

# Gender, Youth & Livelihood Programs in Food and Water Systems

## COVID-19 Guidance

The operating environment for food and water system programs that focus on gender, youth and livelihoods (GYL) has changed significantly with the onset of the novel corona virus of 2019 (COVID-19). The totality of funding for traditional development programming will drop, and programs must adapt to new funding priorities and focus areas. Long-term social change processes promoting gender equality, youth empowerment and building livelihoods are interrupted by restrictions on field-based activities, potentially jeopardizing positive gains. This document lays out implications and response strategies for GYL programs in response to COVID-19.

### Global Responses for Adaption of Food and Water System Programs

- Document delays, innovative approaches, and adaptations in programming.
- Build on proven humanitarian and crisis modifier approaches.
- Protect food security of vulnerable populations and advocate for immediate social protection in the form of cash, vouchers and, where appropriate, direct food aid. Wherever possible, cash and vouchers are the preferred method of aid.
- Follow community and household shelter in place guidelines to prevent transmission of COVID-19.
- Analyze disruptions affecting food systems in production, marketing and consumption levels and disseminate analyses with policy makers and actors, both within and outside CARE's network.
- Place women and girls at the center of all activities.
- Actively monitor and manage potential risks of increased gender-based violence, negative coping mechanisms and interruptions of gender-equality focused social change processes.
- Use CARE's nutrition, education, gender, gender-based violence, and water sanitation and hygiene guidance to broadcast and disseminate gender-sensitive key messages.

### Agriculture, Markets and Livelihoods

#### Implications

- Producers will not be able to access agricultural inputs and services, mobility is limited, and increased social distancing will disrupt market activity (i.e. selling and buying). Crop and livestock farmers will not be able to access extension services for both crops and livestock. They may also not be able to access their fields, as observed in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.
- Community-based extension trainers will not be able to receive direct, face to face training and knowledge transfer. This will affect adoption of improved agricultural practices.
- Actors across food systems will be impacted by income loss from market closures and disruptions.
- Transportation limitations, lack of market access, and inability to sell, market, process, and adequately store foods will lead to food loss and waste. Most women in retail markets will be significantly affected by market closures as they solely rely on retailing food items on a daily basis.
- Availability of agricultural laborers may be significantly reduced by COVID-19 related restrictions on movement and remaining agricultural laborers could be forced by employers or need for income to work while sick.

- Food system policies are changing across the globe. Governments are taking measures to address potential COVID-19-induced food crisis. Some of those measures are helpful, as they are geared at advance planning for food market disruptions; others need to be considered very carefully to avoid interventions that distort markets, e.g. export bans.
- An increase in food prices will result in negative coping mechanisms by consumers, especially those already in fragile conditions, food insecure households in general, and women in particular. The negative coping mechanisms include reducing food consumption affecting women disproportionately in cultures where women eat “least and last”; transactional sex; and going into debt to pay for food.

## Response

- Keep seeds and agricultural supplies flowing to mitigate future foods shocks through humanitarian mechanisms such as supplying seed packs, fertilizer, food security crops (i.e. roots, tubers), and plant cuttings. Ensure women are targeted and have access. Support the revival of nutritious neglected or ‘orphan’ crops.
- Prepare for [cash and voucher assistance](#) and social safety net strengthening. These need to be digitized through mobile money platforms to reduce interactions between people.
- Monitor markets for disruptions and assess market-based responses for needs; assess feasibility of cash, voucher and in-kind assistance.
- Support savings groups using CARE’s [Savings Group Risk Mitigation, Support and Engagement](#) guidance, to prioritize savings for purchase of agriculture inputs, and to increase social funds to support social needs in communities dealing with shocks and consequences of COVID-19.
- Increase opportunities for e-extension messaging and market information, including the use of mobile phones, community radio messaging, WhatsApp groups, and other digital tools that increase farmers access to and use of extension messages.
- Elevate the focus on hygiene and handling for workers, farmers and retailers to ensure that food supply chains continue to operate. This will be important for everyone from farmers to retailers.
- Call for country strategic plans for preparedness and response that maintain and augment agricultural support, nutrition, stockpile surpluses, pre-positioned food, and women’s leadership in planning and decision-making.
- Identify and support linkages with secondary (non-affected) markets given food supply chain disruption, including supporting decentralized food policy mechanisms to reduce food insecurity in locked down urban and rural areas.
- Establish secure food storage facilities to food waste and loss, if needed.



