

RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY TO THE GLOBAL COVID-19 CRISIS

As the predominant global development and humanitarian donor, U.S. efforts on the COVID-19 crisis will shape the global response, helping to save lives and curtail economic losses across the world. Leading an effective COVID-19 response in the developing world will protect the American people by limiting the resurgence of the disease after it is suppressed domestically, mitigating the destabilizing economic and political effects of the pandemic, saving lives, and preserving long-term U.S. investments and gains in partner-country development. **These are among the important reasons why the United States provides foreign assistance.** Failure to address the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic effectively will put at risk years of American investments in national security, trading partnerships, poverty reduction, and values-based humanitarian outreach. These international impacts could significantly worsen the impact of COVID-19 on our own prosperity and way of life.

The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) advocates for the effective use of U.S. foreign assistance, particularly through accountability and country ownership. The guidance listed below can help the United States government mount a successful international response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its humanitarian and economic impacts.

1. Maximize efficiency of Covid-19 response team.

The U.S. development and diplomacy infrastructure is complex, with diverse areas of expertise, priorities, and functions. To avoid duplication of effort and to maximize efficiency during pandemic response, MFAN recommends that the U.S. government:

- ❖ **Establish clear lines of authority and ensure coordination across government.**
- ❖ **Institute effective communication between U.S. embassies and Washington-based agencies regarding pandemic response.**
- ❖ **Expand administrative capacity and continue to support expedited hiring at aid agencies in order to effectively manage emergency funding.**

2. Make evidence-based investments & expand commitments to transparency.

U.S. assistance toward countering Covid-19 should be directed towards areas where the need is greatest, and/or it can have the most impact. Such investments should be made using evidence and done so in a transparent manner.

- ❖ **Allocate funding based on evidence of need and potential for health and development impact and publicize the criteria used to decide country allocations and justifications for each.**
- ❖ **Collect, report, maintain, and share high-quality data, disaggregated by sex and age, to guide and coordinate rapid responses to outbreaks and adapt to changing needs on the ground.**
- ❖ **Establish clear lines of communication between response apparatus and Congress, particularly involving areas where increased flexibility is granted.**

3. Increase flexibility of funding.

Local actors, INGOs, USG aid officials, and other implementing partners will need funding and program guidance that is flexible and adaptive in order to respond appropriately and quickly to changing needs.

- ❖ Avoid country and sector allocations in supplemental funding requests and appropriations acts, recognizing that needs on the ground will shift quickly and cover a variety of sectors.
- ❖ Grant transfer authority for response funds comparable to the authority included in section 402 of the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act.
- ❖ Provide emergency funding through no-year or multi-year accounts, such as the Migration and Refugee Assistance and International Disaster Assistance accounts.
- ❖ Loosen the restrictions on current grants by extending end dates and providing cost extensions of current projects and convert project-based grants to unrestricted support.

4. Work directly with local governments and civil society organizations.

With transportation routes closed and supply chains disrupted, U.S. assistance must be leveraged to help communities protect their own health and economies. Successful COVID-19 responses will require effective local solutions that engage both governments and local civil society organizations in the decision-making process. Working with and strengthening the capacity of local entities will also help build long-term resilience.

- ❖ Coordinate with country-led Covid-19 response teams to align U.S. response with the plans and priorities of national and local governments.
- ❖ Simplify proposal processes and requirements and fast-track and prioritize procurement and acquisition instruments to create more space for local organizations to respond, and encourage INGOs to provide greater technical support to local actors.
- ❖ Provide increased direct support to government institutions, as appropriate within existing restrictions.
- ❖ Prioritize and invest in innovative technologies to get resources to communities and individuals efficiently, including [cash transfers](#).

5. Measure success wisely.

Simply increasing expenditures alone does not necessarily lead to better results. It will be critically important to focus not only on the dollar amount spent over time, but on the results of programming.

- ❖ Prioritize outcomes over outputs, measure both immediate results and resilience-building emergency preparedness and response systems, and do not use “burn rate” as a metric for success.
- ❖ Establish monitoring and evaluation requirements that satisfy reporting needs while also providing projects the space needed for locally-informed adaptive management and learning, which is associated with better outcomes in fragile environments.

6. Focus on prevention and continued long-term development.

To ensure sustainability of any response efforts, a focus on resilience must start now. [Continued investments](#) in education, infrastructure, gender equality, and democracy and governance strengthen the health, research, and emergency preparedness and response systems that will [enhance](#) local and national resilience now and in case of future pandemics.

Additionally, investment in multilaterals, including International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank and regional development banks, GAVI and CEPI, the United Nations, and technical assistance and scientific networks led by the World Health Organization are critical tools for enabling the U.S. to shape the global response agenda.