

Prevention and Mitigation Measures for COVID-19 on the Implementation of Agricultural Projects

**(with high priority on the safety of FSL partners' staff
and farmers)**

Agriculture Technical Working Group (ATWG)
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Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster Turkey Hub

Gaziantep, Turkey

www.fscluster.org | info.syria@FSCluster.org

As the Pandemic Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread in an unpredictable manner, it presents a growing risk to Field staff and beneficiaries in the context of Syria crisis response.

This document aims to provide key guidance during Agricultural projects implementation phase to minimize the risk of exposure of NGOs personnel, and farmers. Adjustments should be in line with the instructions and guidelines provided by the World Health Organization, local authorities, and Ministry of Health.

This document outlines the standard operating procedure (SOP) to be applied in the agricultural distribution processes by FSL partner's field teams, in an effort to enhance the safety in the operation areas in NW Syria.

Key messages:

- COVID-19 is a global pandemic that is already having tangible impacts on the agriculture sector.
- In addition to its potential health effects, COVID-19 threatens to affect the livelihoods of poor rural farmers who relies on agriculture.
- Given that we focus on the poorest of the poor, FSL partners have a concern that the impact of COVID-19 on the beneficiary groups is likely to be severe.
- Investments in rural agricultural programmes can help people become more self-reliant, mitigate the impact of severe events, increase rural prosperity, ensure sustainable food systems and food security.
- Economic growth in agriculture is three times more effective in reducing poverty and food insecurity than other sectors. Investments in small-scale agriculture can help improve food production while creating job opportunities and enable rural communities to recover.

1. General recommended actions:

a. Assess the priority and urgency of the needs:

- Balance the humanitarian needs with safety of staff and farmers. Field offices are best positioned to understand the need.
- Reduce the workloads to include only the prioritized/urgent cases as long as restrictions on movements and gatherings are in place.

b. Plan and organize Agricultural interventions in advance:

- Coordinate with local authorities on their plans for: providing approvals, prioritized projects, monitoring and supervision of activities to adjust project timelines and modalities.

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- For less urgent projects, the NGO management team can use this period of time to finalize the necessary preparations such as: submitting requests for approvals, coordination with donors, preparing the agreements, drafting BoQs and procuring materials for agriculture.
- This period of time can also be used for area-based/community level assessments to help (re)plan agricultural projects related to communal infrastructure.
- Organize awareness sessions addressed to staff, contractors, volunteers, and laborers on the preventive and mitigation measures as indicated by the Ministry of Health, local authorities, and WHO; including handwashing, hygiene and sterilization.

c. Communicate with farmers in advance of work:

- Regarding coordination and communication tasks, use alternative modalities such as phone calls, SMS or online means to avoid unnecessary social contact and gathering.
- When contacting farmers, provide the necessary awareness on the current situation related to Covid 19, prevention and mitigation measures, and what steps should be taken in advance.
- Also make sure to guide farmers on the precautionary measures that they can take to ensure their safety.
- Provide farmers the option to opt-out explaining how they can re-program their work while maintaining the planned assistance.
- For activities that demand direct interaction with farmers (e.g. interviews for post-intervention monitoring), consider using modalities such as phone interviews.

d. Do not allow crowding at the project site:

- When identifying the prioritized cases and projects, it is strongly recommended to avoid close social contact and crowded places.
- Encourage both farmers and field staff to follow social distancing guidelines; if possible, conduct work when there are less people.
- If the implementation is done through NGO staff directly, will try to rely on local service providers and suppliers as much as possible to minimize movements across different communities.
- If the implementation is done through contractors, efforts will be in place to partner with local contractor(s) in order to minimize movements across different communities.

e. Consider hygiene and sanitation measures:

- Make sure that sanitization and hygiene measures are in place for farmers and field staff including that they have the right personal PPE (masks, gloves, etc.), have access to handwashing facilities with adequate soap and/or gel, and practice appropriate hygiene practices.
- As much as possible, conduct monitoring through online communication means.

