

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

13 PRACTICAL TIPS

Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) is an infectious disease caused by a strain of coronavirus that was first identified in December 2019. Covid-19 was initially declared a global emergency of public health concern by the World Health Organization on 30 January 2020. On 11 March it was declared a pandemic.

Government measures in response to the outbreak have included severe restrictions on movement and physical distancing, which will inevitably impact the way we engage communities. This document provides key messages and practical tips for such community engagement.

REMOTE ENGAGEMENT



1. TECHNOLOGIES

Consider engaging communities through different technologies. Online means, such as WhatsApp, allow for communication through both text and audio messages. Mobile networks can support hotlines, phone trees or simple phone calls. Where mobile networks are either not present or unstable, two-way radios can be an alternative.



2. MATERIAL SUPPORT

Make sure communities have the means to use these technologies! This includes the provision of portable radios, phones, phone credit, free Wi-Fi hotspots and even megaphones.



3. ACCESSIBILITY

Make sure to engage all groups, in both host and displaced communities, in environments where everyone can feel comfortable to speak up. Adapt the way you communicate to reach each group, which may require using simple language or communicating messages through alternative audio-visual means.



4. FOCAL POINTS

Identify focal points within communities and keep them informed. Build on existing leadership, such as community leaders, traditional healers, teachers and religious figures. Women are often overlooked, even though they are primary caretakers and first responders in emergencies, so make active efforts to identify women focal points.



5. GENDER SENSITIVITY

Adapt remote engagement tools based on the roles of women, men, boys and girls. For example, if using radio messaging, evening spots can ensure that women and girls are reached, as they may have responsibilities during the day.



6. COLLECTIVE EFFORT

We will need all the help we can get! Be ready to assign staff and community volunteers new tasks. They may have to work in different sectors – e.g. WASH, EFSVL or Protection – simultaneously, especially when there are few entry points to a community. Ensure all staff and volunteers receive a clear briefing on risks, and ensure they know they have the right to refuse to perform tasks that make them feel uncomfortable and/or unsafe.



7. ADVOCACY

Advocacy can contribute to the continuity of community engagement. Depending on the context, consider developing advocacy strategies that include issues such as digital rights or discrimination against NGOs and civil society. These could be key to guaranteeing people's access to information and preserve humanitarian space.

INTRACOMMUNAL ENGAGEMENT

Physical distancing will also affect how community members engage each other. Here are some tips for **Oxfam volunteers** and other community members we work with.



8. DOOR-TO-DOOR ACTIVITIES

During door-to-door distributions, community focal points can leave items at the door of the household for collection, rather than handing them over directly. For verbal exchanges, prioritize talking through the door.



9. INFORMATION SHARING

Community volunteers can use WhatsApp groups to stay in touch with each other and other community members, allowing for the sharing and gathering of information on key developments. When this is not an option, information can be passed on through information trees, either by phone or in person, following the advice above on door-to-door activities.

As a last resort, megaphones can be used to spread messages – this is less ideal as it does not allow for two-way communication.



10. FACE-TO-FACE

Community members may still resort to face-to-face interactions. When that is the case, advise them to follow [Oxfam's Guidance for Community-Facing Staff](#).

SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES



11. ISOLATION STRATEGIES

Specific groups, such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, will have more difficulties dealing with Covid-19 once they are infected. Work with communities to find achievable ways to protect these high risk groups from transmission, such as isolating those who are more vulnerable in their homes, whilst ensuring their access to essential services continues.



12. SOLIDARITY STRATEGIES

Support communities' solidarity strategies. These can include support groups for collecting water, food and other necessities for those most at risk. Suggest using simple signage systems for homes self-isolating or in need of support. While signage systems will have to be adapted to each context, they could be as simple as leaving an object by the door or writing a symbol on the wall. These measures can reduce physical contact between community members while also supporting basic welfare.



13. HYGIENE

Consider providing handwashing stations in places convenient for the community, especially if they are still undertaking group activities. Handwashing facilities are also essential near markets. Consider using cashless systems where possible, including remote transfers.

MORE RESOURCES

Oxfam. (2020a). [Community Engagement During Covid-19 Guidance Note](#).

Oxfam. (2020b). [Community Engagement During Covid-19 Checklist](#).

Oxfam. (2020c). [Protecting Community Facing Staff and Volunteers](#).

IFRC, OCHA and WHO. (2020). [COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement](#).

IFRC, UNICEF and WHO. (2020). [Social Stigma associated with COVID-19: A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma](#).



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