



Guidelines for continuation of extension activities in response to COVID-19 pandemic

Government restrictions in terms of movement of people and conduct of public meetings due to the COVID-19 epidemic is anticipated to challenge and disrupt Extension activities. However, Village-based Advisors (VBAs) will continue to need information and inputs to supply to the farmers, who will continue to need advice from their VBAs. All efforts are therefore required to ensure that VBAs and farmers are protected against potential COVID-19 infection as they continue their work.

Therefore, Extension Implementing Partners should equip VBAs with Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) e.g. face masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and instruct VBAs on their correct use whilst issuing Government guidelines regarding conduct of meetings, hand washing, wearing of face masks, social distancing etc. when teaching farmers. VBAs should also be encouraged to teach farmers to respect the same Government guidelines in their respective countries to ensure that they are protected against the disease.

Guidelines:

The following guidelines are suggested for continuation of Extension Activities:

1. Conduct of Mother and Baby demos

- i. Partner Seed and Fertilizer Companies should continue to prepare small packs for Mother and Baby demos and transport these inputs to central places where VBAs can collect them. A plan for collection of the input pack by VBAs and Extension Agents must adhere to Government regulations.
- ii. VBAs should be encouraged to continue to train farmers whilst respecting Government guidelines. If public meetings are forbidden, then VBAs are encouraged to visit farmers, house by house, in order to distribute small packs, and inform them how they should be used.
- iii. At training events, VBAs should wear face masks and respect social distancing, and use sanitizers before and after events. Sanitizers, or water and soap, should be provided for all farmers to use before and after the meetings, also when they are collecting seeds and other inputs.
- iv. If Field Officers of Implementing Partners are not able to visit VBAs for training, they should send instructions to VBAs by SMS or WhatsApp (if VBAs have smart phones).

2. VBAs into Business

Partner Seed Companies and Agro-dealers should be strongly encouraged to supply their seeds and Inputs to VBAs for them to sell to farmers on commission. Recognizing that it is not easy for companies to link with each VBA, it is recommended that:

- i. VBAs are advised to form themselves into groups based on Geographical clusters (20-30 VBAs per Group).
- ii. Implementing Partner introduces Group Chairpersons (Chairs) to Partner Companies, and they develop a Business Plan, and procedures for sale of seeds.
- iii. Group Chairs request Group member VBAs to aggregate farmers' demands for seeds and communicate demand to Companies.
- iv. Companies send consignment of seeds for sale to Group Chairs, and VBAs collect seeds from their Group Chairs, sell seeds and send cash to Chairs to send to Companies.
- v. This same methodology could be used for supply of other inputs demanded by farmers, such as herbicides, fertilizers, PICS bags etc. It can also be applied for aggregation of produce on behalf of Offtakers/local SMEs.

3. Digital Extension:

As face-to-face meetings are likely to become increasingly difficult, Implementing Partners are encouraged to explore the use of ICT such as mobile phones for SMS, radio, TV among others in order to extend key extension messages to farmers.

4. Smart Seed Subsidy Schemes

Development Partners are making funds available to Governments to help farmers prepare for/recover from the pandemic. Funds could be used to purchase seeds, and other critical inputs, which could be distributed to farmers through VBAs. Concept notes are being developed for discussion with Government Officials to also utilize funds to identify and train many more VBAs to distribute inputs to many more farmers.

THANKS FOR YOUR WORK AND STAY SAFE