



TO: All Trees for the Future Field Staff and Field Partners

FROM: Trees for the Future Executive Director, John Leary

DATE: April 3, 2020

RE: UPDATED COVID-19 Response: Stopping In-person Activities for at least the month of April

STATUS: Urgent

Your health and the health of your farming communities are of the utmost importance! We thank you for following the initial COVID-19 Response Guidelines that were sent out on [March 25th](#). However, the rapidly evolving nature of the virus worldwide makes it necessary to act with extreme caution.

We want to again stress the seriousness of COVID-19, countries that have not taken proper measures are now seeing large outbreaks, including the United States.

We have been consulting with many international organizations and researchers this week to determine the best actions to protect the health and safety of our staff and farmers. **After much reflection, we have decided that we will stop all in-person, face-to-face field activities and close offices in all countries for at least the month of April.** We know many of you have begun working remotely and are following the protocol that we sent last week. **We have spoken with Country Directors who can answer questions and provide further guidance on what this will mean in practice. This is not meant to be a holiday or time to travel or gather with friends and extended family. We require all staff to stay at home with their immediate family and only communicate electronically with the rest of the team (via messages, video, and phone calls). Here is what to expect:**

- We have cut all non essential spending. You will continue to receive your salary.
- If you haven't yet, you will return or park your motorbike and not use it until further notice from your Country Director.
- You will be given additional phone/wifi credits to communicate with farmers and guidance from your Regional Coordinator on how to track your communications with farmers.
- You will continue to track farmers progress via phone calls to provide guidance, answer questions, and check on their well being.

- We encourage you to continue to study the Forest Garden Technical Manual and Facilitators Guide. You can access all the information in English and French offline through the Forest Garden App downloadable at: training.trees.org. **Please use this time to study the materials and master the techniques, so you can be even more helpful to farmers in the future.**
- Look out for new field resources that will soon be distributed to the field from the Innovations team.
- Use the time to organize pictures and videos you have stockpiled, and make sure to share with the communications team. Follow TREES on social media and support the Earth Day Campaign.
- We encourage you to talk with other staff and farmers to see how they are doing in their communities - via phone calls, videos, or messages.
- We will continue to work with office-based staff remotely (e.g. accountants, supervisors, and other essential office personnel).

When at home continue to follow these guidelines and urge family members to do the same:

- Wash hands regularly, including after visits to the market.
- Limit visits to the market or outside to public places.
- Please try to stay at least 6 feet (2 meters) away from other customers while at the market stands and in lines. To reduce the number of people at the market, please only send 1 person per family to shop (no kids please, if possible). Please stay home if you are not feeling well.
- If feeling sick with a fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath, seek medical attention and notify your supervisor and anyone you have been in close contact with.
- Do not shake hands, hug or share food and drink with people outside your family or with anyone who is ill. Even if you don't suspect they are ill, this is a best practice, since many people can still transmit the infection while not showing symptoms. While this may go against acceptable cultural norms, you can explain that it is to preserve the health of everyone. This is an unusual time, but smiles, waves, and friendly words go a long way.
- This is a stressful time for everyone, please take care of yourself, your families and continue to communicate with friends and colleagues to stay positive.
- **There is currently NO vaccine and NO medication that can prevent or cure COVID-19.** A lot of misinformation has been spread about this. Please do not try to take non-approved, recommended medications for this virus as it can cause other illnesses.

Remote Communications

The key to making this new strategy work is excellent communications with staff and Lead Farmers. In accordance with the previous COVID-19 Response, each country has created groups on WhatsApp to segment communications and get mass communications out quickly to different teams as necessary. It is during times of crisis that we can be innovative and

creative in our solutions. We will continue to seek advice from you and look to you for ideas and innovative ways to continue to educate and communicate with farmers remotely.

Farmers with Smartphones: In projects where Lead Farmers have smartphones, WhatsApps Groups have been created with Technicians and Lead Farmers. **TREES staff is in the process of making short in-country videos in local languages to describe key processes, such as seed preparation, soil preparation, nursery care, etc. These videos will be sent to Lead Farmers via WhatsApp to use as references to guide other farmers. The protocol for developing in-country videos can be found [here](#).**

Farmers with Regular Phones: In projects where Lead Farmers have regular phones, Text Message Groups have been created with Technicians and Lead Farmers. Technicians will also follow up 1-on-1 with farmers via phone calls to answer questions and make sure that they are implementing things correctly.

All official health communication about COVID-19 should only be relayed by the Country Director to ensure information is correct and uniform. *We caution that all these groups are meant to share **official** information, coordinate between staff and farmers, and check on each other's health and safety to ensure everyone in the program feels supported and calm. These communication groups should never be used to share 'home remedies for a cure', rumors, or unofficial news updates that provide misinformation and create panic and fear.* **Country Directors will provide guidance on messaging to farmers. However, in your communications, it is important to convey a compassionate message to the farmers that we are in no way discontinuing their project or abandoning them, we just need to ensure that they are not exposed to this very contagious and dangerous virus.** We will resume normal activity with farmers as soon as it is safe.

Below are the recommended communication groups. Each country can adapt the system to work for their own field offices.

- **Head Office Group:**
Country Director, Liaison, Accountants, Bookkeepers, M&E officer, Partner Coordinator, Training coordinator, Driver, Seed Bank Coordinator (any other staff working in Head Office)
- **Lead Supervisors Group:**
Country Director, Regional Program Coordinator, Technician Supervisors
- **Technicians Group:**
Regional Program Coordinators, Technician Supervisors, All technicians from the country
- **Regional Groups:**
All staff in each Region
- **1 Group for Each Project:**
Lead technicians, assistant technicians, and lead farmers from that project.

Timing

This will be set in place immediately, and lifted at a further point when the risk of virus transmission has lowered. We are not sure when this will be, so staff should make plans to operate under this protocol for at least the month of April and possibly well beyond. We hope that the spread of the virus will slow and we can commence work again sooner rather than later. Headquarters is in nearly constant contact with Country Directors. We will be continually following the situation and keep everyone up to date weekly or more frequently if needed. However, the main concern now is the health and safety of everyone, including staff and farmers.

As leaders in your farming communities, people look to you for answers. This is the time to show, in both words and actions, the steps needed to protect your community. If you have any questions, please reach out to Country Directors at this time.

Thank you and stay healthy and safe!