

Open Letter to Decision Makers Facing COVID-19

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With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting countries around the world, the Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub believes it is important that governments, donors, UN agencies and NGOs respond to the situation in a conflict-sensitive way. Being conflict-sensitive means minimising the potential for your programmes to do harm, and maximising the potential for your programmes to contribute to peace. This open letter shares key recommendations for decision makers, based on observations and best practice in various contexts.

ANALYSE & COMMUNICATE

The current situation holds immense risks and contexts are changing rapidly. The COVID-19 emergency is reinforcing drivers of conflict. It is crucial to understand the risks facing the population, including the most vulnerable, and support host country governments and donors to make conflict- and gender-sensitive COVID-19-related decisions.

Conduct and update context and conflict analysis – use participatory approaches and support local and technology-based initiatives given movement restrictions.

Conduct scenario planning to understand how context changes are affecting programming, and vice versa.

Draw on existing knowledge and networks that help empower local actors for peace.

Share information widely to avoid repeated information-gathering exercises.

ADAPT LOCALLY

Once changes in context are understood, COVID-19 responses should be designed and implemented in ways that do not deepen divides, overwhelm local actors or put people at risk. Business as usual may no longer be possible, but abruptly stopping existing activities also brings risks. Local actors are the first to respond and should be supported. Interventions should respond to immediate COVID-19-related needs, including through ‘pivoting’ existing activities, but also prepare to respond to the longer-term consequences of the crisis.

- Facilitate collaboration within and between local networks and fora and between government, local civil society and international actors.
- Avoid imposing blanket shutdowns of non-emergency projects.
- Continue supporting critical development assistance and peacebuilding work that is now needed more than ever.
- Support adaptation of non-emergency projects with potentially new, innovative ways of working.
- Allow more time for reporting and flexibility for programme adaptations.

PROMOTE PEACE

COVID-19 is already impacting social cohesion – with effects on inter-communal relations, stigmatization and scapegoating of minority groups, refugees and migrants, widening of fear and mistrust, along with the exclusion of groups from access to services or resources, participation and leadership in response efforts. As lockdowns continue, economies are under pressure and competition for resources increases, these trends and tensions are likely to worsen.

However, COVID-19 also creates opportunities for positive change with local actors leading the way: prevention, treatment and response efforts have the potential to radically reshape informal and formal structures and dynamics within societies. If managed carefully, response efforts can cultivate solidarity and dialogue across conflict lines.

- Identify and strengthen existing capacities for peace and support inclusive conflict resolution efforts.
- Ensure greater transparency and coordination of efforts around peacebuilding.
- Support initiatives to counter stereotyping and stigma attached to COVID-19 cases and refugees.
- Scale up support to community and faith leaders to combat misinformation related to COVID-19.
- Encourage transparent management and reallocation of funds for COVID-19 responses to ensure funds reach all those in need equitably.

The Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub is a global network of organizations & individuals working on conflict-sensitive approaches in their field. It aspires to improve the impact of development, humanitarian, peacebuilding and other actors through collaborative efforts that strengthen the application of conflict sensitivity on policy, organizational & programmatic levels, from the local to the international level.