



# STRENGTHENING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DONORS COVID-19 RESPONSE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world is facing a momentous challenge precipitated by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). While the direct effects of this pandemic will manifest in health outcomes, societies will experience significant destabilizing forces affecting all aspects of life. Donor programming will likewise be affected through reduced ability to conduct on-the-ground work, reduced implementing partner capacity, and a reprioritization of development assistance to directly address the pandemic. With their global footprint, donors are well placed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable populations. The extent to which donors can effectively respond to this challenge will depend on their ability to quickly assess and redirect new and existing development resources to bolster the pandemic response in each partner country. This decision-making process will need to be informed by rapid, reliable, and actionable data and operationalized through adaptive strategy and operational planning.

Social Impact is already supporting donors with their COVID-19 response and stands ready to provide this assistance more broadly. We are one of the international community's most trusted partners in the provision of planning, monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management services in support of evidence-based decision making. Over the past 25 years SI has worked closely with international agencies in over 80 countries on HIV-AIDS, Ebola, Tuberculosis, Malaria, pandemic preparedness, and disaster response. Our experience from previous crises can be directly applied to the COVID-19 pandemic. We present a range of ideas to supplement and strengthen donors' response efforts.

## HOW SI CAN HELP

### ANALYTICAL SERVICES

- Social Media Analysis
- Network Mapping
- Causal Loop Diagramming
- Outcome Mapping
- Rapid Impact Assessments
- Rapid Descriptive Assessments
- Identifying Predictors of COVID Resilience

### MEL SERVICES FOR DECISION SUPPORT

- Maps Depicting Viral Spread
- Remote Monitoring
- Improved Monitoring Frameworks
- Improved Monitoring Technology
- Context Monitoring
- Adaptive Third-Party Monitoring (TPM)
- Developmental Evaluation

### PLANNING & OPERATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- Agile Planning Solutions
- Workforce Analysis
- Training & Mentoring
- Accelerated Recruitment
- Change Management Support

### CLA SERVICES

- Co-Creation of Activities
- Virtual Collaboration Platforms
- Learning and Knowledge Sharing



Source: Wikimedia Commons

## STATE OF THE CRISIS AND DISRUPTIONS TO THE PROGRAM CYCLE

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is an unprecedented global phenomenon with the potential to cause significant and unpredictable disruptions across all sectors of development. According to the WHO<sup>1</sup>, the pandemic is continuing to spread in developing countries, none of which have demonstrated capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to a health crisis of this magnitude.<sup>2</sup> Even as the grave public health toll of the pandemic rises, the global imperative to practice social distancing and stem the spread of the virus is causing an economic crisis to which developing countries are particularly vulnerable and from which many countries will take years to recover. Donors must quickly adapt to support the suppression of the COVID-19 pandemic and address its immediate consequences as first order problems and contribute to rebuilding the global economy in the long term.

While program cycle principles require analytic rigor and the use of robust evidence in strategic planning, COVID-19 will require reprioritized funding and new program planning before there is an evidence-based consensus on the most effective crisis response strategies. Previously laid plans and objectives must be reframed to strengthen country preparedness for the pandemic, improve health outcomes for individuals who become infected, as well as address the socio-economic fallout of the crisis. The urgency with which donors need to act and the life-saving impact of their actions amplify the importance of evidence-based decision making just when access to that evidence is made more difficult. Standard practices for program planning, measurement, evaluation, and learning that require in-person activities are not feasible while the pandemic persists. Instead, donors must pivot to lean more heavily on self-reported or remote methods for monitoring, and innovative approaches to evaluation. They will need to rapidly capture the data and learning critical for adaptive management to reprogram resources where needed, ensure those resources are being applied effectively, and be prepared to transition to the most appropriate post-COVID-19 programming when the pandemic subsides. In moving forward, donors will need to draw upon change management and organizational development tools to improve their ability to collaborate in atypical ways, learn and disseminate new knowledge widely and swiftly, and adapt their portfolio and operations at the pace demanded by the crisis.

## HOW SOCIAL IMPACT CAN HELP

**Social Impact (SI) provides comprehensive services in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL); strategic, project, and activity planning; and management consulting for organizational development to help address each of the program cycle disruptions donors are experiencing.** Although the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic crisis is unprecedented, SI has experience delivering relevant services under constraints that are applicable to this context and can support donors in generating evidence quickly and ensuring it is integrated into adaptive management and new strategic planning. Further, because SI does not implement technical programs, donors can rapidly procure SI services without fear of organizational conflict of interest. The specific analytical, operational, decision support, and CLA services SI offers include the following:



### ANALYTICAL SERVICES

Adapting programming to COVID-19 response will require the collection and synthesis of new information streams. SI can provide donors with a wide range of rapid and empirically-grounded tools to meet information needs.

