

## **LDC Focal Points Webinar – 11 June 2020 – Presentation by NFP- Sierra Leone**

### **THE SIERRA LEONE EXPERIENCE IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE**

#### **Prevention and Containment Measures**

Sierra Leone recorded the first confirmed COVID-19 case on 30 March 2020. Prior to this and with the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, Sierra Leone had taken proactive measures which include:

- Intensive public health awareness and campaign messages across the country
- Screening and other safety measures introduced at the airport
- Mandatory quarantine of 14 days of all passengers coming from countries with more than 50 COVID-19 confirmed cases
- Increasing surveillance measures at the border crossings
- Reactivation of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) that was established for the Ebola.
- Suspending air travel to and from Sierra Leone, except for emergencies
- Closure of religious places of worship
- Closure of schools and universities
- Preparation of the COVID-19 Health Response Plan and a Quick Action Economic Response (QAREP) to mitigate the shocks of COVID-19.
- Limiting meetings and public gathering to not more than 100 people.
- Eventually closure of the airport and border crossings

The COVID-19 Health Response Plan was divided into two phases: phase 1 in a no confirmed case scenario (Prevention) and phase 2 in a confirmed case scenario (Containment).

The COVID-19 Quick Action Economic Response programme has five components aimed at:

1. Building and maintaining adequate stock of essential commodities at stable prices
2. Providing support to hardest hit businesses
3. Providing safety nets to the most vulnerable through cash transfers and food assistance
4. Supporting labour-based public works and

5. Providing assistance for the production and processing of local food items to keep businesses in operation and to forestall shortages of locally produced commodities.

A platform for private sector participation/support was also created.

With the first confirmed case on 30 March 2020, the country's Minister of Defence was appointed Interim Coordinator of the EOC, which was renamed National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NACOVERC). Similar structures were also established at district level and District Coordinators for the 16 districts of the country appointed to coordinate the sub-national response. Additional measures put in place include:

- A robust social mobilisation drive that includes, CSOs, journalist, artists, religious and community leaders
- Limiting meetings and public gathering to not more than 20 people
- Virtual meetings are now the new normal
- The declaration of State of Public Health Emergency
- Imposition of inter-district lockdown
- Imposition of a 9pm to 6am curfew
- Two three-day national lockdowns
- Establishment of treatment centres for the management of positive patients and isolation centres for primary contacts of positive patient as a way of containing the spread of the virus
- Promotion of hand washing in homes, communities, offices and other public places
- Mandatory wearing masks in public places

### **Key Challenges**

- GDP growth rates have been revised downwards with huge implication for the countries development
- Maintaining a balance between saving lives and livelihoods especially in poor countries
- High Cost of surveillance, contact tracing and quarantine (lodging and provision of food)
- Loss of Revenue and livelihood across all sectors
- Coordination needs to be strengthened especially at the district or sub-national level.
- Need to increase testing capacity for future needs.

## **Lessons Learnt**

- Unlike Ebola, this is a pandemic so external support is limited as every country has to deal with it
- Repurposing of existing resources to the response effort, while trying to maintain regular development at the right level.
- You can never be too prepared in a health crisis – despite our best efforts before an index case, within a month we recorded 100 cases and within two-and-half months, we recorded 1000 cases. As of 10 June 2020, Sierra Leone has 1062 cases and 50 deaths
- Confidence in the testing kits and methods is waning due to the A-Symptomatic nature of COVID-19
- Not enough knowledge about the virus as it affects people differently and transmits differently.
- High level of collaboration and inclusiveness is required to contain the virus
- Coordinating participation of international and national NGO's in the response.

In all of these, our partners especially the UN Country team has been very supportive.

## **Going forward**

- I wish to underscore the importance of strengthening national health and social protection systems and to help ensure a sustainable recovery from COVID-19.
- We call on the UN system and the international community to commit to supporting countries with weak health systems and high levels of debt and limited fiscal space etc.
- We need to ensure availability and accessibility of Vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics for low income countries which are at the tail end of the global supply chain.
- Ensuring the flow of remittances to low income countries as this is a crucial revenue life line for low income countries.

- We seek additional grants, access to finance and technical assistance from our development partners, multilateral Agencies, as well as the private sector to alleviate the effect of this pandemic and deliver on the SDGs and IPOA.
- We encourage the World Bank, the IMF, and major regional development banks to deliver urgent fiscal space and liquidity through budget support, extended credit amenities, debt relief and where possible debt cancellation.

Thank You!