Managing Programmes and Projects in the Age of COVID-19
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Programming Instruments

1. **What programming instruments can we use to rapidly respond to COVID-19?**

   A variety of programming instruments can be used to respond to COVID-19, including:

   Engagement Facility: To quickly deliver one-off activities in response to the COVID-19 crisis, including hiring consultants and procurement.

   Initiation Plan: If the activities are likely to turn into a full project, an initiation plan can be used to jump start initial activities.

   Standard Development Project: We can always use the standard development project. The prodoc can be short (a 1-2 page narrative is fine) and the LPAC virtual. Get creative to make the processes efficient. Use Advance Authorization, if helpful.

   Development Service: This enables UNDP to help a partner implement their project, or deliver fee-for-services to partners (including government, IFIs, private sector, etc.)

2. **Can we use the Engagement Facility to procure large amounts of masks and other medical equipment to help respond to COVID-19?**

   The preferred modality to procure large amounts of medical equipment is the Memorandum for Provision of Services (MPS).

   If the activities are programmatic in nature, the Engagement Facility can be used. The usual cost recovery policy and procedures apply, including the direct costs of procurement (e.g. CPH's procurement fee), other direct costs and GMS applies.

3. **The Engagement Facility does not allow low value grants and cash transfers, but some activities related to COVID-19 response require this to reach the most vulnerable and to do advocacy work. What other programmatic instruments can allow for rapid response if ongoing projects cannot accommodate these activities?**

   Low value grants and cash transfers can only be done as part of a full project. The best way to quickly jump start activities for a full project is through an Initiation Plan. Adequate assurance is still required to protect against fraud and to ensure institutions receiving cash transfers have adequate capacity – especially for CSOs we haven't worked with before.

   For on-granting (when a partner issues low value grants), it is important to use the legal clauses for agreements posted in the POPP as well as the Partner Capacity Assessment Tool's on-granting assessment. Reach out to your Bureau's PPM focal point if you have any questions.

Project Changes

4. **What do we do if projects need to suspend activities under the COVID-19 outbreak for several months? How do we do that, and can project staff still be paid?**

If the entire project is formally suspended, then no financial expenditures may be made. The UNDP Resident Representative makes the decision to suspend a project, in consultation with the government and donor.

If only certain activities need to be suspended or delayed, there are a few options for dealing with this:

a. If activities are delayed for a few months but the project team believes the workplan will still be able to be delivered on time and within budget, no formal revisions need to be made. Communicate with partners on the measures that will be taken to achieve the results under the circumstances. Project staff can still be paid as usual as long as no changes to the budget are required and staff can work remotely.

b. If the activities cannot be completed on time as a result of the pandemic but the overall budget envelope will not need to be changed, then the workplan can be revised the next time the project board meets (virtually or in person.)

c. If key activities cannot be completed and will need to be removed or changed as a result, a project revision will be needed. Changes can be reviewed by the project board and other relevant stakeholders remotely. If restrictions on movement and social distancing are in place, signatories can indicate their agreement via email as long as this is also agreeable with the government.

5. **Are fast track procedures available for substantive project revisions to accommodate changes needed because of COVID-19 (such as changing activities, adding new components, increasing the budget envelope, etc.)? Are LPACs, SESP and PSDD still needed?**

Project revisions may be reviewed by the Project Board and other key stakeholders virtually, which may satisfy the LPAC requirement. It is essential to secure agreement from government partners, donors and other funding partners before substantive revisions are implemented, or expenditures may not be accepted later on. Signatories can indicate their agreement via email as long as this is also agreeable with the government and funding partners.

Now more than ever, we must be careful to ensure we are not inadvertently harming people or the environment through our programming. The SESP helps us to think through this systematically to make it easier to identify and mitigate such risks. It is critical that we continue to manage risks robustly during this time, including SESP.

There is a new fast track process for **private sector due diligence** for partnerships undertaken to respond to COVID-19. Please see the [guidance on partnering with the private sector in COVID-19 response](#) or visit the COVID Teams space in the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization channel.

6. **Can we redirect funds in an existing ongoing project to help respond to COVID-19? How can health and safety measures be incorporated into ongoing projects, especially if it requires redirecting funds to new purchases not originally budgeted?**

We can redirect funds in an existing project to help respond to COVID-19 if we have agreement from the government and funding partners. If restrictions on movement and social distancing are in place, signatories can indicate their agreement via email as long as this is also agreeable with the government and donors.

If new purchases like personal protective equipment (PPE) need to be purchased for project staff or beneficiaries as a result of the pandemic in order to safely deliver planned activities, these purchases can be accommodated in the existing budget as long as they do not exceed the agreed tolerance levels (typically 10%) and/or contingency budgets as per the project document and donor agreements.

Project Monitoring and Stakeholder Engagement

7. **How can we do our site visit monitoring given current or potential future restrictions on movement of people and social distancing requirements?**

   The COVID-19 pandemic may require different measures to be put in place, from recommended social distancing to a partial or total lockdown that is enforced by authorities. These measures may change at any time and may be applied differently in locations across the country.

   It is important for country offices to open a discussion with each implementing partner on how monitoring activities can be modified under different scenarios. The response will depend on the type of intervention (i.e., upstream policy vs. downstream work with communities) and whether or not activities can continue to take place or need to be suspended.

   Where project activities continue to take place, effort should be made to put in place remote monitoring activities with beneficiaries and field-based project staff. This can include accepting time stamped and/or GPS tagged digital evidence, such as digital photos, video, or satellite images in lieu of in-person verification. In addition, skype meetings and remote data collection, such as online surveys, can also be used.

