

# Adapting CLD Processes to continue through Covid19

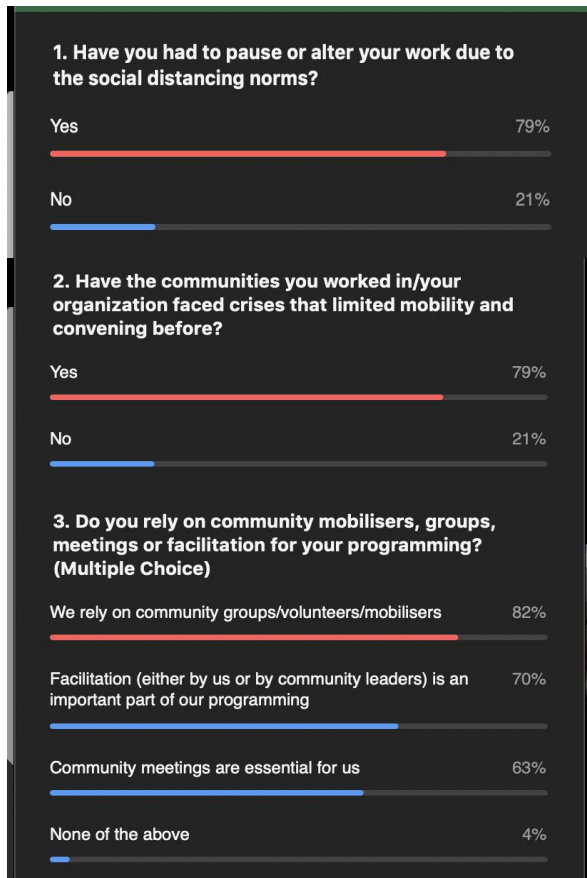
Tuesday, April 21 at 10:30 am - 12:00 pm EST

Facilitators:: Gunjan Veda (MCLD) and Nelly Mecklenburg (ISE)

On April 21, The Movement for Community Led Development organized a special call to collectively consider the challenges and barriers to CLD programming during COVID-19 preparation, response and recovery, and to brainstorm solutions. The focus of the meeting was on finding ways to continue our regular programming that relies heavily on facilitation, social mobilization, training and capacity development. These elements, that are at the core of CLD work to address hunger and poverty, build solidarity and voice, and increase local level decision-making, remain critical during this time of lockdowns and travel restrictions. The facilitators recognised that it would not be possible to come up with clearly defined strategies and solutions within 90 minutes. Instead, the purpose of the meeting was to start the conversation and identify the next steps to ensure that our programming is adaptive, not just in the face of the Covid19 pandemic, but in preparation for future crises that may come our way.

## Challenges/Barriers and Partner Experiences:

The meeting began with a discussion around the barriers and challenges that organizations are facing during the COVID19 pandemic, with respect to their regular programming. A quick poll revealed that 82% of the respondents relied on community groups and mobilisers, 63% believed community meetings were critical to them and 70% noted that facilitation was an integral part of their programming. Eight out of every 10 respondents had had to pause or alter their work due to social distancing norms. Interestingly, almost 80% of the respondents said either their organizations or they had faced crises that limited mobilisation before, Therefore, there was enough experience in the meeting to collectively work on solutions.



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Three partners from three different countries shared their experience of programming during the pandemic with the group. Arthur Nkosi from Corps Africa shared that in Malawi the Government had shut down education institutions and was sending students and teachers home without any back-up plan. Corps Africa is looking at “how to ensure access to education to the youth, especially rural youth” and how to run CLD programming after the volunteers leave. Arthur discussed working with telecommunications players (including Telecom Network Malawi) to set up a hot zone in areas where schools use solar energy- run computers, so that teachers and students could receive instructions. This will ensure that students can be taught in groups in their communities while Corps Africa volunteers

conduct research and aid in teaching.

