



NSIF Covid-19 Rapid Assessment and Response Strategy

1. Introduction

The ramifications of the Covid-19 crisis is expected to be severe and widespread. The NGO sector stands particularly exposed to financial and operational challenges. Various programmes and projects run by NGOs are likely to be affected, putting at risk much-needed support and services provided to poor and vulnerable groups.

As the principal funding partner of NGOs, the National Social Inclusion Foundation (NSIF) has prepared a Covid-19 Response Strategy with following objectives:

- To adapt its support to NGOs and help them tackle the crisis
- To maintain the support and services provided by NGOs to beneficiaries
- To meet emerging funding needs arising from the crisis
- To continue working together in a spirit of dialogue, partnership and solidarity

The Response Strategy builds on a rapid assessment exercise carried out through online consultation with NGOs on the difficulties encountered during the lockdown and the potential challenges likely to be faced post-lockdown. Valuable feedback and insights were received from 108 NGOs, representing 26.5 percent of organisations registered with the NSIF. The respondents are engaged in the different priority areas of intervention of the Foundation as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

Priority Area	Number of Respondents
Socioeconomic development as a means of poverty alleviation	18
Educational support and training	37
Supporting people with disabilities	4
Dealing with health problems	21
Family protection including gender-based violence	10
Sports and Leisure	4
Environmental protection and sustainable development	11
Peace and nation building	3
Total	108

2. Impact of Lockdown

80 percent of respondents reported having interrupted their normal operations on the ground, causing support and services to beneficiaries to be disrupted and even cut off. Office premises, support centres and schools were generally closed and outreach activities ceased. The unavailability of Work Access Permits was underlined.

Residential structures, for example shelters, managed to maintain their services under sanitary precautions but faced challenges in terms of food supplies, medical care, PPEs and transport.

Some NGOs (16 percent) were involved in immediate relief response, helping to provide food assistance to vulnerable families during the lockdown, either directly or through referrals to other organisations.

Around 25 percent of NGOs kept contact with some of their beneficiaries during the lockdown via phone and online. NGO staff working remotely interacted with their beneficiaries to follow up and provide practical advice and counselling. However, access to adequate IT equipment and internet facilities was a clear limitation for more extensive online support.

3. Resuming Operations Post-Lockdown

NGOs expect to ensure continuity of their operations after the lockdown. The most common operational challenge indicated by more than 55 percent of NGOs is the implementation of sanitary measures to ensure safety of beneficiaries and staff when resuming their activities. These will entail cleaning/disinfecting and adjusting premises, providing masks and sanitizers and adopting social distancing. The deployment of human resources and transport facilities will also need to be adapted in order to accommodate a smaller number of beneficiaries at a time.

Two thirds of respondents will review their planned activities. Timeframes for implementing actions may be adjusted and programmes may be reassessed and reprioritised due to constraints posed by sanitary measures and in response to the emerging needs of beneficiaries.

An increase in demand for services is anticipated by 10 percent of respondents. In addition, there may be a need to employ additional effort to reach out to beneficiaries where contact has been cut off during the lockdown.

17 percent of NGOs indicate considering a broader use of IT as a tool to facilitate communication with staff and beneficiaries and to develop online support programmes after quite successful experimentation during the lockdown.

4. Financial challenges

28 percent of respondents are concerned about the uncertainty and possible shortfall of funding support from private companies, donations and fund raising in light of deteriorating economic conditions. Revenue from income generating activities, for instance fees and income from sales, are also likely to be affected.

Around 32 percent of NGOs are particularly worried about meeting human resources and other running expenses in order to sustain their programmes and continue providing the necessary support and services to beneficiaries.

The provision of PPEs and implementation of sanitary and social distancing measures, including adjustments to be made to premises, planned activities, human resources and transport services will involve additional costs according to a third of respondents.

For NGOs considering the delivery of online support to beneficiaries, there will be financial implications of investing in IT equipment, development of online materials and training.

Most NGOs expect to review their annual budgets and make financial adjustments where necessary. Reallocations and/or additional funding support may be required in at least 50 percent of cases.

5. Emerging needs for support to beneficiaries

NGOs identify the following needs for support to beneficiaries emerging as a consequence of the lockdown and continuing Covid-19 crisis in the short and medium term.

- The economic consequences of the Covid-19 crisis will leave poor and vulnerable families facing significant financial difficulties to make ends meet. Food security will emerge as an important challenge. Support to beneficiaries may take the form of:
 - Food and basic needs assistance
 - Livelihood support and income generating programmes
 - Community and backyard gardening
 - School feeding programme
 - 'Boutique solidaire'
- Enhanced educational support for vulnerable children having learning difficulties who are likely to lag behind in their education due to disruptions in their learning process caused by the prolonged school closure. They may lack the motivation and self-confidence to return to their studies. Parental programmes involving parents in the education of their children will also be important.

- Psycho-social accompaniment as well as mental and emotional health support to vulnerable families, children and youths in order to build resilience and self-confidence and to deal with stress, strained relationships and violent behaviours.
- Paramedical and psychological support to children with disabilities due to regression of beneficiaries in different domains such as psychological, motor, communication and sensory development as well as being affected by anxiety and stress.
- Support to people with disabilities in adopting self-care and preventive sanitary measures
- Youth development programmes aiming at self-development and resilience in face of the crisis
- Support to the unemployed through job search and employability/training programmes
- Supporting access to health care (treatment and medication) for vulnerable groups with poor health, including drug users
- Support to the homeless in terms of food, shelter and medical assistance

6. Response strategy in support of NGOs

In light of the above, the Foundation proposes to implement the following measures to support NGOs and mitigate the potential consequences arising from the Covid-19 crisis.

- Increasing flexibility in funding arrangements and setting up of a special desk to address immediate operational and financial needs of NGOs, particularly in respect of:
 - Adjustment of planned activities
 - Budget reallocations
 - Early disbursements
 - Reconsideration of funding requests
 - Carry forward of unused funds over next funding period
- Providing access to ad-hoc/emergency funds to meet shortfalls in funding from other sources
- Implementing national programmes to meet the emerging needs and challenges of the poor and vulnerable
- Collaborating with the Covid-19 Solidarity Fund to coordinate funding support to NGOs seeking to implement Covid-19 related projects

7. Conclusion

The rapid assessment exercise reveals that NGO support and services to beneficiaries have been disrupted by the lockdown. As operations resume post-lockdown, planned activities will be adjusted in light of required sanitary measures and emerging needs for support by beneficiaries.

Financial uncertainties may be forthcoming as NGOs are concerned about reduced funding from private sources given the predicted deterioration of economic conditions.

The Foundation remains committed to provide the necessary support to NGOs during the crisis in order to help maintain the delivery of services to beneficiaries.

Greater flexibility in funding arrangements will apply. Procedures will be simplified and fast-tracked to facilitate the implementation of appropriate support measures. A special desk will be set up to assist NGOs.

The Foundation will seek to address the challenges faced by the poor and vulnerable groups which would have been amplified by the Covid-19 crisis through the implementation of national programmes, working in collaboration with NGOs and other stakeholders. It will, in addition, coordinate efforts with the Covid-19 Solidarity Fund.

The Foundation will continue to engage in dialogue and consultation with its partners and stakeholders and adjust its Response Strategy as required.