Seeds are collected at CARE’s distribution center in Eastern Ethiopia. @ Josh Estey/CARE

- Identify and share information on alternative markets with smallholder farmers for crops/products if primary market linkages are disrupted.
- Develop data-driven policy guidance for governments in developing a response to COVID-19 and mitigating the impact on resilience, agricultural production, and market functioning.
- Build on CARE's [Dignified Work](#) programming to develop income-replacement (cash transfer) programs for food system workers who could be forced to work while sick or are not getting paid.
- Support communities and individuals to apply gender-based violence and other risk mitigation measures identified in participatory risk mitigation exercises (collective and individual level plans).
- Work with market actors to stabilize price escalations.

## Gender Equity

### Implications

- Women's limited control of resources, information, and income affect their absorptive and adaptive capacities to respond to the crisis.
- Heightened risk of infection due to women's social responsibilities as primary caregivers, coupled with childcare and nutrition and farm work.
- Increased women's workloads including primary caregiver responsibilities for the sick, the elderly, and children. Men are currently believed to be at greater risk of illness from COVID-19 and additional labor may shift onto women and girls as a result of this.
- COVID-19 is resource intensive and health systems are overwhelmed, leaving women with additional workload, increased risk of infection, and lack of access to needed sexual and reproductive health services, resulting in collateral damage for women. Redirection of medical resources to COVID-19 patients will mean that women step into caregiving roles for non-COVID19 patients, further increasing their workload and vulnerability to the virus.
- Progress in reducing maternal and infant mortality and gender equality may decline when medical resources are redirected and progress towards long-term social change is curtailed.
- Increased incidences of gender-based violence based on household food allocation, use of income, food insecurity, and increased competition between male and female household members over access and control over productive assets and resources.
- Limited mobility will create access barriers to social support, products and services, including for sexual and reproductive health.
- Reduced ability for women, especially women in female headed households, to engage in economic activities, particularly in informal sectors, coupled with potential growth of gender inequity in agricultural livelihoods such as day labor.
- Limited access to information by women depending on functional literacy and accessibility of communication channels.
- Increased caregiving burdens or economic pressures can force girls to drop out of school and it is less likely that girls will return to school when schools are reopened.
- Increased likelihood of negative coping mechanisms including child early forced marriage, sale of assets, and the prioritization of high-value crops over nutritious food crops.
- Intersectional circumstances as gender, age, disability, ethnicity and race will affect access to food. Racism and xenophobia may lead to severe consequences for targeted populations.
- Inequality in food access will be further exacerbated by disruptions in food availability– women, who already eat least and last, will be the most affected.

