COVID-19: AIF India Preparedness & Response Strategy

Situational Assessment

COVID-19 is caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. It is also called Novel Coronavirus as it has never been identified before. WHO has declared it’s outbreak as a global pandemic. As on 29th March, there are 575,444 confirmed cases across 202 countries or territories, with 26,654 confirmed deaths as per WHO. India is at a crucial stage of a possible transition from stage II to stage III (community transmission). As per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), as on 19th March, there were 1,095 confirmed cases of COVID-19 across 27 states and union territories in India and 25 confirmed deaths across 13 states. At the time of writing this, India has been placed under a 21-day lockdown, the GoI’s focus is on preventing community transmission through social distancing and management of COVID-19 cases.

With poor living conditions, overcrowding of many setting and more than 70% of the population engaged in the unorganized sectors for employment (and therefore daily waged workers and freelancers), the poor and underprivileged in India are at higher risk due to a lack of knowledge and weak access to health care. They are not only at risk of getting health-shock due to the fast-spreading corona virus infection, they are also most likely to bear a disproportionate brunt of the resulting economic distress.

As an organization that has its origins in a humanitarian response (Gujarat Earthquake 2001-02) and experience of responding to several humanitarian emergencies since, AIF is uniquely placed to leverage its existing multi-sectoral programmatic infrastructure, reach and access across multiple geographies in India, working with communities on public health, education and livelihoods, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. AIF seeks to build on its strong partnership with the central and state governments, local NGOs and institutions to work on a collaborative model of disseminating best practices, promoting preparedness and building resilience among communities.

Most of the intervention proposed will be delivered through the existing ‘service delivery platforms’ (frontline health workers, teachers, community mobilisers, local self-governments etc) and therefore these will not only contribute to COVID-19 preparedness and response, but also to longer term health system strengthening in the country.

As a premier non-profit in India and in the US (top rated by Charity Navigator and Guidestar), AIF will prioritise staff well-being and duty of care for its staff, volunteers and partners in carrying out these interventions. The response will be led by the India Country Director and supported by AIF’s Public Health, Education and Livelihoods Programme Directors and the members of the India Leadership Team (ILT). This team will receive active support and supervision from the New York based CEO, Nishant Pandey, and COO/CFO, Pratibha Srinivasan, under the overall guidance of the AIF Board of Directors. An initial needs assessment will be carried out in accessible areas. AIF has an existing network of partners across India and we will be using this network for delivering this response strategy.

EMERGENCY RELIEF MEASURES: AIF is currently engaged in undertaking the following activities

1. Working with donors, hospitals, government institutions and manufacturers/suppliers for provision of lifesaving and protective equipment such as ventilators, thermal scanners and personal protection equipment for health personnel and caregivers.
2. Provision of health kits to the community including soap, handwash, hand sanitizers, wet wipes and face masks in the community through the district administration, frontline workers and volunteers with the support of AIF personnel and partner organizations.

3. Virtual employee engagement and volunteering through online and telephonic mode for virtual communications, teaching, mentoring, counselling and connecting with communities on their needs and requirements.

The overall intervention framework for AIF’s COVID-19 response consists of the following focus areas:

**A. Behaviour Change Communication (including digital engagement)**

**Immediate interventions** by AIF would include:

1. Disseminate correct and relevant information on COVID-19 and preventive measures using existing and new visually-rich IEC material, including visual aids in the local languages, for low-literacy populations through existing AIF presence in the field. These would be based on Government data inputs and material.

2. Enhance the communication effectiveness of frontline resources including the ASHA (last mile heath workers), Anganwadi (child development services for nutrition and pre-schooling) workers, panchayat (local self-government) members, school teachers and community influencers through use of online/mobile-based solutions for provision of adequate communication aids/tools and appropriate information useful for settings that adhere to applicable social distancing norms.

3. Utilize the high mobile phone density that reaches almost every household to share necessary hygiene tips such as frequent handwashing, social distancing, seeking early medical care if symptomatic to COVID-19.

