CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)
Voluntary Operational Guidelines for NGOs working with Namibian communities

Introduction

National and international NGOs operating in Namibia recognise that the impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic are likely to remain present throughout 2020 and potentially reach into 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic will have health, economic and social impacts the lives of staff, communities and government partners.

While global COVID-19 infections continue, organisations must increase measures for preparedness, including assessing transmission risks during the course of work and potential direct impacts from the pandemic, and develop management plans for COVID-19. Many rural communities depend heavily on the informal economy, and often have limited access to essential services, limited advocacy influence, and limited access to communications and technologies. They therefore have limited resilience to shocks from economic and health threats.

Namibia has a comparatively low national population and low population density, with dispersed rural inhabitants and limited health services capacity. Hence, the benefits of geographic isolation for many rural communities must be balanced with likely increased essential service delivery needs due to the global economic slowdown, which may bring increased risks of exposure.

It is therefore to essential to reduce exposure and transmission, by reducing travel, adhering to safety protocols, increasing remote working practices, and limiting direct interventions in communities.

In order to mitigate the impacts and risks of the COVID-19 pandemic, NACSO Members agree to the following voluntary guidelines, alongside additional specific measures taken in our specific working environments.

Organisational Guidelines

These guidelines are aimed at addressing five main aspects, namely:

1. COVID 19 Response – it is critical to ensure that all actions are well coordinated.

2. Communications- it is essential that correct official information is relayed, and misinformation countered.

3. Personnel & operational preparedness – all staff must be adequately prepared and trained to carry out their work safely.

4. Community Engagement – all community engagement should follow minimum protocols to curtail risk of infection within and between communities.

5. Indirect consequences – extra effort should be made to address the social consequences of the ongoing pandemic, in particular; fear; stress and domestic violence.

- **COVID 19 Response**: Government leads the response, with the assistance of civil society at a national level through NANGOF and other structures including NACSO & NCE, and at a regional level through and with Regional Councils.
- **Communications**:
    - use official sources (MOHSS, CDC Africa and WHO), avoid creating noise, maintain continuous communications, myth busting and fact checking
    - Observe and communicate weekly updates to staff on guidance issued by the Government of the Republic of Namibia, primarily the Ministry of Health and Social Services, World Health Organisation and other recognised bodies.
- **Personnel and operational preparedness**:
    - Develop specific COVID-19 staff guidance for each organisation, including for: specific projects where risks are high, staff remote working guidelines, and a monitoring system to ensure guidance is effective. The guidance will be reviewed and updated periodically.
    - Ensure all staff, especially frontline staff interacting with communities, are comprehensively trained in the risks of COVID-19, and measures including

effective handwashing, physical distancing and self-isolation.

- o Train and provide frontline staff at particular risk with personal protective equipment (PPE) including the use of face masks, including effective and non-effective uses.
- o Ensure all staff are aware of the symptoms of COVID-19, and encourage self-isolation and access to medical services as required, without financial penalties.
- o Ensure offices and working practices take into account physical distancing and hygiene.
- o Increase access to, and training for, remote work for staff.
- Limit direct project activities in communities during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- Increase cooperation with relevant government offices to reduce overall travel to and ensure essential service delivery to communities.
- Share information on COVID-19 response with other Namibian organisations, including fundraising activities.

Guidelines for Work in Communities

- In Communities:
  - o Understand and respect changing community needs throughout the developing pandemic, which may include requests for increased isolation and for additional support.
  - o Assist communities in identifying and overcoming barriers to basic hygiene.
  - o Encourage and support communities to develop identify potential risks and hotspots for transmissions and their own practices to reduce risks from COVID-19, using the best available information from government and international organisations. This may include standalone plans with Conservancies and Traditional Authorities.
  - o Coordinate with other local organisations and relevant government offices to ensure the delivery of essential services
  - o Recognise that a disproportionally high number of women are formal or informal primary caregivers to the young, the old and the sick, and therefore may be at greater risk from COVID-19 exposure.
  - o Increase awareness among staff and communities of potential increases in gender-based violence during periods of isolation and sensitize community leaders accordingly.

o Recognise the additional challenges of disadvantaged groups in Namibia, including persons with disabilities, marginalised communities and people with people with chronic health conditions.

- **With Communities:**
  o Minimise all travel to communities, and stringently between areas where COVID-19 cases have been recorded (e.g. currently Windhoek, Swakopmund) and unaffected communities. Maximise the use of local staff and community members to deliver information, training and services.
  o Where travel is deemed to be absolutely necessary, ensure staff and communities observe health and social distancing protocols.
  o Avoid direct delivery of materials from areas with COVID-19 cases to at risk communities, by utilising regional or local temporary storage where possible, taking into account that the virus remains viable for up to 3 days on certain metals and plastics.
  o Avoid circumstances that contravene physical distancing advice, including revisiting methods for community meetings.

- **Communication:**
  o Provide information and training to communities, tailoring messaging to take into account language, culture, and identifying misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, including updates on government guidelines and lockdowns. This should by communicated through social media, radio, online resources and printed materials.
  o Increase access to two-way communications for community leaders or representatives, including establishing remote working guidance where possible with communities, which may include the use of social media, digital photos, and conference calls.

We are grateful to Ben Begbie-Clench for drafting these guidelines. The guidelines have been prepared from local consultation and international best practice published by the UN, IFRC and WHO. These guidelines do not cover the very real and pressing economic consequences, which are dealt with at a programmatic level. The guidelines will be reviewed and adjusted throughout the pandemic period.

Resources and references

Australian Government Department of Health (2020). Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group on COVID-19 Preparedness and Response in Asia and the Pacific (2020). COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement. WHO, IFRC and OCHA.

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Republic of Namibia (2012). Labour Act 11 of 2007

Republic of Namibia (2020). State of Emergency - COVID-19 Regulations: Namibian Constitution.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020). Indigenous Peoples & The COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations.

WHO (2020). Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak.

WHO (2020). Risk communication and community engagement readiness and response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19)