PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE: WORKING LOCALLY FOR AN EFFECTIVE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

As the predominant global development and humanitarian donor, the U.S. government will shape the global response to COVID-19, helping to save lives and curtail economic losses across the world. The United States leading an effective COVID-19 response in the developing world will protect the American people by limiting the resurgence of the disease, 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.

Working directly with local governments and civil society organizations is a key component of an effective pandemic response. Local actors have the knowledge and access to guide U.S. assistance to aid health systems and the economy in the places where it is needed most. They should be the partners of choice, particularly with transportation routes closed and supply chains disrupted. Successful COVID-19 responses will require effective local solutions that engage both governments and local civil society organizations in decision-making. MFAN highlights the following practices for working locally to respond to the COVID-19 crisis:

Coordinate with country-led COVID-19 response teams.

Nearly every country has developed a national level response plan to the COVID-19 crisis. These national level plans should be used by the U.S. government and other donors to align and coordinate assistance with the priorities of national and local governments. *What can be achieved working with local governments on community priorities?*

Prioritizing educational continuity in Pakistan. In Pakistan, education continuity is a key component of the government's pandemic response plan and USAID and other donor partners are supporting this priority. USAID's partner, the International Rescue Committee, is working with the government to make supplementary reading learning materials widely and freely available on the government education websites. Produced in collaboration with the government, these materials benefit early grade students, teachers and parents to continue learning. This project is also supporting Tele School - an educational TV channel initiated in Pakistan by the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training to support students staying home during the COVID-19 crisis to produce and televise reading lessons for early grades. The project uses several content delivery mediums to deliver audio and video decodable stories, which includes SMS, WhatsApp, IVR, radio and the website. It is also holding webinars for teachers to orient them about component skills of reading. Attended largely by government school teachers, these weekly webinars help teachers keep abreast with teaching reading to early grades.

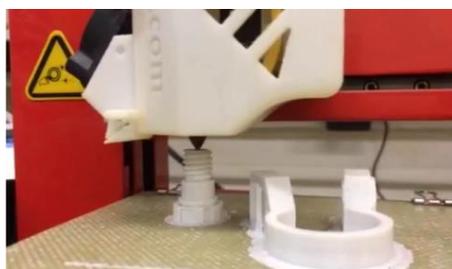## Engage in partnerships with local organizations and simplify requirements.

Local organizations, with the support and guidance from INGOs, are already making strides combatting the virus in their own communities. This is both a critical component of meeting immediate needs during the crisis, and of building the capacity of local organizations to build long-term resilience. **USAID should simplify proposal processes and**

requirements and fast-track procurement and acquisition instruments to increase U.S. partnerships with local organizations for the pandemic response. *What can local partners achieve on the ground?*

Directly reaching families and communities in Lebanon. *Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an international NGO, is partnering with local organizations to support their ability to meet immediate needs in their communities. In Lebanon, CRS is supporting Sisters of the Sacred Heart to provide education materials to Syrian refugee children amid school closures, and with* Imam Sader Foundation *in its awareness campaigns to encourage families to stay at home.*

Invest in innovative programming.

Travel restrictions and social distancing requirements present an opportunity to re-think traditional delivery of aid and invest in digital and other program innovations. Prioritizing and investing in innovative technologies can get resources to communities and individuals efficiently. *What can innovative programming achieve during the pandemic?*

3D Printing PPE in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *A USAID funded education project, intended to teach skills in technology and implemented by Save the Children, mobilized schools' USAID-donated 3D printers to make and distribute the much-needed shields for medical personnel and other frontline workers free of charge. Dozens of local engineering firms have also become involved in the production of protective equipment for workers and institutions that work directly with vulnerable people, such as hospitals and health centers.*

Support local civil society voices and protect civic space.

Civil society is a critical actor in the development process, however, the pandemic is posing additional threats to civil society. Funding and programming are facing pressure,[1] and in some cases, national governments are using the pandemic to restrict freedoms and civic space.[2] In addition to investing in and partnering with local organizations through enhanced procurement, acquisition, and technical assistance, civil society organizations should be highly visible and actively engaged in driving solutions to the pandemic. *How can civil society organizations be supported during the pandemic?*

Coordination and inclusion of civil society voices. *In Cameroon, Plan International chaired a coordination meeting of partners of the task force of COVID-19 response working in the Minawao refugee camp. Discussions prompted activity coordination, community engagement, communication improvement, case management, and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) item distribution in the camp.*

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[1] https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/rapid-assessment-impact-of-covid-19-on-womens-civil-society-organizations

[2] https://www.icnl.org/post/analysis/top-trends-covid-19-and-civic-space