

DI COVID-19 Response Members Webinar #1 Summary

Date & Time: May 28, 2020

Location: Online

Format: Presentations, case studies

Context and Objective

Managing the spread of the novel coronavirus, treating people infected with COVID-19 and providing essential services as economies shut down is a global issue. National, regional and local governments are at the forefront of the response. But NGOs and mining companies are uniquely positioned to work with governments and take a leadership role in addressing COVID-19 responses globally. The objective of this webinar was to share general responses, hear from members about their main challenges and questions and introduce the group to an online format. This initial webinar will help us understand our common opportunities and challenges and plan future programming related to COVID-19.

Future webinars will focus on:

- Inclusive community engagement methods and ways to support community action;
- Adapting and leveraging social investment and community development programs; and
- Opportunities and challenges related to cross-sector collaboration.

Formats and Topics

This online meeting was members-only in order to test out the webinar format. The meeting included short 5 - 7 minute member presentations about the organizations responses to COVID-19 (e.g. general strategy, community engagement, cross-sector collaboration), as well as specific challenges and questions they have. Presenters included:

- Amaya Renobales, World Vision
- Chelsea Pandelidis, WUSC
- Dominic Channer and Emily Hendrickson, Kinross
- Simon Chorley, UNICEF Canada
- Stacia Kean, CESO
- Jennifer Johnson, Canadian Bar Association
- Corine Frenzel, Right to Play

Summary of Discussion

The main points from presentations and the discussion are listed here.

Collaboration and Co-ordination

Organizations have started to collaborate and co-ordinate with governments and other stakeholder groups in the response to COVID-19.

- One NGO spoke about how they are implementing national government plans at a rural/local level because the government has a limited presence in the area. The same NGO has also co-ordinated with an Oil & Gas company to deliver relief in rural areas.
- One mining company is working with schools and food banks to deliver immediate relief to the community. The same mining company has teamed up with other mining companies in the region to provide short term loans to small businesses in the region.
- Another NGO is working with a University to study the impacts of COVID-19 on their immunization programs. This data is an important element of our collective decision making about 'opening up' moving forward.

Each organization spoke about how they have relied on pre-COVID relationships and communication channels to drive this collaboration.

Reliable Information and Data Collection

Delivering clear and trusted information about COVID-19 is a central part of any response. In some communities, people do not trust the information they receive from government agencies. This is more common where there has been long standing conflict or tension between a community and government. Companies and NGOs can play an important role in sharing reliable information about COVID-19 including the realities of the virus and how a community can protect itself from the virus.

- World Vision has used their historical relationships with faith and other community leaders to deliver training on COVID-19 virtually. These leaders are then able to share that information with the broader community.
- UNICEF has mobilized the channels within their network to share reliable information, including through TV, radio and using chat bots.
- The WUSC/CECI WAGES project released a podcast about their response in Ghana¹.

At the same time, the response to COVID-19 has disrupted data collection for many programs and made communication throughout multinational organizations challenging. These challenges will become more apparent as we move through reporting cycles.

Disrupting engagement

Physical distancing has disrupted face to face engagement activities as well as many programs. This includes both local community engagement and multi-stakeholder platforms and engagement with peers. Many forums and meetings have been postponed and will likely take place virtually. However, this does not necessarily work for all stakeholders, particularly communities, because:

- People don't have bandwidth and access to technology;

¹ [WAGES Podcast Episode 1](#), May 2020.

- There is a saturation of online engagements and people are overwhelmed;
- Virtual engagements are more planned/scheduled, which leaves less time for the important less formal and personal connection of face to face or ad hoc engagement;
- Virtual engagement can include fewer people because of the challenges listed above;
- The personal dynamic of speaking over video/phone is different, especially as it relates to sensitive issues.

These challenges have meant that most organizations are focused on information sharing rather than discussion, dialogue or deeper consultation. For many communities, physical distancing will be a reality for a time come and so organizations will have to find new ways to engage from a distance. Again, previous relationships and trust is paramount to maintaining meaningful communication and engagement.

At the same time, this presents an opportunity to do virtual engagement and communications better. For example, the DI has tried out webinars for the first time which could present new opportunities to engage with more people from our member organizations.

Adapting Programs

COVID-19 responses have also disrupted many programs. Physical distancing and travel restrictions have meant that some programs are not running at all. Many organizations are funding COVID-19 responses by reallocating budgets that were slated for other development programming.

- UNICEF has had to post pone immunization campaigns because doctors and supplies can not reach communities.

Other programs have had to adapt because of physical distancing requirements.

- CESO has moved to online engagement and support for communities.
- The WAGES project has worked with local entrepreneurs to pivot their service or product to participate in the response effort through sewing masks, welding foot powered sinks and dehydrating fruits and vegetables.
- The Canadian Bar Association has been able to continue to support law reform and policy development. They have had to pause most of their in-person training and capacity building initiatives. CBA continues to provide information about legal support and other messaging around key issues like Gender Based Violence. For example they have used radio and includes some training material in their COVID-19 response by posting them on water jugs.
- Right to Play has narrowed the program focus to keeping children healthy and safe through remote coaching and training opportunities. RTP is also looking to support virtual learning. The main focus has been to maintain contact. One of the benefits is to bring play-based learning into the home, where programming used to be delivered outside the home. RTP is also working with community champions to deliver food parcels and keep a touch point with kids.

Many organizations are taking this time to record and report in more detail.

- CBA is making webinars for future training.
- WUSC is developing case studies.

- Right to Play is part of a coalition to develop a library of recreation activities for Indigenous children in Canada.

Many organizations, NGOs and companies, have an opportunity to influence the governments response to COVID-19. As a result, many organizations have integrated COVID-19 into their advocacy campaigns.

- World Vision is working with governments to highlight the specific impacts of COVID-19 on children.

Program Flexibility

COVID-19 drastically and quickly changed the development priorities for communities. Organizations have had to pivot quickly, however, making changes to current programs and re-allocating budgets has its own challenges.

- Many donors have expected that NGOs will continue to achieve program milestones and meet the agreed upon objectives. Especially for multi-year, multi million-dollar projects there has been limited flexibility to adjust the program activities, outcomes to support a COVID=19 response.
- Managing expectations of donors, community members and other stakeholders during COVID-19 has continued to be a challenge.
- One mining company also noted that the scale of the community investment response put pressure on their corporate process for approving donations. It also highlighted areas for improvement and clarity.

Moving forward, companies and NGOs will have to manage expectations but remain flexible in order to the respond to community priorities. This will require constant communication and openness with all stakeholder groups including donors, communities, and partners.

In addition, the impact of COVID-19 varies between communities and people. Some regions require more support because they are particularly fragile or are dealing with compounding impacts of multiple issues (e.g. other health crises like Ebola, impacts from climate change etc.)

General Questions and Next Steps

The group had a brief discussion and the following question emerged.

- How do we understand and track the cumulative impacts from COVID-19 and the response to COVID-19? Health impacts and impact of isolation, economic closures, ending of development programs?
- How do we balance the impact of isolation, economic shut down and lack of access to health care with the direct impacts and risks from COVID-19?
- How do we share information and hear from peers/other organizations? How do we move forward into specific forms of collaboration among members to support each organization's efforts?
- Will our response to COVID-19 lead to rapid changes in program delivery? Will we move to remote program delivery and engagement?