**Rapid descriptive assessments** can generate evidence and analyses quickly. These tools can establish context regarding country pandemic preparedness and response by synthesizing existing data sources with targeted, remote interviews. SI is experienced in administering quick, population-based SMS and/or phone surveys to supplement these assessments to understand how social dynamics can inform the COVID-19 response. SI is skilled in developing reporting templates for these assessments to accelerate use in planning and enable learning for donors and other stakeholders (e.g. governmental agencies, implementing organizations, partner countries, and political constituencies). SI has relevant experience assessing health systems in India<sup>3</sup>, Uganda<sup>4</sup>, and Zimbabwe<sup>5</sup>.

### Social Impact's Experience with Remote Data Collection

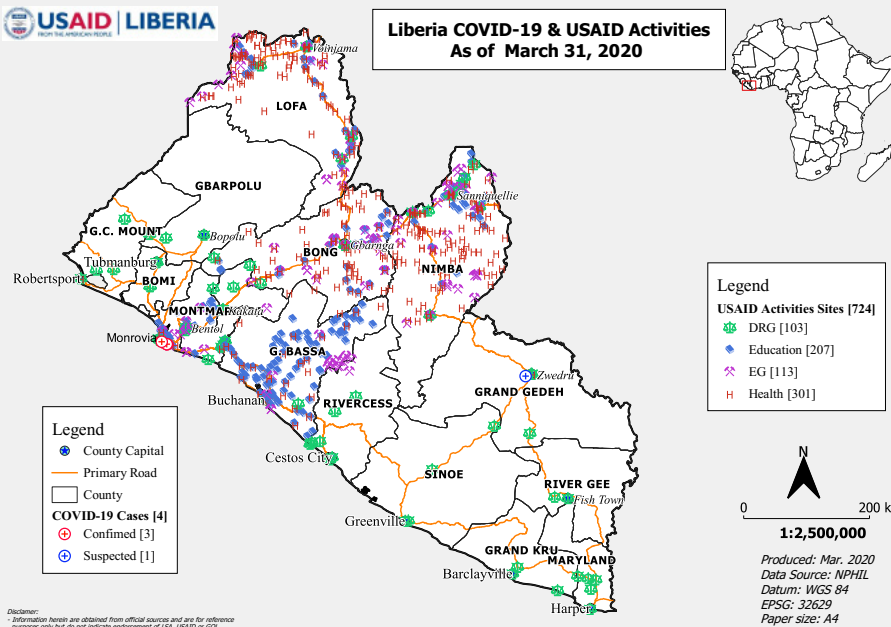
Mobile phone surveys are an effective solution to facilitate data collection in contexts where public health, security, or other feasibility constraints preclude in-person interviewing techniques. SI has deployed mobile phone surveys in numerous engagements, including nationally-representative SMS surveys across three West African countries during the 2015 Ebola outbreak.<sup>6</sup> SI has deployed Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews and SMS-based surveys to thousands of respondents in Bangladesh, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania and brings direct experience in designs to mitigate the risks of non-response, sampling bias, and suspect data quality from remote data collection.

**Identifying predictors of COVID resilience** can help better target programming. By comparing of trends in secondary data before the pandemic to those after the arrival of localized COVID transmission, SI is able to identify factors that correlate with increased success in mitigating a wide range of adverse effects. For example, what clinic-level characteristics predict stronger health outcomes. This approach uses a natural experiment design to rigorously quantify impacts at low cost and with quick turnaround time, without the need for in-person data collection or comparison groups."

**Social media analysis, network mapping**, and other creative qualitative approaches can help assess how risk communication has permeated society and identify how to leverage key influencers for greater impact.

**Causal loop diagramming, outcome mapping**, or other scenario-based assessment methods can help donors anticipate how changes in the operating context may affect the ability of existing programming to meet defined objectives.

**Rapid impact assessments** use an operations research approach to quickly gather data on outputs and short-term outcomes for new programming approaches as they are being piloted. These tools can be deployed to directly compare different programmatic approaches and measure relative efficacy and cost efficiency for rapid scaling. Remote data collection and, in some cases analysis of secondary data, can be used to accelerate mobilization of these assessments, mirroring the response to the Ebola outbreak.<sup>7</sup>



Source: Social Impact



## MEL SERVICES FOR DECISION SUPPORT

**Maps depicting the spread of the virus** can be a critical tool for ensuring decision-makers understand the risk associated with ongoing or planned program activities in their country. SI can develop maps that, when overlaid on existing programming presence, enable donors to identify opportunities for rapid response via existing projects and activities.