## Response

- Use CARE's [Gender and COVID-19](#) and Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19 guidance.
- Apply CARE's [Rapid Gender Analysis](#) (RGA) to identify key issues that contribute to gender inequalities, explore how gendered power relations give rise to discrimination, and understand how socially constructed roles and vulnerability to and experiences from the outbreak differ. Encourage country office response plans be based on the RGA.
- Design/document gender-sensitive, adaptive agricultural and market system programs that help farmers to cope with market and food system disruptions. Prepare for surges in gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse among women, girls, LGBTQIA individuals, and other vulnerable populations.
- Develop and disseminate gender-sensitive Behavior Change Communication materials, including print, radio, online and SMS materials to address the drivers and consequences of GBV in food systems and the support available to women experiencing violence. Support mobile hotlines to mitigate and respond to these risks where it can be done safely, understanding that not all women and girls have access to phones.
- Use low tech dissemination approaches such as talking points, mobile dialogues, and feedback platforms such as those used by Farm Radio International and Ulula to conduct gender-sensitive messaging on the barriers and impacts of COVID-19 on women, and to support increased agency, access, and decision-making for women.
- Engage men, boys, and traditional leaders on women's access to productive resources including nutritional, workload, income, gender-based violence, agency, and decision-making.
- Engage social movements, women's organizations, [savings groups](#), producer and marketing groups, and other community groups to create awareness on prevention and response to COVID-19 and to support gender equity efforts.
- Ensure community decision making bodies, including disaster risk management and health committees, are gender balanced and develop gender responsive plans that address the different needs of women, girls, men, and boys. Incorporate women's voices and knowledge challenging social norms that restrict women's ability to participate.
- Build on existing initiatives that provide prevention, protection and response services to survivors of GBV through existing legal and psychological referral systems.
- Support establishment of gender responsive communication channels and dissemination platforms.
- Vigilantly uphold [CARE's policy on Protection of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).

## Youth Inclusion

### Implications

- Closures of formal and non-formal training and education opportunities, depriving youth of their education and social engagement with their peers, educators, and healthcare providers. Prolonged periods of closures and movement restrictions may lead to increased drop-out rates for girls, adolescent pregnancies, emotional unrest, heightened anxiety and potential for recruitment into armed groups.
- Illness and death among susceptible elderly populations will shift on- and off- farm activities onto younger generations who have different needs, skills, capacities, viewpoints, and technological habits than older generations.
- Increased risk of exploitation when seeking income/revenue and family support, including human trafficking and child early and forced marriage as a coping strategy.

- Lack of access to critical reproductive health services and products, and increased burden of unpaid care work which increases exposure to COVID-19 and other maladies.
- Migrant workers returning from abroad and those who work in cities are returning to home villages, increasing economic strain and food insecurity within households

### **Response**

- Establish new ways of providing gender-sensitive information and support to adolescents and young people for agriculture, training, employment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). For example, support young people in risk communication, extension messaging, social behavior change, and virtual community engagement via social media and technology.
- Empower youth on social media to disseminate accurate and useful information on COVID-19, risk reduction, national preparedness and response efforts.
- Engage youth in promotion of gender-equitable messages on COVID-19 and related health issues – i.e. nutrition, SRHR.
- Connect youth into markets and Value Chains where they have assumed market responsibilities from the elderly.
- Explore virtual intergenerational dialogues that include discussion of social norms and the rights of women and girls between the youth and adults.
- Link to existing education programming to ensure girls in particular are encouraged and supported to resume classes when schools re-open.

## **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**

### **Implications**

- Activities related to data collection in the communities are postponed and delayed.
- Data limitations will impact upcoming reporting.

### **Response**

- Follow CARE's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidance, particularly in shifting to remote data collection keeping in mind that there will be a dramatic decrease in data collection processes.
- Use of social media (e.g. WhatsApp, SMS, DHIS@ and Kobo tools) to remain connected with frontline staff and women for easy access and flow of information that take into consideration women's specific needs and access to phones.
- Develop, advocate for, and review existing tools and data points for any required adjustments, especially to ensure that data related to the outbreak is disaggregated by sex, age, and other relevant parameters, and analyzed accordingly in order to understand the gendered differences.
- Strengthen assessment, M&E and information management processes to better capture and address the needs of women and girls.
- Adapt reporting to reflect qualitative information and program plan changes.
- Clearly document and communicate all adaptive management decisions made as a result of COVID-19.
- Work with other actors to share information on situation analysis and data collection to reduce duplication of efforts.
- Use Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms (i.e. toll-free hotlines) to better support community response and react to emerging community needs.
- Employ gender-based violence monitoring.