



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

FROM: Trees for the Future Programs Director, Brandy Lellou

DATE: May 7, 2020

RE: 3rd Update COVID-19 Response: Remote Assistance for Resilience

STATUS: Urgent

KEY TOPICS:

- **TREES Operational Directives**
- **Remote Communications**
- **Coordinated Assistance**
- **Protecting Yourself and Your Community**

Your health and the health of our 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](#) and [April 3rd](#). We know that the last two months have been very difficult.

We want to again stress the seriousness of COVID-19: countries that have not taken proper containment measures continue to see large outbreaks, including the United States.

We have been consulting with Country Directors, Regional Coordinators, trainers and technicians over the last month to better understand the conditions and difficulties farmers face in each country.

TREES OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES

Due to the fact that most countries remain in lockdown with stay-at-home orders, offices in ALL countries will continue to be closed through at least the end of the month of May. We will continue watching the situation closely and work with each country to open safely as it becomes possible. All TREES staff will continue to work from home with NO in-person, face-to-face field activities unless given special permission.

We require all staff to stay at home with their immediate family and only communicate electronically with the rest of the team and famers (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.
- You **will not** use your motorbike (unless given special permission by your supervisor for a specific, limited task).
- 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. A remote communications tracking tool has been developed on TaroWorks. Guidance on using this tool is provided below.
- You **will** continue to track and train farmers progress via phone calls to provide guidance, answer questions, and check on their well being.
- We will be working with you **to gather and report on the needs of farmers during this time**. Some upcoming responses to the most immediate needs are outlined below.
- 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.**
- We will continue to work with office-based staff remotely (e.g. accountants, supervisors, and other essential office personnel).

There are three key areas where we can focus our energy and work efforts over the next month: 1) Remote Communications, 2) Coordinated Assistance, 3) Protecting Yourself and Your Community.

1) REMOTE COMMUNICATIONS

We have been extremely impressed with your continued communication with 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. Staff and training teams will also continue conducting virtual meetings via whatsapp and Google hangouts. Technicians will continue to communicate with farmers based on the technology available to the farmer.

Farmers with Smartphones: In projects where Lead Farmers have smartphones, WhatsApp Groups have been created with Technicians and Lead Farmers. **TREES staff has made short in-country videos in local languages to describe key processes in nursery development including: seed preparation, soil preparation, nursery care, etc. These videos are being 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 are also following up 1-on-1 with farmers via phone calls to answer questions and make sure that they are implementing techniques correctly.

Remote Communications Tracking: A new task has been added to our monitoring platform Taro Works called *Record Remote Communication*. This feature allows you to select a project, group, and farmer and record the type of communication, subject, and notes. Most of you have already begun using this system. To see a list of all communications that have been recorded by country follow these steps:

- Go to <https://tff.force.com/taroworks/000/o>
- Log in using your TaroWorks login info
- Click on your country's Remote Communications report

This report will show you a list of all remote communications received via TaroWorks for each project. Please read through the notes every few days and work with your supervisor to report and resolve issues farmers are having. By default, the communications are only shown for the current calendar quarter (April through June), but this can all be changed, as needed. Please feel free to contact your country's M&E Coordinator (or Andrew@trees.org) for additional training or to request a customized view of this information.

COVID-19 Health Messaging: All official health communications about COVID-19 that you give to farmers or partners 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.

2) COORDINATED MARKET LINKAGE ASSISTANCE

Through discussions with each Country Director, we have identified key areas where we can take immediate action and other areas we will continue to monitor. They include:

Areas for Immediate Action:

- TREES farmers are producing an abundance of fruits and vegetables which, unlike grains and beans, have a very limited storage time—and can quickly go to waste if not taken to market. With lockdowns in many countries, some farmers are having difficulty getting their produce to market. To reduce post harvest loss, ensure farmers have an income from this produce and maximize food availability in each country, TREES Country Teams may be able to facilitate farmers in finding buyers for their produce, including other aid organizations and food aid distribution partners. **Country Directors will be leading and guiding this process through [a three step process found here](#).**
- **The key takeaway is that this is an emergency response to assist farmers during this unprecedented lockdown due to COVID-19. In the future, as TREES rolls out new advanced modules, technicians will be training and building the capacity of farmer groups to plan, market, negotiate and build relationships with buyers.**

Areas to Continue to Monitor:

- Farmer Food Security - Review which farmers showed low food security during most recent surveys. How can we assist with food distribution, at a local, regional, and national government level, and increasing and ensuring food access for our own farmers and their communities?
- Proactively redirecting food resources - How can we get our Forest Garden farmers' food into the hands of the people who need it, in their own communities and countries?
- Crop Resilience - How can we help farmers get access to services that can help with protection of crops? For example, crop storage, processing of fruits and vegetables, and crop insurance?
- County Response Efforts - How can we assist our farmers in country-led responses (e.g. food distribution), seed supplies, distributions of materials?
- COVID responses - How can we assist partners in facilitating grassroots support?
- Funding - How can we access government or international funding in response to the food crisis and COVID-19? How can we elevate our message of food security, sustainability, and future challenges through Forest Gardens to show how important having your own food sustainable supply is?

3) PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR COMMUNITY

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to do nothing. TREES employees are hard workers, energetic, and want to take action. We understand that being at home is difficult and you just want to be out working and helping farmers. However, at this time the best thing you can do is to avoid contact that can spread the virus. **In this way, you're saving**



lives. 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 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.

TIMING: This COVID-19 protocol will be in place until further notice. It will be lifted when the risk of virus transmission has lowered. We are monitoring the global situation, and are in-contact with our local staff and Country Directors very frequently regarding updates. We are not sure when this will be, so staff should make plans to operate under this protocol for **at least the month of May** and possibly months beyond. We hope that the spread of the virus will slow and we can commence work again sooner rather than later. 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 or feel free to contact Brandy Lellou, Director of Programs at brandy@trees.org

Thank you and stay healthy and safe!