



Lyra's Policy in response to Covid-19

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Corona Virus Infectious Disease (Covid-19) a pandemic on 30 January 2020. Over 3 million people are confirmed to be infected globally, with the global infection rate and death toll continuing to rise close to 220,000ⁱ. Lyra in Africa (Lyra) UK has a small number of working staff (part-time, pro-bono and consulting), while Lyra Tanzania as the implementing partner and where the operations are located, have a number of staff, partners and beneficiaries. Both Lyra UK and Lyra Tanzania are led by a Board of Trustees.

The UK government declared a lockdown, due to the health risks of Covid-19, on 23rd March 2020, while in Tanzania, already on 17th March 2020, all schools and colleges were closed, with the Government cautioning nationals of the potential impacts from the pandemic.

Because of the unprecedented threat that Covid-19 poses worldwide and in particular to the people and communities that Lyra works with, Lyra has set out its Covid-19 principles, position and overall policy through this document.

This policy is intended to guide the organisation in these unprecedented and uncertain times as well as safeguard Lyra staff, volunteers, consultants, donors, partners and communities, as well as inform each of our position. The pandemic is moving quickly, and Lyra will continue to monitor the national and global spread of Covid-19 to keep this policy up to date and relevant. The WHO continues to rate Covid-19 as a Very High risk.

At the time of writing this policy (April 2020), there is a marked difference between the number of confirmed covid-19 infections in Tanzania (currently 300) and the UK (currently 177,000 with deaths at 27,500) as published by relevant authorities. As Lyra has a presence in both countries, we will be monitoring the trends in infection rates and national guidance carefully.

Driving principles

Lyra recognizes the potential possibility and harm from the spread of the Covid-19 to the areas where Lyra has presence.

Underpinning Lyra's Covid-19 position and policy are three interlinked principles:

- 1) **Do no harm:** any actions or interventions taken by Lyra will not intentionally put Lyra staff, partners or communities in which Lyra works at increased risk of Covid-19 transmission. In this respect:
 - a. All staff received awareness training on Covid-19 as early as March 2020.
 - b. All staff continue to receive and share both in-country and international updates on Covid-19 through a Lyra Staff Mobile platform (WhatsApp and sms).
 - c. The Board of Lyra approved temporary closure of all the Tanzania operations from early April, with a limited number of staff working from home.
 - d. By end of March, Lyra had stopped all staff travel to the communities where project activities are done. This includes visits for monitoring and training of both Village and Youth Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs and YSLAs) weekly meetings. In the case where any travel may be required, Lyra will assess the need and means to ensure safeguarding of the staff and the people.
 - e. Lyra has stopped all Hostel Construction projects.
 - f. Resumption of any activities will be subject to declaration by the government of Tanzania and WHO that it is safe.

- g. Lyra will provide information to all her stakeholders on risks related to covid-19, as will be published from time to time by the Ministry of Health Tanzania (MoH), by the UK government (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) and by the WHO. Such risks include but are not limited to:
- i. Gatherings of larger than 5 for example for VSLAs and YSLAs meetings
 - ii. Participation in community social activities, what to do and what not to do

Lyra has provided online (via phone) training to the Community Based Trainers (CBTs), on how best to support the VSLAs and YSLAs while minimizing any potential risk towards infection of and spread of Covid-19. This includes training on digital alternatives using mobile money for members to send in their weekly shares; using an sms platform to receive the status of their weekly group funds, using an sms platform to share any important news with their groups.

- 2) **Align to latest in country Ministry of Health and WHO guidance:** all programme delivery and operations will follow and be aligned to the latest and most up to date Tanzania and UK governments as well as the WHO Covid-19 guidelines.
- 3) **Be responsive yet realistic:** Lyra will endeavour to respond to the impact of Covid-19 within the communities that it works, however any response will need to be realistic and aligned to the capacity of the current small team, skills and funding. Lyra will in this respect work with partners where possible to ensure that any planned response will bring the intended value.

Communication with Partners and Stakeholders

Lyra works with a range of partners and stakeholders, all of which are critical for the successful delivery of Lyra programmes. For

- **Implementing partners:** Lyra will continue to maintain strong links with our existing partners and will continue to keep them up to date on a frequent basis. Where any changes to projects implementation may occur as a result of Covid-19 that involve partners, information will be communicated to them at the earliest possible time with a plan on when a project can re-start.
- **Donors:** Lyra will keep communication channels open with existing donors to keep them abreast of the situation on the ground, and any key decisions that may have to be taken to pause or pivot programmes.
- **Stakeholders:** Lyra will ensure that information to stakeholders, specifically about temporary office closure, temporary stoppage of operations, etc. will be communicated. Any other updates will be communicated as deemed necessary, including any planned possible re-start dates of projects.

Existing Lyra programmes and programmes in the pipeline

The majority of Lyra's current portfolio of programmes relies on active engagement with communities and beneficiaries. Therefore, to minimize the risk of possible further Covid-19 transmission, all current programme activities that require physical engagement with communities, will be put on hold until it is safe to resume. Any activities that can be delivered remotely via mobile phone technology will

continue. In all instances, communication channels will be kept open with donors to ensure that they are kept closely informed of any changes to programming and changes to results frameworks.

For projects where funding has been secured and the project has not started yet, Lyra will work closely with the donor to keep them informed of the situation and any delays in the start date.

Covid-19 response programming and pivoting programmes to respond

With Lyra's long established and trusted links with local communities, Lyra is in a strong position to develop a Covid-19 response programme, and potentially pivot some existing programmes to respond to the impact of Covid-19. In line with the principles set out at the start of this document, Lyra will seek to develop response programming/ re-orient programmes that are aligned to the existing strengths and expertise of the Lyra team. Lyra will also scope out the possibility of forging partnerships in country in areas where Lyra does not have the skills needed to deliver, nor the necessary funds. Either directly, or through partners, Lyra will scope programme interventions around the following areas

- 1) **Bridge the information gap to provide effective outreach in rural communities on Covid-19 prevention measures:** through Lyra's established links with communities, CBTs, VSLA leaders, YSLA leaders, School teachers, Community leaders and other stakeholders, initiate a SMS platform to reach rural communities with continuous key messaging around Covid-19 as published by the MoH and WHO. All messages will be sent in Kiswahili language.
- 2) **Where possible and where funds allow, provide critical resources and essential supplies to the communities.** These may include training relating to the prevention of Covid-19, such as short recorded video clips on soap making and use, face masks making and use; provision of sanitary pads to girls.
- 3) **While schools are closed, enable students in the Lyra rural based schools, to keep learning through digital technology** by using Lyra's existing digital learning expertise and provision of digital learning equipment such as tablets with pre-downloaded learning content.
- 4) **Fortify rural youth livelihoods with short term working capital and flexible loan terms,** whilst also helping them to pivot businesses to the agricultural and food production to tackle looming food insecurity.
- 5) **Reach out to people with disabilities in the rural communities where Lyra works,** with necessary supplies to ensure their safety and security during covid-19.

Looking ahead and remaining responsive

The trajectory and impact of Covid-19 is unknown. Lyra will remain open and responsive to the developing situation on the ground, to update this policy and Lyra's position accordingly.

Applicable Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

1. World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>)
2. Tanzania Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (<http://www.mcdgc.go.tz/index.php>)
3. UK Government (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>)

4. Lyra in Africa Safeguarding Policy
5. Lyra in Africa Risk Register

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200430-sitrep-101-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=2ba4e093_2

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