Guillermo Sardi from Caracas Mi Convive informed the group that around 94% of Venezuelans in the most vulnerable communities had violated quarantine and been targeted by armed security forces for not wearing masks. People were spending money on food rather than protective gear. "Social inequality is large in Venezuela and **staying at home is a privilege few can afford.**" Caracas Mi Convive and their sister initiatives are finding ways to communicate with community leaders through text messaging and phone calls. The main goal of their work - building relationships within communities - has not changed. They value listening to what the communities need and their responses. Giving an example of innovative solutions, he shared that community kitchens are selling desserts to finance their fight against human rights violations through social media.

Emma Akello from Spark Microgrants pointed out that because Uganda was under lockdown, Spark Microgrants could no longer meet to facilitate action plans and projects. They have suspended all organization travel and field visits to community partners; community meetings and activities have been put on hold. Now they are supporting the Government's campaign to use SMS and phone calls to reach local leaders. They are working with communities over the phone to develop preparedness plans. Spark Microgrants has also begun to create organization system guidelines and procedures for future contingencies that may require remote work.

This was followed by a discussion around the four key barriers to CLD programming during Covid 19 that had been circulated prior to the meeting based on conversations with many partners. The various challenges identified by the participants before and during the meeting were grouped under these categories:

1. **Access:** This encompassed challenges that arise from our inability to travel, the lack of internet or phone connectivity etc. This also recognised the need to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable who have the least access.
2. **Convening:** This group of challenges dealt with the inability to convene, mobilise or undertake face-to-face work due to social distancing policies, stay-at-home orders/lockdowns, fear of contagion etc.
3. **Procurement/Service delivery:** These barriers were related to supply chain disruptions, shortages, closure of schools, government infrastructure or offices, lack of clarity on what was considered essential services, curbs on the movement of goods, etc.
4. **Time/Shifting Priorities:** This group of challenges spoke to the need to re-prioritize responsibilities as a result of the pandemic. People may be unable to engage in CLD processes due to caregiving responsibilities, sickness and ill-health, livelihood concerns, emerging tensions and divisiveness, etc
5. In addition to this there were a few other challenges like lack of clarity on contractual obligations in the wake of disrupted programming.

The facilitators pointed out that the challenges and barriers that we experience in our programming will vary with the phase of the pandemic that the communities we work with are in. For communities in the preparatory stage of the pandemic (the outbreak has just begun, lockdown orders are yet to be issued etc), there is a very small window of opportunity to set in place systems to deal with the lockdowns or the peak that is likely to follow. The challenge in this phase, as noted by friends from Nigeria, is also to convince the people that Covid19 is a serious threat that requires action. For organizations working in communities under lockdown or at peak (the response phase), there is a whole set of different challenges that revolve around lack of access, movement and supplies, fear, etc. Finally, when the pandemic ends (the recovery phase), the world will look different - already the incidence of hunger and poverty is going

up, community tensions are on the rise and violence against women is escalating. Both our programmes and communities have to prepare for the new set of challenges that will emerge in the post-Covid world. The facilitators urged the participants to consider the challenges and the solutions through the prism of these three phases.

### **Breakout Groups:**

After brainstorming manifestations of different barriers, participants worked in four breakout groups to dive into each of the four barriers (1. Access, 2. Convening, 3. Procurement/ Service Delivery, 4. Time/ Shifting Priorities), and brainstorm resources available, lessons learned from other experiences and possible solutions. Each group discussed:

- **What are the manifestations of the barrier in programming?** How does the barrier constrain our ability to hold community meetings, facilitate, etc.
- **What would communities and staff need to feel safe and do this work?** What is needed before you can resume this work? What are the minimum requirements?
- **What resources are available (in communities, in your organization)?** What may be available to do this? i.e. technology, megaphones, face masks, facilitators in communities, funding, etc.
- **What lessons can be learned from past crises/periods of social distancing?** Many organizations and communities have dealt with other crises where they had to adapt (if not entirely halt) programming. This may be more directly relevant, like Ebola or SARS, or because of conflict, instability or unrest, etc. What did they do? What can be drawn from that experience?
- **Without considering practicality or constraints, what are some ways that you could adapt?** If resources weren't a constraint, what might be some ways to adapt programming?

