

Local NGOs raise the alarm about COVID-19

Local organizations have often been the first to raise alarms about, and respond to, most emergencies due to their proximity to and close relationships with affected populations, often risking their lives. Now, at a time when most internationals are themselves affected by the ongoing pandemic and returning to their homes, to ensure business continuity, **the majority of the response to COVID-19 and other humanitarian assistance will be delivered by local responders who will be at the frontline risking their lives again during this crisis.**

As local organizations who created the [Nexus platform](#), we are delivering on our civic duty to 'flatten the curve' of any COVID-19 outbreak in Somalia and we are well placed to rapidly respond to the developing pandemic across Somalia. **Nexus will carry out a coordinated response with public health messages** to the people, using our platform's core funding as well as financial support from donors. Nexus will ensure vulnerable people receive verified translations of WHO key messages and mitigation strategies on COVID-19, as well as 'myth-busting' misinformation about the virus.

Somalia is at high risk of experiencing an uncontrollable spread of the virus that will overwhelm the capacity of its weak health system and severely affect a population that has already experienced almost 30 years of conflict, government collapse and two famines in modern history. According to the latest statement of the Somali Ministry of Health, there is currently one confirmed case of COVID-19 in Somalia and zero in Somaliland. Somalia, similarly to other fragile contexts, is extremely vulnerable to the impact of a global pandemic. In addition to weak health systems, communities have been facing repeated shocks, poor nutrition conditions, lack of access to quality food, water and sanitation, and a lack of knowledge about disease transmission.

The COVID-19 crisis may have unparalleled impact on the health of Somalis and also lead to a global economic crisis with knock-on effects in Somalia, such as increased food insecurity. Somalia is one of the few post-conflict fragile countries that relies heavily on remittances from the diaspora, amounting to approximately USD\$1.6 billion per year (*CIA World Factbook*, accessed March 26, 2020). As more and more countries close borders and businesses, upcoming high unemployment rates will **directly impact remittance flows acting as the backbone of the Somali economy that allow Somali families to purchase food, and access health and education.** Many of the large number of the Somali population—who depend on remittances to meet basic needs—are already feeling the impact of their relatives contracting the virus or losing their jobs, and many will not be able to afford to isolate and stay home as they have to earn a living for their families. The crisis could also put pressure on donor countries to reduce foreign aid to address ever growing needs at home, and **we urge donor countries to continue to prioritize funding to save the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities in Somalia.**

In addition to the immediate action that Nexus is taking, we are making the following recommendations:

1. **Ensure local actors are deeply involved in the development of COVID-19 response plans, including decision-making processes at the HCT and task forces led by the Ministry of Health.** While we must provide technical and financial support to the government-led response, we must also realize their limited capacity to undertake a nationwide COVID-19 response. We therefore recommend that local organizations acting as first responders across the country work in conjunction with government counterparts

at national, regional and local levels. We will further support the WHO's efforts to control the pandemic and will encourage them to work alongside local actors and governments.

2. **Involve local actors in existing humanitarian assistance and use this crisis to rethink partnerships with local actors.** Given Somalia's fragility, we also need to ensure that all other existing humanitarian, life-saving programs—such as food security or protection—are not at risk due to a lack of human capacity of international agencies. Thus, we need to transfer as many programs as possible to be led and implemented by local organizations in conjunction with relevant government counterparts. Consider investing in local partners online communications capacities to keep up communications.
3. **Fund flexibly with fewer restrictions.** Local organizations have almost no unrestricted or flexible funding from their INGO or UN agency donors. Now is the time to provide general support and unrestricted funding to local organizations to be able to cater for unforeseen needs, ensure business continuity and to enhance organizational resilience to the medium-long term effects of the global pandemic.
4. **Frontline staff of local organizations need to be treated as health care workers and be provided with the necessary training and personal protective equipment to protect themselves** and communities from increasing transmission.
5. Response plans should take local realities into account:
 - a. While cash transfers continue to be the most dignified and flexible transfer that we should always be aiming to provide people, we need to continue to **monitor food supply chains** to ensure that imported food continues to come into Somali markets. Furthermore, we need to **continuously evaluate food prices** as we are already seeing price increases and accordingly adjust grant sizes to reflect these changes.
 - b. We need to ensure we provide Somali communities—who have always lacked access to basic water and sanitation services, in particular in densely populated areas such as urban communities and IDP camps—with **increased access to WASH services** as a matter of urgency.
 - c. As IDP groups are already living in crowded makeshift homes, it will be impossible to practice social-distancing, self-isolation or self-quarantine. It is important that **separate spaces or tents are made ready in each IDP camp to limit the spread and flatten the curve of COVID-19 transmissions.**

Notes to editors:

Nexus is a paradigm-shifting platform composed of 9 Somali NGO members that aspires to pioneer a locally driven agenda for change by building partnerships between communities, civil society and the public and private sectors, and through the implementation of integrated and sustainable interventions across the triple nexus of humanitarian, peace and development. Nexus core members possess wide-ranging technical capacities and represent communities across all Federal Member States of Somalia and Somaliland. Nexus has two international partners who are committed to the localization agenda – Oxfam and Save the Children.

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Nexus local members:

- African Development Solutions (Adeso)
- Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD)
- Gargaar Relief and Development Organization (GREDO)
- Horn of Africa Voluntary Youth Committee (HAVOYOCCO)
- KAALO
- Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC)
- Social-Life and Agriculture Development Organization (SADO)
- Taakulo Somaliland Community (TASCO)
- Wajir South Development Association (WASDA)