   For targeted groups in high Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) contexts or at risk for gender-based violence (GBV), be sure to put in place some form of remote direct verification that includes SEA-related questions.

   A number of innovative monitoring techniques can also be applied, such as crowdsourcing data via mobile phones and open source software platforms, real time methods, participatory statistics, data exhaust, and more. Further information can be found in the UNDP discussion paper, "Innovations in Monitoring and Evaluation."

8. **How can we engage stakeholders for new activities and projects undertaken to respond to COVID-19?**

   Face-to-face communication often builds trust, increases shared understanding and improves the quality of feedback. But this often is not possible to do during a pandemic that requires social distancing to curb the spread. UNDP often deals with vulnerable communities that may be difficult to reach with limited connectivity. There also may not be established virtual mechanisms where community members can "meet up" to discuss a particular intervention, even if many people have cell phones. During these times, it is important to reach out via phone or email to community leaders with a deep understanding of their members. Even if wider stakeholder engagement is not possible, this more limited engagement can still help ensure the activities are in line with the

needs and take into account the constraints faced by the community. It can also help fast track programmatic responses in times of crisis response.

CPD and Programme Management

9. **For CPDs going to the September 2020 and January 2021 Executive Board sessions, what are the key considerations in the face of COVID-19 throughout the CPD sections?**

   The effects of COVID-19 will change the assessment of development challenges in the years to come. Until entire populations can become immunized against the virus, it will remain a public health threat that can severely impact a country's ability to achieve the SDGs. CPDs for countries that have been significantly affected by COVID-19 should certainly reflect the impact on the virus, and also measures taken to contain the virus, on development in the assessment of development challenges as well as the risk management section. CPDs should also detail UNDP's support to countries to respond and/or recover from COVID-19, where relevant. Don't forget to highlight how we are working with other UN agencies to deliver results jointly.

10. **How can we effectively ensure stakeholder engagement in the country programme design process given restrictions related to the pandemic? For programmes under implementation, how do COs undertake participatory portfolio reviews with government and IPs/RPs under lockdown conditions?**

    If social distancing measures are in place throughout the duration of Cooperation Framework/CPD design, the country team will need to get creative about engaging with key stakeholders. Platforms such as Zoom can be used to consult with a number of stakeholders at one time. People can connect to Zoom calls with computers or telephones so it can work for stakeholders with access to different technology solutions.

    When engaging stakeholders remotely, it is important to communicate expectations ahead of time. Have a clear agenda, ask everyone to mute their microphone unless they are speaking and establish protocols for requesting the floor and speaking times. Participants can also contribute in real time through the chat box. It is important to follow up with all participants with a summary and key take-aways from the stakeholder engagement meeting, since it is easier to feel like their voice may not have been heard while using remote methods.

11. **Will the IPACs still take place under these circumstances?**

    Yes, since the Integrated Programme Assessment Committee (IPAC) is done remotely, it can still be held effectively. If a country office is proceeding with programme planning, the IPAC can (and should) be held to strengthen the quality of the Theory of Change underpinning the Cooperation Framework and CPD.

12. **What will be done for audits scheduled this year?**

    Most fieldwork for HACT/NIM audits has already been completed. Any questions on specific audits should be channeled through your Regional Bureau for guidance on the deadlines and approaching OAI.

13. **Can we postpone project QA, evaluations, and new CPDs?**

Project quality assurance for 2018-2019 just completed in February 2020. Quality assurance for new and closing projects should still be done at the time the project is being approved or closed, respectively. If the country office is responding to an emergency, project quality assurance may be delayed for up to 3 months, but it should be completed as soon as feasible.

The Independent Evaluation Office recommends that evaluations be delayed, rather than cancelled. Evaluations scheduled to start in April or May should be delayed for two months to start. Changes to the evaluation plan should be approve by the programme/steering committee or CO management (virtually if necessary) with a copy shared with regional M&E focal points before a request is made in the ERC. Units can also consider combining forthcoming evaluations, where possible.

If the UNCT decides to postpone the start of a new Cooperation Framework (in consultation with the government), then UNDP must also postpone our CPD. UNDP must stay aligned with the timeline of the Cooperation Framework. For countries without an UNDAF/Cooperation Framework, the start of a new CPD can be postponed at the request of the government.

Reporting Risks Related to COVID-19

14. Do we need to tag risks related to COVID-19 in the risk register?

It is critical to carefully think through risks related to COVID-19 and enter relevant risks to be managed in the risk register under the most relevant existing category. The "Social and Environmental/ Health and Safety" category can be used for risks related to COVID-19 exposure. Programme level risks should be entered in the IWP Risk Register and Project level risks in the Atlas Risk Register. Risk owners and risk treatment owners should be confirmed in the Risk Registers and risks can be escalated using the system.

Financial Management

15. Do we need government approval to reallocate project funding for COVID-19 response? This includes the Government Aid Coordination Authority as well as national Implementing Partners.

Any programmatic activities undertaken by UNDP are in support of the government's response to COVID-19. It is crucial to always work with the Government's aid coordination agency when donors are consulted to repurpose existing unspent balances to COVID-19. This will involve work planning revisions with government and IPs. Please note that for 11888, UNDP does not need government approval to repurpose to COVID-19 response.

16. Can we use core funds to respond to COVID-19?

Yes, in consultation with the Government, TRAC resources can be repurposed to COVID-19. This is one of the measures anticipated to scale up UNDP's response to COVID-19, especially for "hot spot" countries. When repurposing core funding to COVID-19, please use new outputs with the TRAC fund code and marked to COVID-19.