

**GUIDANCE ON COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY EFFORTS**

**(for “Call for Proposals”, 2022)**

**GEF-Small Grants Programme, UNDP Bhutan**

The Global Environment Facility’s Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP), implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan provides financial and technical support to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to conserve and restore the environment while enhancing people's well-being and livelihoods. SGP demonstrates that community action can maintain the fine balance between human needs and environmental imperatives.

Since its inception in October 1998, SGP-UNDP has implemented a total of 183 projects in partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan, CSOs, CBOs and academia. SGP-UNDP is now in its 7th Operational Phase (OP7) (2020-2023). The Strategic Goal of OP-7 is *“to promote and support innovative, inclusive and scalable initiatives, and foster multi stakeholder partnerships at the local level to tackle global environmental issues in the priority landscape”.*

Accordingly, SGP-UNDP announces the 2022 "Call for Proposals" inviting CSOs (including Community-Based Organizations and grassroot institutions/communities) to submit inclusive and innovative project proposals that not only solves environmental issues but also have focus on the COVID-19 recovery by addressing the root causes of vulnerability and enhancing community resilience contributing towards **building back better**. The proposals must align with SGP-UNDP’s Country Programme Strategy (OP-7) and government priorities. A summary of SGP’s COVID-19 offer is outlined below.

**SGP-UNDP COVID-19 Offer**

**Building back better** from the crisis includes efforts to increase community resilience and prevent future disasters. Sound management of natural resources, on which communities rely, and ensuring food security are key for the recovery process. SGP, UNDP is looking at supporting community-based initiatives related to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources that could generate both environmental and economic benefits. The **“SGP offer to the COVID-19”** will focus on the recovery by addressing the root causes of vulnerability and enhancing community resilience, in line with the Country Programme Strategy (OP-7) and government priorities contributing to building back better.

**Background**

Confronted with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the world is now facing the greatest health, economic and social challenge in the recent times. Bhutan has been also affected with 59,940 active cases out of which 59,845 cases are recovered as of 11th July 2022 (National Situational Update on COVID-19, Ministry of Health). While the work of GEF Small Grants Programme, implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan, is focused on addressing long term environmental challenges and fostering community resilience, SGP will contribute and address relevant recovery efforts in line with the SGP Strategic Initiatives under its Country Programme Strategy for Operational Phase 7 (2020-2023).

The fact that the current crisis takes its root in a number of human induced adverse impacts that are undermining the stability of critical ecosystems on which key economic sectors rest (e.g. land use changes, climate change, etc.), all of which are compounded by the additional pressures of rising inequality, there are concerted strategical efforts that SGP could take in coordination with the partners and stakeholders. The COVID-19 epidemic is a multidimensional crisis affecting health, economic and social aspects and the response will also need to address these various dimensions, including environmental issues.

This unprecedented crisis also presents a unique opportunity for SGP to reaffirm its role as an innovative, flexible and relevant community programme by leading effective community-based solutions on the ground and initiating new strategic partnerships. The impact of the pandemic is unequally and more severely affecting the vulnerable groups: urban and rural poor, women, persons with disabilities, and others. SGP has been working closely with these target populations for many years. Based on experience, SGP will proactively address the impacts of this crisis and help the communities to recover and **“build back better”.**

While GEF funds cannot be directly used for crisis response measures and re-purposed, “SGP offer to the COVID-19” will focus on the recovery by addressing the root causes of vulnerability and enhancing community resilience, in line with the existing SGP strategy and approaches. The initiative will be closely coordinated and implemented in line with priority of the Royal Government of Bhutan outlined in SGP strategy and UNDP’s Policy and Programme Offer on; a) Inclusive and Integrated Crisis Management and Responses, and b) Addressing the Socio-economic Impact.

**Additional considerations**

*Digital technologies and innovation*: The “new normal” created by the global pandemic calls for out of the box thinking and combination of new technologies and ideas with traditional approaches. Grantees are recommended to consider shifting to digital and remote program operations as much as possible, including monitoring and capacity building support to reduce project cost. This may include investing in online training and setting up new procedures, which could be identified as part of response measures.

*Community consultation:* Consultation with affected communities is essential, and any response measures can only be effective if they are designed and implemented in close consultation with the communities. The communities may also need accurate information to determine specific risks they face and specific measures that would work for them. In the course of assessment and consultations, proponents are encouraged to learn about communities’ own locally acceptable epidemic response and enforcement measures and identify and document the practices and governance strategies the communities use to cope with the crisis, including traditional knowledge. Community self-governing structures may serve as key service delivery partners.

