

# Security Risk Management Guidance

## CoVID-19 Environment

27 March 2020

### 1. Overview

The situation globally with CoVID-19 disease pandemic is unprecedented and is forcing rapid change on all societies and institutions. Global organizations, countries and their populations are struggling to adapt. ACT Alliance members, and the aid sector in general, are not immune and are also facing significant disruption and challenges. This guidance document is an interim guide intended to highlight some of the security risk management (SRM) challenges we may face in the coming months (and beyond) and make recommendations on how to mitigate these risks.

### 2. Scope

The guidance will by necessity be generalized in nature and must be adapted to local conditions. The objective is to give organizations an opportunity to be proactive in dealing with challenges that may occur in the near future as a result of the pandemic. We also must recognize that the situation is highly fluid, and more information is coming forward daily that will affect long term recommendations; thus users will need to adjust accordingly.

### 3. Stages of the Crisis

To facilitate understanding the SRM challenges in dealing with the disruption the pandemic has caused, the crisis can be broken down into three stages:

Stage 1: Outbreak/Initial Response

Stage 2: Managing Response

Stage 3: Recovery

### 4. Stage One: Outbreak/Initial Response

This stage began in December 2019 when the SARS-Corona Virus-2 was first identified in Wuhan, China. This coronavirus produces the CoVID-19 disease which is now affecting populations across the globe. This phase covers the period when countries first begin mobilizing a response and/or identify the first victims of the disease up until a full response strategy has begun being implemented.

Threats to consider during Stage 1:

- Lack of acceptance of the risk posed by CoVID-19 by governments and populations in the early days allowing the virus to spread before a response is initiated.
- The attitude that this is a problem “somewhere else” and “I won’t get it” or “only older people need to worry.” Or the idea that “God will keep us safe.”
- Misinformation being distributed either through official channels, social media or community rumours.
- Panic buying and hoarding of essential supplies by those with access and financial resources to do so. Also, profiteering by individuals or businesses holding key supplies.
- As governments respond, there are examples of literal over-night lockdowns forcing people to remain in their homes. This can cause distress for those who do not have several weeks of food and other necessities stockpiled at home; also for the vulnerable who may not have been able to access supplies.
- Targeting, harassment and violence directed at foreigners or those who work with foreigners who are blamed for the arrival of the virus. This could definitely target ACT members and NGO’s in general.
- Misinformation or outright scams recommending certain products are a ‘cure’ or will provide protection from the virus leading to dangerous practices.
- For aid organizations and ACT members, reduced ability to deliver programs, especially humanitarian activities, that raise the vulnerability and hardship of those in targeted communities.
- Reductions in access to key supplies for program delivery and for staff and their families.
- Challenges in organizations where key decision makers or those with signing authority for payroll functions, finance or HR cannot carry out their functions or fall victim to the virus without a systematic transfer of responsibilities.
- Loss of acceptance in communities where there is suspicion aid organizations have brought the virus or the consequences of the virus.
- For those member staff involved in life-saving humanitarian activity, increased exposure to the virus, lack of access to personal protective equipment and the danger of passing the virus on to family members.
- Psychosocial needs of staff who may be worried or scared for themselves and their family.

#### Recommendations:

- Develop a business continuity plan for your organization that includes a number of contingency plans for how the national environment could change.
- The virus has struck different countries at different rates of infection. Those hardest hit initially have been forced to adopt the strictest response strategies. Even if your country has not been affected that seriously yet, anticipate that it will be and look at what restrictions are likely to come. Prepare your programs, staff and communities for this eventuality.

- Liaise with UN/NGO clusters and local government to discuss the response and coordinate efforts.
- Consider bulk ordering key items from suppliers that staff may need in coming months. Stockpile these items against a future need. Share these within forums where smaller members do not have the same capacity. Do not hoard, but stockpile responsibly.
- Develop key messaging strategies to maintain acceptance in communities if you are forced to temporarily halt program delivery.
- Secure valuable equipment, vehicles or other assets in the event of forced closure of offices or other facilities.
- Identify the staff who, due to existing health issues, may be most susceptible to CoVID-19 and advise them on safety. This goes for staff with family members in same category.
- Identify ways to get key messaging out that allows staff and community members to understand the facts of dealing with a coronavirus to counter rumours and agenda media sowing discord. A daily Q&A system on Whatsapp or Google docs can help.
- Establish phone trees or chatapps groups to stay in contact. Try to keep spirits up and keep your sense of humour and fellowship.

## 5. Stage Two: Managing the Response

The stage can be considered to kick in when countries have begun introducing response strategies that may broadly affect society while the private sector and other organizations have instituted business continuity strategies. This stage will last until virus infections rates plateau and have declined to a 'safe' level. *(Note: we may see repeated cycles here if when restrictions are lifted, infection rates climb again)*

Threats to consider during Stage 2:

- Ensure all staff, communities and especially management understand that this crisis may last many months and possibly up to one year. While the virus infections rate may decline if state response plans are effective, the infection rate may spike again when restrictions are relaxed.
- Be aware of sudden rapid changes in government restrictions and policies affecting your interim work plans and staff resilience.
- Where response plans are ineffective and infection rates overwhelm health systems leading to widespread fatalities, expect civil unrest, backlash and disruption.
- Be aware that if health system are overwhelmed staff and families are unlikely to be able to access medical treatments for other accidents/conditions. Border closures may also restrict the importation of medicines needed for treating non-CoVid-19 illnesses.
- This is an unprecedented crisis and many staff and community members may suffer from the stress and anxiety it produces. ACT members have a

responsibility under duty of care to support staff mental health and increase coping mechanisms and personal resilience.

