North East Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa & Yobe) Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Guidance Notes

Background

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. In the current situation where COVID-19 is rapidly spreading worldwide, and with the number of cases rising with increasing pace in several affected countries, there is a need for immediate targeted action. Nigeria confirmed its first case on 27th February 2020. Since then, the number of confirmed cases has been increasing. By the morning of March 29th, 2020, the total confirmed cases within Nigeria had risen to ninety-seven. As of March 30, 2020, no case had been confirmed in the North Eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY). However, the North-Eastern Nigeria is highly endemic to diarrheal and other diseases (malaria, measles, Lasa fever, Meningitis, Hep E) with limited access to health services, and chronic underdevelopment compounded by poverty and years of conflict and displacement. The lack of adequate potable water and sanitation infrastructure coupled with extreme flooding has seen cholera among other cases rise every rainy season, while the protracted conflict has kept IDPs in overcrowded camps and overstretched the little resources and infrastructure in host community. This heightens the risk and potential negative impact of the COVID-19 on food assistance programs, on the different categories of people in the BAY states including the IDPs, people in the inaccessible and Hard to Reach areas and the Host Community.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food Security Sector Partners will work with other sectors and government structures for a coordinated multi-sectoral response, to sustain food assistance support to food insecure households during this period. The Food Security Sector will also develop a separate guidance note for preparedness and response towards protecting and sustaining livelihoods support in the different locations of the BAY states.

Two main pillars of focus for food assistance will be;

- **Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)** to inform decision making related to personal risk, mitigate rumors, share information and advice among communities, vendors and officials, and to effectively involve communities in the response to control the outbreak. The communication will also include the specific Food Security preparedness and response measures that are in place by the various Food Security Partners.

- **Infection Prevention and Control** (IPC) by implementing various (or a combination of) recommended methodologies to prevent infection mainly by ensuring sanitation, hygiene and social distancing, in the various food assistance activities.

This document does not summarily exhaust solutions or recommendations. However, it is a guidance note that has been drafted in relation to the specific context of the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states of the North East Nigeria, in consultation with Task Force members including various government agencies and non-government organizations through teleconference calls on March 25th and 26th of 2020. The document will also be regularly updated as the context evolves.
Preparedness and Response Mechanism

1. How the COVID-19 threat may impact the BAY states Food Assistance response?

- Border closures, restriction of movements and numbers of individuals gathering at a time will reduce movement of food and food-preparation commodities. This may interrupt market operations and preposition of commodities in the different locations, hence a threat to regular food assistance support. In event that the markets are interrupted that supply cannot meet demand, this may lead to increase in prices. The partners will continue monitoring to ensure the to assess the impact of the price changes on the MEB or SMEB value.
- The likelihood of reduced productive activities may also affect production, hence further reducing food availability.
- In event that there are gaps in food assistance, this may lead to demonstrations and strikes in the camps. Continuous community engagement and sensitization will be key in mitigating this.
- In event that restrictions are put in place for accessing the camps and any other category of food insecure people, this may lead to delayed response in delivering food assistance to the people in need. As per March 26th, 2020, confirmed by NEMA and SEMA authorities, the current restrictions of entry into the camps do not apply to the humanitarian actors.
- Liquidity issues may also arise especially if the financial service providers reduce operations and are not able to meet the demand of the response. This may significantly affect vendors and beneficiaries as well.
- With additional precautionary measures in place, the cost of operations of some specific activities may increase. For instance, with smaller distributions in line with social distancing measures, more days may be required to finalize distributions hence more costs. Additional sanitary and hygiene items will have to be in place going forward.
- Key risks will include how to handle new arrivals in the different locations. In event that a case is confirmed, the management of new arrivals as a result of conflict and/or other shocks, from and into the areas affected becomes more complex.

2. What practical precautionary measures should be done by partners to ensure safety of stakeholders especially beneficiaries, volunteers and staff?

The measures vary from sanitation and hygiene, to social distancing.
Among the key precautionary measures proposed by the different partner by partners include;
- Sensitization to all stakeholders including staff, community, vendors a key precautionary measure. The sensitization should as well be targeted and in the most suitable local languages and various medium of communication for the local population. The sensitization should be on both the prevention of infection strategies, and the various changes activity implementation that will be implemented in coordination with the community. For instance, during sensitization, in coordination with other Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) actors, it is critical to mention also to the various stakeholders that those who have recent cases of related signs and symptoms of the COVID-19 (without stigma), should be allowed to self-isolate and restricted from participating in public activities such as food distributions. Rather, an alternate and reliable household member should be recommended to take part. On this note, the needs of the extremely vulnerable households/individuals need to be put into considering. These include individuals and households with chronic illness, child-headed, aged. Therefore, as part of the preparedness, the
partner organization feedback mechanism should be further strengthened and include the remote management, given the high likelihood of reduced footprint in the community.