*Support to vulnerable populations*: It is important to note that different communities (urban, rural, geographically remote, indigenous peoples, women and men, etc.) are affected by this epidemic in different ways and require targeted support. Assessment and proposed measures should consider these differences between and within communities.

**Addressing the Crisis**

Following provides some ideas related to immediate to short-term response to COVID-19 that could be proposed under the **2022 Call for Proposal** in line with the SGP’s strategy and government priorities. This is not an exhaustive list of potential measures, and we encourage grantees to come up with innovative ideas.

**Focusing on Green Recovery:** With SGP’s strong community focus in supporting global environment and sustainable development issues, SGP is uniquely positioned to play an important role in early green recovery from COVID-19 crisis. The following possible themes have emerged through our experiences:

***Landscape Management and Climate Smart Agroecology***

Building back better from the crisis includes efforts to increase community resilience and prevent future disasters. Sound management of natural resources, on which communities rely, and ensuring food security are key for the recovery process. In line with the GEF-7 Country Programme Strategy, SGP could support community-based initiatives related to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources that could generate both environmental and economic benefits under the Strategic Initiatives on threatened ecosystem and species management; sustainable agriculture and fisheries management, waste management and others. Examples include the following:

1. Support small and medium entrepreneurship development and enhancement linked to sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources, particularly focusing on vulnerable groups, such as women, community people, persons with disabilities, at risk youth (training, seed funding, including bio-enterprises, energy access for productive use, etc.);
2. Improve food security (e.g. agroforestry, urban gardening, support for cooperatives, sustainable agriculture) for the communities losing their livelihood (e.g. market access etc.), or employment (e.g. tourism, service industries) because of the epidemic;
3. Support and incentivize sustainable agricultural production and supply chain to improve food security, provide targeted support to small farmers, water supply and irrigation support, including with renewable energy and water harvesting (agroforestry, agrobiodiversity, home and urban gardens, agroecology, information dissemination on healthy eating, water use and harvesting, etc.), support delivery services through low carbon transport (i.e. bicycle, EVs etc.); and virtual marketplace and technologies to disseminate market information for organic and sustainable produce harvested by the project.
4. Recover and support sustainable nature-based tourism activities, considering the COVID-19 impacts, for both job creation and promote wildlife/natural resource management.
5. Encourage production of biodiversity friendly and nature-based products, including artisanal production of soaps, masks, sanitizers and other hygiene supplies by following
6. Green jobs/employment generation through biodiversity projects (protection of water sources, forest management, eradication of invasive species etc.) with twin objective to secure critical ecosystem services while also improving livelihoods;
7. Support conservation related initiatives safeguarding key protected area conservation measures, including forest protection and provision of critical ecosystem services, particularly associated with preservation of water sources and water supply;
8. Promote traditional/indigenous crops and traditional practices to enhance sustainable land management and food security; support growing of medicinal plants and gathering ancestral knowledge related to health and epidemic response;
9. Support sustainable community management of water resources including local sustainable fisheries focusing on food security and improved storage;
10. Community-based wildlife management, including expanding work on curbing poaching and illegal wildlife trade (i.e. as the source/vector of zoonotic pathogens);

**Grantmakers Plus Support**

Community voices are to be heard and reflected in policy development process at both response and recovery stages of COVID-19. As governments, development partners and international organizations are rolling out economic aid and stimulus packages, the communities can advocate for green and equitable recovery. As part of its Grantmakers plus function, SGP can facilitate the dialogues between decision makers and communities beyond grant project support.

Below are some initial examples of CSO-Government Dialogue initiatives; Support participation of local communities in multi-stakeholder dialogues at the landscape, local and national levels (including through remote and digital dialogues) in providing inputs to post-crisis recovery policies and measures, particularly related to environment and natural resources management; renewable energy, creation of green jobs, and low-cost infrastructure development;

Collaborate and partner with e-learning/distant educational platforms for awareness raising and training of SGP partners on effective epidemic prevention measures, particularly focusing on vulnerable groups, such as children, youth, women, local community, and persons with disabilities; and to provide training on virtual tools and their use in communities with limited access or inexperience in the use of technologies;

The above is only some of the preliminary ideas and experiences on SGP’s response to the COVID-19 at this point. They will continue to emerge and grow in collaboration with the partners in the due course of time. This initial guidance attempts to summarize early experiences and possible adjustment SGP may take as a community-based programme to address the most significant challenge faced by many communities. This guidance is a living document, which is expected to be further enriched and improved with knowledge and experience.