2. Pre-work guide (Before Agriculture Distribution Processes)

a. Field staff

- Make sure that you don't have any symptoms of the COVID19 such as fever, dry cough and other symptoms by making sure of the following: check your temperature, wear a medical disposable face mask.
- The following employees are forbidden from work to prevent the spread of the virus: who have moved or traveled to places where the virus is active; who have contacted with people that came from places of virus spread; or with people already infected with the virus, and those with symptoms of fever, or they feel sick.
- Always wear a medical face mask, sit in the back seat of the car, and keep a proper distance between you and the driver, keep the car windows opened; and if the driver turns on the air conditioner, tell him to activate the fan mode and avoid getting into the car with large numbers of people where the rate of infection is high.
- Keep a proper distance between you and others, avoid talk to them in the waiting line.
- Try to reduce the rounds of work as much as possible, and if you can't, you must adhere to all personal precautions.
- Preparing the necessary banners and posters to raise awareness about this epidemic.
- Providing training about the preventive measures against COVID-19 for the teams before going to the field.

b. Farmers

- Set up a handwashing point with an appropriate hand washing solution (0.05 sterile bleach solution)
- Make sure that there are visible signs showing exit and entry points in the distribution area.

- Contact farmers through WhatsApp groups before the distribution process and divide them into groups up to ten people, to ensure reduced crowding during distribution and waiting.
- Increasing the number of distribution days, which will extend the distribution cycle, while reducing the number of people/farmers on the site.
- Implementing two daily distribution rounds in order to reduce the number of farmers on the site, simplify the verification and distribution processes, and increase the number of volunteers.
- Dividing the farmers into groups, if possible, so after the end of the distribution process for the first group, and after they leave the place of distribution, the distribution of the second group will start.
- Avoiding the presence of the elderly farmers who are over fifty (>50) at the points of distribution. Door to door will be put in place for elder farmers.
- Activating the portable distribution mechanism, whenever possible, where quotas are transferred by pick-up to the local community and direct distribution will be done from the trucks.
- Provide the field staff with protective hats, masks, clothing, and gloves to screen the temperature of the farmers. Thermometers devices must be placed at the gate (in and out), if there is more than one gate, it is recommended using the main gate only and closing the other(s).

3. Within-work guide (During the Agriculture Distribution Process):

a. Field staff

- Bring the hand sanitizer with you.
- Avoid using public transportation if you can.
- Meet in an open space instead of closed rooms.
- Avoid opening doors with your hand in the meeting area (use the arm if possible) and avoid handshaking.
- During the meeting, try not to touch your face.
- Bring your stationery to the place and don't use the stationary available at the meeting place.
- The distribution place must be ventilated to keep the air moving in, open windows and doors as much as possible to ventilate the place.
- Surround the area around the table (1 meter - using a rope or tape) at the distribution point if possible. This will ensure that the area is intended for one farmer only.
- Use your personal cup and do not accept drinks (such as tea, coffee, etc.).

- The meeting place should be prepared so that there are 2 meters between you and the other person.
- Separate the distributed materials from the distribution point and the crowded place as much as possible.
- Allocate garbage baskets to get rid of used protection disposable (face masks).
- If an infection is detected during the meeting, the meeting must be cancelled immediately and report to the health focal points.
- When symptoms such as: fever, cough, chest pain, vomiting, bone pain, and other Symptoms, for any beneficiary, should be immediately transferred to the hospital for treatment
- When you get home, wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds at least before you touch anything

b. Farmers

- Ensuring the presence of special awareness posters and brochures.
- Providing the distribution points by water and soap, which will be available for staff and farmers.
- Only one service provider, NGO's employee, and one farmer must be allowed to enter the distribution room at the same time. It is necessary to take care of the cleanliness and sterilization of the distribution room, reduce the public gatherings as much as possible.
- Inform the farmer about the meeting and make sure the meeting place is not crowded with people and visitors.
- No physical contact should be happened between the distribution staff and the farmers beneficiaries or between the beneficiaries themselves.
- Workers at the collection point should place the kit on the table/linoleum at the distribution point and then take a step backward so that the farmer can take the kit by himself.
- After receiving the kits, the farmer will be guided to the exit point from the site and encouraged to leave the place immediately without any gathering with other farmers.
- Prioritizing the distribution process for pregnant women who accompanied children and the elderly people.
- Reducing the number of agriculture kits/vouchers to be distributed at each point, in order to avoid the Congestion and gathering at the place of distribution.
- Increasing the number of daily workers.
- Organizing and clearly defining the areas as allocated in the distribution site.
- Make sure to organize the farmers (queue, line) to be at one-meter distance at least between the individuals at the receiving point, verification point, the collection point and the exit point.

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