### Initial GIS Support to USAID Missions

Through its field offices in various countries, SI is already working to support USAID Missions as the crisis evolves, by supporting business continuity and providing monitoring, analytical, and knowledge management services to support the COVID-19 response. GIS specialists in multiple SI field offices are regularly producing real-time maps overlaying program activities with the spread of the virus. GIS mapping has already helped these Missions identify opportunities for existing activities working in COVID-19 risk areas to pivot to preventative or responsive actions.

### Improved monitoring frameworks and technology

can help donors assess programming implications of the evolving public health crisis. SI can develop electronic dashboards detailing the local spread of the COVID-19 virus, as we have done in Liberia,<sup>8</sup> that are integrated with publicly available data.<sup>9</sup> SI can also help donors update existing monitoring practices to maintain business continuity while ensuring the welfare of program participants and staff. Specific services include development and training on the use of safety protocols for monitoring staff, contactless monitoring technology like drones or sensors, or increasing reliance on IPs for monitoring with light-touch third-party verification. SI has experience designing MEL frameworks for post-pandemic recovery, as it recently did for the Citizens' Involvement in Health Governance Activity<sup>10</sup> to strengthen the post-Ebola recovery in Guinea.

**Context monitoring**, through either primary data collection or the aggregation and synthesis of secondary sources can help donors capture and monitor key COVID-19 response indicators that may not have been tracked as part of existing programming.

**Adaptive third-party monitoring (TPM)** technical assistance to IPs can promote the collection of reliable data while minimizing risks to data collection teams and respondents. SI can provide guidance on improving monitoring processes, provide independent quality assurance over IP monitoring, or conduct primary TPM activities.

**Developmental evaluation** can integrate evaluators more deeply with IP's teams to shorten the learning and adaptation feedback loop, enable donors to pivot quickly, and generate results and learning on an ongoing basis. SI is currently providing this support for child and maternal health programming in Indonesia.<sup>11</sup>





## PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Given the volume and velocity of operational changes the pandemic will require, donors will need to rapidly examine, adjust, and accelerate its management and operations functions. With in-depth understanding of donors' business models and cultures, SI can provide donors with a full suite of management consulting services to support operations planning and implementation.

**Agile planning solutions** can help donors rapidly revise global, regional, and country-level strategies and programming in response to the crisis. SI has experience supporting donors through scenario-based planning, stakeholder mapping and consultation, as well as designing and facilitating disciplined After Action Reviews, feedback loops, and trade-off analyses. SI has conducted scenario-based planning through its work with USAID in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Liberia and Malawi.

**Workforce analysis** can identify needed staff competencies for current and transition programming. SI has done similar work at the national level in Ghana and brings this same technical lens to support donors.

**Training, mentoring, and accelerated recruitment** can address workforce competency gaps, as SI did for USAID through the Global Health Professional and Organizational Development<sup>13</sup> contract and is doing under the Food Security Service Center (FSSC) contract.

**Change management support** can help leaders and staff understand and support the case for change, while helping clients and partners develop procedures, accountability mechanisms, and communications strategies such as those SI is providing through the Management Excellency in Operations contract (MEO).

### Social Impact's Support to Local Actors

SI can also apply these tools and services—from assessment through customized organizational strengthening—to host government and civil society partners as we have done at the national level with the Ghanaian Ministry of Education; with local civil society organizations in Mexico; and with local organizations seeking to improve their programming and operations in Lebanon and Ethiopia.



## COLLABORATING, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING SERVICES

SI has award-winning expertise in applying CLA best practices to capture, synthesize, and rapidly disseminate new knowledge from disparate sources to achieve effective development outcomes.

