CRS.
  - **Use remote assessment approaches** to ensure market assessors are not at risk. Remote rapid assessment tools modified for use in COVID-19 are available from CRS or other established tools like [CRS’s MARKit](#) for price monitoring or [seedsystem.org](#) and [Agricultural Fair and Voucher Manual](#) for Seed System Security Assessments could be used, if appropriate [here](#).
    - Where possible, facilitate individual beneficiaries and program groups to do similar assessments, specifically considering the supply chain impacts they may themselves face and how they might adapt their activities and procurements accordingly.
  - **Based on the market analysis**, programs:
    - could use the [UN Criticality Framework](#) to determine which inputs must still be procured.
- can assess whether different inputs (e.g. short-season crops, nutritious crops) should now be procured to address potential food or production short-term needs.
- could procure larger quantities in case of future supply chain disruptions.
- can work with agro-dealers to locally stockpile essential inputs and seeds.

- **Assess impacts to rural and urban livelihoods and income due to COVID-19.**
  - Conduct monitoring on labor and income disruptions using a remote rapid assessment approach (see above).
  - Programs should track availability of labor, particularly as COVID caseloads increase (and people become too ill to work), quarantines/lockdowns prevent workers from leaving their homes, or people choose to stay home to avoid infection.
  - Programs should assess gender dynamics and develop mitigation strategies that address the specific economic impacts women and men are experiencing and build economic recovery solutions based on community members’ age, stage and gender, including women and women-owned businesses.

- **Shift to emergency response programming, or refer participants to emergency services, if needed**
  - Redirect project funds from cancelled activities towards emergency and recovery programming, in coordination with donors.
  - Link to other emergency assistance providers in the area. Coordinate with host country governments and other actors providing humanitarian assistance. For more information on approaches, please contact CRS.
  - Ensure affected beneficiaries are identified, eligible for, registered for, and receiving cash transfer, food distribution and other social safety net programs, as appropriate. Special attention is needed to include women- and child-headed households along with other at-risk groups, especially people with disabilities, quarantined, locked-down locations, or self-isolation. Transfers should further consider gender dynamics so its design (i.e., who receives, SBC on joint decisions) can support equitable access and use of these resources.

- **Mitigate impacts to women and other vulnerable groups exacerbated by COVID-19**
  - Use intersectional analysis to understand how COVID-19 is affecting all agricultural programming participants (i.e., gender, age, ability, ethnicity, religion)
  - Make accommodations to ensure gender equity
    - Ensure women receive information and engage in community decisions as women are often excluded from spaces where information is provided on the outbreak, its livelihoods impacts, services available, and where response decisions are made.
    - When expanding use of ICTs, consider who has access and ability to use the device (e.g. phone, radio); when to schedule information sharing so vulnerable participants receive it; and tailor messaging.
    - Use gender transformative approaches to make care work more equitable between men and women. Social norms place care work on women, who are likely to have less time for A/L activities in the face of increased illness/COVID cases and other domestic responsibilities.
    - Reports are showing that COVID-19 is driving increases in GBV given increased stress, financial difficulties, and isolation. Collaborate with the Protection team to train staff on GBV and integrate SBC on GBV prevention into A/L services and information sharing.
  - Take steps to protect people with disabilities, who may be at greater risk of contracting or dying from COVID-19 because of barriers to implementing basic hygiene measures and accessing public health information or healthcare; difficulty in enacting social distancing because of additional support or underlying health
conditions that result in more severe illness. Guidance from the WHO on protecting people with disabilities can be found here.

PLANNING FOR LONGER-TERM IMPLICATIONS

- Consider longer-term implications
  - While acting in the short-term, A/L programs should be actively planning for potential medium- and long-term impacts on food security, production approaches, food prices, and agriculture-related incomes. Deliberate futuring exercises (or strategic planning) should be conducted around these impacts but also expected multiplier effects such as (1) migration, and off-farm and non-farm employment increasing; (2) increased need for social safety nets; and (3) consequences in health, nutrition, education, gender, etc. This might entail reviewing and adjusting Detailed Implementation Plans and considering options and potential donors for future programming. Guidance around this planning process can be found here and here. Where possible, programs should be engaging partners, donors, and stakeholders in developing alternative long-term programming.
  
  - Preparations could also be made for supporting post-COVID recovery, especially food security and livelihoods programming that will be immediately relevant. Options could include restarting markets, reconvening groups, rebuilding food and seed stocks, possibly planting fields that were fallow in the past season due to the pandemic. Tailor these responses to address the specific needs of women and other vulnerable groups.

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<th>Remote Communication Options for Agriculture and Livelihood Programming</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Information/Program</strong></td>
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| Create awareness | - SMS messaging * | - Send an SMS blast via Telearivet or other service to large numbers of recipients | * Weather updates  
* Crop and livestock disease/pest outbreaks  
* Market prices  
* Reminders on key agriculture/livestock actions  
* Shared workload across couples |
|  | - Viamo messaging * | - Send photos, videos, documents, and voice messages on WhatsApp | |
|  | - Rural radio * | - Develop posters and display in a public place within communities and accessible to all | |
|  | - Public announcements via megaphone | - Develop messages that can be shared via megaphone by community partners | |
|  | - Posters and IEC materials that can be shared at a distance | - WhatsApp | |
|  | - WhatsApp | | |

| Train on specific technical skills | - Farmer-to-farmer videos | - Source a pre-made Farmer-to-Farmer video from Access A/ Agriculture SAWBO Digital Green or elsewhere, or create your own and share via WhatsApp or through television | - Specific climate-smart agricultural practices  
* Guidance on specific disease/pest responses  
* Storage technologies  
* Simple processing approaches (i.e. safe drying) |
<p>|  | - Television programs | - Pre-record or share a live-streamed training without an audience | |
|  |  | - Hold virtual demonstration or field days | |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Type of Information/Program</th>
<th>Potential Approach</th>
<th>Specific Actions</th>
<th>Examples of Potential A/L Content</th>
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| Facilitate peer-to-peer learning | - WhatsApp groups  
- Instagram groups  
- Rural radio call-in shows | - Create a [WhatsApp](https://www.whatsapp.com) or [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com) group and share simple technical content, request feedback, and facilitate conversation  
- Partner with a local radio station directly or coordinate with [Farm Radio International](https://www.farmradio.org) to find a partner station and host a call-in show around a technical topic | - Multi-step agricultural practices  
- Business planning  
- Marketing club coordination  
- Group strengthening |
| Provide direct coaching | - Phone calls  
- SMS messaging | - Directly contact group leaders and champions | - Agriculture productivity troubleshooting  
- Group strengthening |
| Convene a Community of Practice or learning event with stakeholders | - Audio or Video conferencing | - Hold a virtual meeting or [online seminar](https://example.com) | - Steering committee meetings  
- Policy work with key stakeholders  
- MEAL or research findings presentations |
| Conduct remote market assessments | - Phone calls  
- SMS messaging  
- WhatsApp groups | - Create a WhatsApp group with market leaders and vendors to get regular market information | - Price monitoring  
- Supply chain bottlenecks  
- Output market constraints |
| Collect data from project participants | - Phone calls  
- SMS messaging  
- WhatsApp  
- Public data sets | - Use phone calls, text, WhatsApp, Telerivet, Instagram, or other electronic methods described above  
- Utilize public data sets shared by governments and partners | - MEAL surveys  
- MEAL reports |