- Social distancing: This will be implemented in different ways depending on the context and capacity of partners. Among the key recommendations are:
  - Suspending non-critical activities. Partners have recommended to focus on mainly lifesaving and potentially livelihoods protection activities with precaution
  - Partners also emphasized crowd reduction as much as possible, in and around distribution points
  - Setting up separate distribution points in the camps
  - Both Partners implementing through Cash Voucher Assistance and in-kind have specifically identified the vendors and tricycle (keke na pep) owners/riders as a key target group for sensitization to ensure they implement the preparedness measures. This is because often, the tri-cycle carries about 3 to 4 passengers and this affects the social distancing. Therefore, in addition to potentially reducing the numbers of people carried per trip to and fro the activity sites, disinfecting the tricycles will be essential.
  - Partners including both government and non-government partners have agreed to go forward with at least distributions that cover more distributions for extra days, preferably double-month distributions. This would also reduce movements and contact in the between different stakeholder individuals in the coming weeks as the situation evolves.

Some partners already have started implementing some of the precautions in the March distribution. Among the measures include having reduced numbers of people at the distribution points. A partner also mentioned a door-to-door delivery mechanism already in place.

- Sanitation and Hygiene Measures: These measures will vary from personal to public health.
  - Partners have highly recommended putting in place public-use/non-touch/forehead thermometers for measuring temperatures of beneficiaries and staff before and after distribution and redemption
  - Handwashing facilities and sanitizers will also be in place and all beneficiaries and staff coming into the distribution areas will be required to wash or sanitize before and after joining the distributions or redemption activities.
  - All partners should coordinate with respective health workers to ensure that is at least a minimum measure of isolation at the distribution and redemption points

**Triggers and Thresholds for operations to implement the preparedness and response measures**

When asked at what point should all the preparedness and response measures be put in place, all actors agreed that the preparedness and response measures be put in place immediately by food security partners in coordination with the relevant stakeholders including the community, sectors and respective government structures. This is due to the fact the pandemic is already in country hence having the BAY States also at risk.

**Way forward on biometrics services vis-a-visa Food Assistance Response**

A colleague from IOM – DTM team joined the call and clarified that the IOM- DTM biometric services will continue. However, this time it will continue with extra precautions including disinfections. This should be in complementarity to other measures in place by the respective partners including hand washing, in addition to the various measures to be affected by the different partners

**Market Monitoring and analysis**
To maintain high quality of the response especially for the activities implemented through the Cash Voucher Assistance, Market Monitoring and Analysis is critical. As part of preparedness and potential response:

- Partners have recommended the use of remote data collection where feasible.
- Partners also proposed a joint inter-partner market monitoring and analysis team where partners join efforts to set up a single team to reduce footprint. This could be through having a joint team or also potentially relying on one partner in the same location to collect recommended data from the different respondents including vendors, beneficiaries among others. This is to be discussed in detail in the FSS Assessment Taskforce for COVID-19.
- Partners may as well consider the reduction of the frequencies or numbers of market monitoring and data collection visits.

3. **Key advocacy Points and Recommendation**

- All actors are encouraged to enforce sensitization messages on the COVID-19 pandemic, together with the preparedness and potential response measures that are (will be) in place for specific food assistance activities. These prevention messages are from the government with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO).
- As part of the preparedness, partners recommended to immediately start implementing the precautionary and response measures as applicable. Specifically, both government and non-government partners agreed to implementing a two-month food assistance (or at least more than the normal monthly ratios going forward. This should be backed by a rapid market assessment to ascertain feasibility of supply meeting demand, guided by Do-No-Harm principles. This will also vary by partner capacity.
- Partners to consider other approaches for market monitoring and analysis including remote, online or setting up joint teams for this activity for the different specific areas of operation. The Food Security Sector will follow up with coordination efforts towards harmonizing the market monitoring and analysis going forward. A separate Food Security Assessment Taskforce on COVID-19 which has been established will start meeting on Tuesday 31 March 2020 to harmonize a way forward.
- All actors should have enhanced risk mitigation measures in place for with the various thresholds. The Food Security Sector will coordinate the development of a Risk Analysis and the different scenarios and thresholds.
- The government should ensure a safe and precautioned movements of food complementary non-food commodities in pipeline to the BAY states.
- Partners whose activities are implementing through CVA (and any other market-based), should consider continuing with the existing structures of operations and communications on market related discussions including vendors. In event of challenges, the various offices of the State Emergency Management Authority (SEMA) will be the focal points of support in the different areas of operation.
- Partners should continuously coordinate with the relevant sectors including CCCM, WASH among others in the camps to ensure complementarity in sensitization and mobilization.
- The Food Security Sector will also develop a separate guidance note for preparedness and response towards protecting and sustaining livelihoods support in the different locations.
- Partners have also proposed the postponement of non-critical activities.
- Partners to follow up on liquidity issues and preparedness of the different service providers.
- The IOM-DTM team will also share with Food Security Partners a detailed Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) that has been put in place to enhance precautionary measures.