- Where lockdowns have been instituted and businesses closed, it is anticipated robberies may spike, especially as the crisis extends and those without financial resources are pushed to crime to survive.
- Similarly, consider other unsafe behaviours and activities that may increase as the most vulnerable begin to suffer and are pushed to find ways to survive and feed their families.
- For ACT members, in times of crisis, the Church becomes a place of solace and safety. However, in the current crisis Churches need to seek alternative ways of supporting their congregations both spiritually and in terms of basic human needs like food and medicine without large gatherings.
- Be aware of agenda media and other actors who wish to take advantage of the crisis to push extremist or other negative behaviour for their own ends.
- Cyber threats will likely increase as IT capacity is restricted and our work increasingly shifts to online environments.
- Similarly, be aware that as governments feel under pressure and may impose social restrictions that could be interpreted by some as human right violations, there may be an increase in state monitoring of aid organizations; especially those involved in advocacy programming.
- Donor funding may face adjustments that can affect programs. However, donor states are likely to increase funding to UN agencies who, will in turn, seek implementing partners.
- All organizations may face pressure to engage as economies and livelihoods are affected by virus response regulations. Ensure that staff are thoroughly briefed, trained and equipped to operate in a coronavirus environment.
- Psychosocial and physical needs of staff as they and/or colleagues begin to test positive for CoVID-19. Potential impact on programs if significant numbers of staff have the disease.

#### Recommendations:

- In this environment staff morale will be challenged: develop ways to ensure staff feel supported, protected and appreciated. Ensure staff have enough supplies and support to see them through a quarantine or lock down.
- Ensure staff who exhibit symptoms are taking all appropriate steps to recover and protect those around them from transmission.
- Management should remember that to be able to help those most affected by the effects of CoVID-19, organizations and their staff need to protect themselves as a number one priority.
- Forums will be the key to any effective response. Cooperative, broad-based efforts will demonstrate the core capabilities of the ACT Alliance's structure.
- Make an effort to maintain acceptance with all stakeholders and manage expectations of communities desperate for support.

- Resist pressure to engage in healthcare programming unless staff can be properly trained and equipped to work safely in a coronavirus environment.
- Review online security and social media policies with all staff to protect your organizations' ability to continue operating and safeguard your reputation.
- Manage everyone's expectations that this will be a short-term disruption. This phase may last for up to a year and impact of the disruption to communities and economies for years to come.
- Avoid any perception of 'hoarding' if gathering supplies for a response. Be transparent but keep locations of supplies confidential.
- Similarly, where possible, avoid succumbing to profiteering in acquiring supplies for staff or programs.
- Improve physical security of offices, field locations and other key sites.
- Seek psychosocial support for staff who are overwhelmed by the challenges and workload that is likely to come.

## **6. Stage Three: Recovery**

This phase can be considered to be in place when national restrictions have been lifted and new infections no longer spike as a result.

Threats to consider during stage 3:

- Staff burnout. This phase will see the end of a long and distressful period for all, both personally and professionally and organizations need to be prepared.
- When the corona virus crisis has ended, we may see significant shifts in how our sector functions. It is difficult to predict all the changes in society, aid funding, ways of working, community engagement and staff support that may occur. Organizations should begin having these conversations during phase 2 to ensure we can address all the challenges that will come.
- Due to an extended period of remote working, M&E requirements that may have been postponed may be ramped up, putting exhausted staff under pressure. Be prepared to manage this situation.
- There may be long term, extensive criticism of many institutions that support public welfare, including charities. Be prepared to engage in reputation risk challenges as they present themselves.
- Due to global economic chaos likely to result from the CoVID-19 expect changes in traditional donor funding priorities. Because traditional donors like the US, EU and UK are going to suffer their own financial difficulties, there may be less funding available for international funding. Economic upheaval will also affect general public donors. Seek and identify alternative funding sources.
- Where staff may have become infected by CoVID-19 while carrying out their duties and died as a result, be prepared for legal and reputational repercussions. Similarly, where staff could not be evacuated from affected

areas in time and were unable to access adequate health care as a result, expect similar issues.

- Be prepared for some governments that may not wish to relinquish power measures handed to them to fight the pandemic and possible access and human rights concerns.

Recommendations:

- There will be a tendency to 'relax' when the crisis is finally passed, and we begin the recovery phase. Frontline staff should certainly be given a chance to recover. However, management teams will now have to focus on the post crisis environment to protect their organization and adapt to the new environment. Again, the ACT Forum structure will prove invaluable in this regard and the traditional balance between international, national and local partners may have shifted.
- It is likely that news ways of funding programming will result and all organizations who do not currently have this capacity, should develop a funding proposal writing capability. Again, ACT forums should share their capacity building efforts in this regard.
- Accept that while this crisis will end, there will be far reaching consequences for all of us, personally and professionally. Being adaptable, open minded and accepting of change is going to be far more effective than trying to return to the pre-CoVid-19 status quo.

## 7. Summary

Since the CoVID-19 crisis is still in its early stages and there is a great deal of uncertainty around the long-term consequences, it is difficult to predict what security risk management challenges we will face. However, based on what we have seen in the first quarter of 2020 those challenges will range from serious to extreme. It is highly unlikely any country will be left completely unaffected.

The ACT ASG has been working since 2007 to help ACT members increase their security risk management capacity. Hopefully, we all now understand they core value of managing risk and threat; and organizations have internalized their duty of care responsibilities. These will be difficult days ahead but we have the tools, the structures (like forums) and the capacity to not only survive, but make a significant contribution to the survival of the most vulnerable in our contexts...if we protect our staff, our capabilities, reputations and ability to continue our work.

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