These are challenging times, and a stark reminder that we live in a world of ‘unknown unknowns’. The current crisis of Covid-19 has taught us that it is more important than ever to equip children everywhere to respond to a volatile and rapidly-changing world.

Schools are currently closed in all of our geographies, so our work with our partner governments is temporarily suspended. But we’re clear that as the world recovers from Covid-19 and children return to schools, it’s more important than ever to support education systems to reignite the intrinsic motivation of teachers and officials.

Our guiding principle as we develop our response to Covid-19 has been that we are not a relief organisation. We’re extremely conscious of the risks of ‘mission creep’ and want to ensure that we play to our strengths as an organisation. But we’re working with our partner governments to identify areas in which we can provide critical support. We’re also focused on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our team throughout this period.

This document outlines the key questions that we are answering across all geographies to be able to continue our work during this crisis, support our partner governments, and to enable a swift return to action once schools re-open. The challenge of these unprecedented times has also afforded us an opportunity to explore new delivery methods and deepen our expertise, so that our team is even better equipped to support our partner governments as we resume our regular activities.

**EXTERNAL**

**HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN MOMENTUM WITH OFFICIALS AND TEACHERS THROUGH THIS CRISIS?**

We think it’s critical to maintain our relationships with national, state and district officials throughout this period, so they know that we care and understand that we are doing what we can to support them and our joint approach. We want to keep them feeling positive and motivated about their own skills, and to continue to engage them in remote activities where these are able to take place. So in all of our geographies, the teams have done an audit of the most effective ways to reach district officials, to understand what technology we might be able to use to reach them.

In Delhi, state officials set up a meeting in early April with all NGOs to understand what activities could still take place, and they asked us to continue our network and coaching meetings. We’ve found that the level of connectivity is sufficiently good that it is possible for our activities to continue remotely, using technology such as WhatsApp, Google Hangouts and Zoom. Our team has supported officials to experiment with online delivery, and provided feedback to iterate and learn about what works. We’re delighted that close to 100% of our expected activities have been able to take place since the start of the crisis. We’re also supporting the government to understand the level of teacher engagement with online learning alongside our own data collection.

In Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the school year has almost concluded, so we wouldn’t expect many activities to be taking place at this time. We are currently focused on creating regular communication channels with all of our stakeholders, and facilitating opportunities for teachers and officials to share and celebrate best practices. We’re also continuing our coaching calls across India, many of which take place remotely in normal circumstances. Finally, we’re working with districts in Tamil Nadu to roll out an online learning pilot in partnership with the University of Roehampton, providing quality professional development to district officials.
In Uganda, we are currently partway through a learning improvement cycle, so the pandemic has had a more significant impact on our work. We have engaged with a taskforce established by the Ministry of Education and Sports to coordinate a response to Covid-19, and we’re also working with partners such as SESIL to identify where we can best offer support. Connectivity and technological challenges are much greater in Uganda, so we need to find more innovative ways to reach our stakeholders. At present, the team are conducting regular telephone check-ins with each district stakeholder to maintain morale and momentum. Our team are also currently working on a series of case studies to engage with teachers and officials and show the impact that has been made by our work so far.

**HOW DO WE EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE KEY OFFICIALS IN SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING GOING FORWARD?**

Our conversations about sustainability with governments in all geographies are at an advanced stage, so it’s essential that we maintain as much momentum as possible throughout this period. We’re working to implement regular meetings with senior stakeholders to continue communication and enable action planning, and to ensure that our activities remain integral to their plans once schools return.

Officials in Delhi have been happy to continue our sustainability planning conversations, and we continue to meet regularly with partner officials. And we are working hard to resume discussions in our southern states too. In Uganda, we’re conscious that officials are deeply involved in responding to the pandemic, so we’re trying to balance these activities with an understanding of the other work they are doing, and we’re hoping to resume sustainability planning in May.

**HOW MIGHT WE DELIVER OUR APPROACH REMOTELY SHOULD THIS SITUATION CONTINUE?**

It’s currently unclear when schools might reopen, so we’re investigating what might be possible over a longer period of time. We think it’s essential that any plans are delivered in partnership with governments, so as above we are aiming to integrate into a wider response rather than develop our own work in isolation. For our design team, the current situation presents an exciting opportunity to experiment with blended learning activities:

- Our team in Delhi is leading the way in piloting online delivery of network meetings, and we’re now working to adapt our monitoring and evaluation processes to these new delivery methods.
- All of the strategies shared in our network meetings are designed to be actioned in classrooms, and it’s this action, supported by feedback and reflection, that really drives their development of the foundations of lifelong learning. So we still need to consider carefully what actions are still possible for teachers taking part in network meetings remotely, so that this learning is embedded and they are able to act on it in their classrooms once schools return.
- The situation is different in our other geographies, where our audit of remote working facilities showed that teachers and officials would find it more difficult to engage in activities.
- In Uganda, we’ve been looking into the possibility to deliver content through television or radio, alongside the government and SESIL. We’ve shared some research into the principles for effective radio instruction with the government, and we’ll continue to support with this project as it progress.
- Senior officials have also asked us to contribute materials for teachers to access through their website, and we’ll also support with their work to encourage teachers to complete lesson plans for the rest of the term.
- These activities have the potential to provide a very helpful impetus to our drive for sustainability, as these channels would also reach teachers and officials in districts where we do not currently operate.
Over the next few weeks, we’ll continue to engage with our partner governments to see what we can do to support their activities, as well as with other NGOs in the same geographies to capture learning and explore additional ways to reach teachers and officials. We’re also working on remote working plans for district officials and engaging with co-design groups on our programme content.

Other areas of our organisation are also innovating to continue their activities during this period. In particular, our Donor Partnerships team have been working with teams in Delhi and Tamil Nadu to design virtual field visits for current and potential donors. These visits provide an opportunity for external stakeholders to engage with our team, government partners and beneficiaries, and will help to increase their understanding about our work. The first visits have taken place remotely this week, and we’ll continue to offer these to our partners in the coming months.

INTERNAL

HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT ALL TEAM MEMBERS ARE SET UP TO EFFECTIVELY WORK REMOTELY, AND THUS WORK TOWARDS THEIR OBJECTIVES AND CONTINUE TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONALLY?

Our Operations team have already worked very hard to ensure that all of our team have the appropriate technology and training to work effectively from home. Although this presents challenges for many, we’re pleased that everyone is continuing to work as best they can. We have no intention of reducing our staffing for the duration of this crisis, and we’re very grateful to have donors willing to support us through this period.

We’re now focused on maintaining our regular organisational rhythm to keep engagement and motivation high, so that we’re ready to resume activities whenever we can:

- We’re using this time to focus on further developing a ‘glocal’ sense of sharing learning and best practice through regular all-hands and drop-in sessions focused on addressing the challenges of Covid-19.
- We’re also building the skills of our team members and improve the quality of support they are able to offer, and staff are focusing on their own development too through our online learning management system.
- Our teams are meeting more frequently to maintain their strong connections, build rapport and ensure a culture of appreciation and recognition. And we’re learning about how we might integrate this into our organisational culture once we return to ‘normal’.

With the uncertainty around timelines of when schools and government offices will reopen, we are regularly reviewing the plans outlined above and ensuring we are as flexible as possible to adapt our approach to support teachers and local government officials. As one of our DIET Officials Dr. Anil Teotia shared, “every challenge is an opportunity to come out even stronger…!”