On reconvening either the facilitator or reporter from every group, shared the salient points of their discussion with the larger group. The Breakout Group excel sheets that recorded the work of each group are being shared with this email. Salient points from the discussion are summarised below.

1. Access: This group noted that having well-organized neighborhoods is important. Having small neighborhoods connected to local government informs them of who is the neediest to have access to them. Giving an example of an adaptation, the group pointed out how radios have been used in Nigeria to warn about the Boko Haram. They now include COVID19 messaging. Also, with the need to wash hands, more Tippy Taps are needed. In the meantime, we need to stop using the terminology "social distancing," and use physical distancing instead. "We stand for social solidarity in the face of social distancing," the group noted.
2. Convening: To get people to convene, and go back to work "as normal" we must recognize that different people have different needs. There is a concern that people are being too cavalier about COVID19. Based on experience from Ebola, communities can be encouraged to define the virus and social distancing themselves. They will find the right solutions and own them. We also need information in all languages. The group discussed that some kind of convening may still be necessary but new ways need to be considered. This can include engaging with local traditional and faith leaders, creating small local committees, working at the neighborhood level, drawing out spacing, etc. The discussion highlighted the need to trust communities and the bodies/local leadership groups that have been developed to do the work they've been building up to - people are the greatest resource for solutions. Again, using the term physical distancing over social distancing was encouraged.

3. Procurement/Service delivery: There is a stigma issue around what is COVID19 and why communities need PPE. So messaging to help communities understand the Covid19 situation should be highly contextually sensitive and include local languages and local circumstances that affect the issue. From the service delivery point of view, the lack of community mobilization presents a problem. Income is interrupted and with mobilization reduced, it is hard to receive government subsidies and delivery services. Mobilizers have begun to use technology (local radio, supplying phones, online facilitation, local wifi clouds, and local language videos) for solutions. The group discussed lessons from the Indian ocean tsunami and how communities in Bangladesh had worked with the government to allow migrant workers to ensure that the harvest is not lost as a result of the pandemic. It noted the need for organizations to come together at a time like this through collaborative platforms and to tap the wisdom within communities that have long developed indigenous mechanisms of crisis response.
  
4. Time/ Shifting priorities : The group expressed concern that activities are moving from multi-sectoral and holistic approaches to only COVID19 approaches. This risks losing gains made in other sectors. Rather than integrating out responses, funding has shifted priorities towards the pandemic. Civil society groups are being created but there is a lack of female representation at all levels; the female voice is no longer a priority. The group noted the need for a collaborative platform (MCLD) and pointed out that working collaboratively with agencies develops strong resources to educate on best practices. Past outbreaks show how stigmatization is projected on vulnerable populations, so using visualizations and local languages helps quickly convey the message. Documentation of this pandemic and its response will also serve us as a guide in the future.

### **Next Steps:**

The meeting concluded with a discussion around the existing MCLD initiatives and the next steps. Almost all the breakout groups had highlighted the need for us to come together at this time to work at the national and global levels. It was suggested that MCLD should play this convening role. John Coonrod, Co-Founder of the Movement said that it was prepared to step up and The Movement had updated its website to have a special Covid19 response section. It is collating a database of CLD responses to COVID-19 (<https://mclد.org/share-innovations/> ) and the Zambia chapter of the Movement has already created a Covid19 Response Task Force. Participants also recommended creating focussed working groups, sharing the excel sheets so that breakout groups could continue to brainstorm around available resources and solutions and a follow-up call. The facilitators promised to share a reflection paper on the meeting with the larger group and to conduct a quick poll on follow-up action.