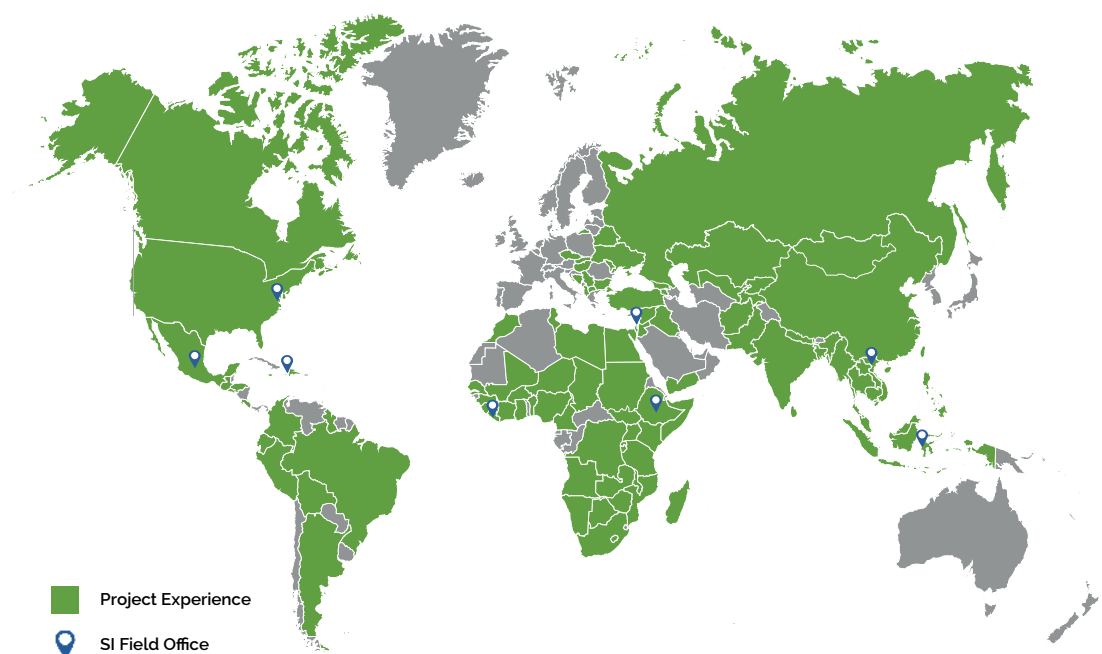
**Co-creation of activities** with trusted and unbiased advisors, such as SI's co-development of activity design with USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia<sup>14</sup>, can ensure a shared understanding of the problem diagnostic and vision for the solution as programming decisions are made.

**Virtual collaboration platforms** can facilitate communication, joint planning and sharing of information when it is most needed. SI is currently developing such platforms through its field offices.

**Learning and Knowledge Sharing** within and across donor operating units and between field offices and HQ will be critical to capturing and sharing lessons learned for application both to this pandemic as well as future crises. Social Impact has developed a wide range of knowledge sharing tools and platforms and can rapidly standup these solutions for donors.

## WHY SOCIAL IMPACT

SI has over twenty years of experience as an industry leader in providing comprehensive management consulting services to increase the effectiveness of development organizations. SI is not a direct program implementer; SI's MEL and rapid design support is unbiased and free of Organizational Conflict of Interest concerns. Headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, SI has worked in over 120 countries in every region of the world, with field offices currently in Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Lebanon, Liberia, Mexico, and Vietnam. SI experts understand donors' business models and cultures and are adept at facilitating productive staff retreats and stakeholder consultations, as well as supporting Operating Units with team building, business process modeling, remote and in-person training, and donor-appropriate change management.



With a large staff and established networks of partners and consultants across the world, SI is well-placed to rapidly mobilize for targeted or large-scale support that donors may require. SI has extensive experience with bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors such as USAID, MCC, the US Department of State, DFID, Global Affairs Canada as well as the World Bank, UN Organizations, African Development Bank and Asian Development Bank. We have also worked closely with large private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, Packard, Omidyar, Humanity United and MacArthur. We have a NIH accredited in-house Institutional Review Board that can swiftly ensure that data collection proceeds with integrity and protects respondents even during a fraught and unprecedented time. We are holders of numerous contracting mechanisms at the country and donor level that can be utilized to easily access our assistance.

**For more information or answers to questions, please contact us at [SI-Covid-Response@socialimpact.com](mailto:SI-Covid-Response@socialimpact.com)**

### REFERENCES

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2. Joint External Evaluations of national preparedness
3. Analytical services for health systems in India
4. Experience using audits of administrative data in Uganda
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7. SI's rapid impact assessment in response to the Ebola outbreak
8. Electronic dashboard development in Liberia
9. Publicly available data on the local spread of COVID-19
10. Citizens' Involvement in Health Governance Activity
11. Child and maternal health programming in Indonesia
12. Winner of the 2016 USAID CLA Case Competition
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14. SI's co-development of activity design with the Regional Development Mission for Asia