

Guidelines to Agro-dealer Development Partners during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted the social and economic lives of individuals, families, communities and nations around the world. Every individual in the world has a role to play in halting the spread of the disease and in contributing to economic recovery thereafter. As per our mandate, AGRA's major contribution is to work with Partners to ensure minimal disruption of food security and nutrition.

The Inputs Distribution and Agro-dealer Development Unit of AGRA is reaching out to Country teams and Implementing partners to agree on a set of guidelines that will see us through these challenging times. The guidelines are to be implemented within the context of the individual coun-

try standard operating procedures (SOPs). The main purpose of the proposed guidelines is three-fold:

1. To ensure that all Implementing Partner staff, all agro-dealers, all farmer-customers – together with their families – are protected from the disease;
2. To ensure, as much as possible, that the flow and availability of critical agro-inputs and related services are not disrupted.
3. To strive to achieve the planned targets of the unit and contribute to the overall AGRA strategic objectives



1. Personal Protection

- All project staff should be provided with protective clothing, notably masks and gloves, free of charge. Use the budget line on office equipment or some other lines, with the approval of the relevant AGRA Program Officer. The staff should be encouraged to buy hand sanitizers themselves. These should be used whenever staff are going out.
- All agro-dealer shops should provide water and soap (and hand sanitizers where possible) for clients to wash their hands before entering shops and after buying items.
- Agro-dealer shop attendants should always wear masks & gloves when dealing with customers
- Shop attendants should regulate the number of customers allowed at-a-time in the shop to observe required social distance. Shops should provide chairs outside for those waiting for their turns to enter



2. Project Implementation Strategic Guidelines

Targets and Timelines: In countries still left with more than a year of implementation, e.g. Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria, and in those countries under total lockdown, e.g. Uganda, Rwanda, and Burkina Faso, the AGRA input distribution and Agrodealer Development Unit will liaise with the respective country teams and Grants Units for assessments of implementation against workplan and in necessary cases, they may submit requests for No-Cost Extension as per AGRA guidelines.

In countries where projects are yet to achieve the number of trained agro dealers, including those ending this year (Tanzania and Mozambique), there are two possible alternative actions: either a no-

cost extension, or a costed modified action plan for the next 6 months. Elements of a modified action plan include:

- Organize trainings in smaller groups of 5-10 people, with the necessary hygiene & social distancing precautions as well as personal protection equipment including mask and hand gloves. This could be used in all these countries to continue training of new retail agro-dealers. Tanzania could explore using same gatherings for certification trainings by TPRI & other Agencies.
- These will require re-alignment of budgets and work plans, which can then be submitted to POs for approval. The grantees have adequate funds allocated to implement respective projects in these countries.



Other Guidelines

1. Increase individual shop visits for mentoring & monitoring purposes – with the necessary health precautions. Such visits should be used for a) sales data capture and GIS mapping b) assessment of new agro-dealers for support, c) complete start-up grants implementation.
2. Increase the use of mobile phones and social media to maintain communication with agro-dealers. This could help in a) fostering linkages along the distribution chain: supplier/hub/retailer, b) obtaining sales data from agro-dealers, c) completing the process of licensing & competence certificate issuance to new agro-dealers in Ethiopia.
3. Explore the use of community radios to communicate key messages to input suppliers, agro-dealers, farmers and commodity aggregators & traders. Thus, we might have to use electronic media as well as social media where applicable, to communicate to farmers on their farming activities and where to get agro-inputs during this time and beyond the various lockdowns, to stimulate its demand. The implementing partners will have to play key roles in this direction. Local Governments are critical in relaying appropriate advice to farmers. However, some Government guidelines can be misinterpreted and abused, leading to unnecessary disruptions
4. Accelerate the use of pilot ICT platforms to promote linkages and enhance the flow of inputs along the distribution chain.
5. The Unit will work closely with agro-dealers to reach the farmers through the implementing partners as well as VBAs who provide hands-on extension services to them. Thus, we will provide technical information for effective and efficient service delivery as well as agricultural production systems.
6. The risk of exposure is real because of our family/ community social networks. Our partner networks should spread the general prevention guidelines. Agro-dealers and VBAs should obtain health brochures and disseminate them where possible. They should observe the basic guidelines from their respective countries including social distances and washing their hands regularly with soap under running water. Should there be the need for face-to-face training, even though it must be discouraged, they should ensure the minimum social distances and, it should be in an open place instead of enclosed facilities.
7. Since most of the lockdown countries have exempted agricultural value chain and food marketing operators to provide goods and services, there is the need for implementing partners and country teams to facilitate the process at the local level, whilst the Unit remotely provides them with the requisite technical support. There will be regular conference calls with the respective country teams and implementing partners to discuss progress and prospective challenges.
8. Since most of the financial institutions have slowed down lending activities in this era, the critical issue is access to credit to finance agro-inputs either directly by farmers or through prospective aggregators and offtakers. The Unit has been and will continue to liaise with implementing partners and country teams to encourage some of the agro-dealers, especially the hub agro-dealers to enter into financing arrangements with some of the offtakers to support the farmers to stimulate agro-input demand.

THANKS FOR YOUR WORK AND STAY SAFE.