4. Collaborate with the state governments and local administrations to amplify their communication efforts in the areas where AIF has a presence.

In the **medium term**, the following activities are envisaged:

1. Mobile vans using public address systems that travel to media-dark locations especially rural areas and locations endemic to seasonal migration of people.

2. Strengthen and leverage AIF’s existing Swachcha Vidyalay – Swachcha Bharat (Clean School – Clean India) campaign for COVID-19 specific response - school level awareness and sensitization for students along with creation of health clubs.

3. Use of story-telling methodology through CBSE comic books to spread information on coronavirus, its transmission, prevention and management.

4. Mobile based online module with videos/animations, interactive language with visual content and minimal text.

**B. Promoting Community Preparedness**

While the government is gearing itself to face the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, the poor infrastructure, distribution and healthcare mechanisms especially in rural areas seem woefully inadequate in terms of the urgent needs to prevent the further spread of the infections to pandemic levels. The following measures need to be taken up in the **immediate term** to support the ongoing efforts:

1. Distribution of health kits including soap, handwash, hand sanitizers, wet wipes and face masks in the community through the frontline health workers, anganwadi workers,
panchayat leaders, teachers and volunteers with the support of AIF personnel and partner organizations.

2. Provide correct information to the community on availability of health care, testing facilities and protocols to be adopted in case of symptoms.

3. Demonstrating the correct use of protective masks, handwashing using soap, usage of hand sanitizers, coughing techniques, self-quarantining, greeting people, etc. through home visits by AIF staff, NGO resources and volunteers.

In the medium term, the following activities are envisaged:

1. Community-level production of protective masks through the beneficiaries of AIF’s livelihoods program where tailoring courses have been taken up. This would also include use of production centers set up by AIF partners.

2. Local production of hand sanitizers using WHO guidelines through social entrepreneurs in different geographies and support in distribution to the community.

3. Creating a cadre of teachers, education department staff, school management committee members, health club leaders, along with students who are trained on pandemic preparedness.

4. Supporting life skills training of children through parents and teachers.

C. Building long-term Resilience of Communities

Anticipating massive disruptions to the economic status of individuals, home-based businesses and production units and small-scale enterprises in urban slums and rural areas, the post-pandemic recovery should include building resilience of the community to safeguard themselves. These measures include:

1. Livelihood/employment and rehabilitation through effective re-skilling, up-skilling and entrepreneurship development. This intervention would be targeted at those who are at the bottom of the pyramid, and those who have lost their jobs specifically due to COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Industries that have been most seriously affected such as travel, aviation and other sectors will be prioritized.

2. Advocate and create a national narrative on Best Practices in Remote Employment through an online platform that brings together all the opportunities of remote employment at one place. Most companies and businesses who are being forced to adopt “work from home” practices are painfully aware of the lack of adequate policies, strategies and best practices for making remote employment productive. An urgent response to this need will be targeted by AIF.

3. AIF will seek to create fresh remote employment opportunities for people without jobs in remote, inaccessible rural areas. Remote employment would be especially useful for people with disabilities to whom access is a major issue while seeking a livelihood.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) are cornerstones of program interventions planned at AIF. Regular monitoring will ensure that the processes laid out at the planning stage are adhered to throughout the course of the implementation. Mobile based technologies will be utilized for real time information to flow directly from the field to the central team. This will ensure that the program is on the right track and field level realities and challenges can be dealt with, in a timely manner. As per the need and type of intervention, Baseline and Endline evaluations will also be conducted, either internally or externally by a third party, to assess the impact of the interventions. Using its presence, reach and access of programs, AIF teams on the ground with the support of its leadership will also be assessing the fast-changing situation in the community and adapt programme
design and operating models that would address the current, medium and long term needs of the communities.

AIF seeks the support of its donors and partners to augment its resources for the urgent implementation of this COVID-19 India Preparedness & Response Strategy.