

THE GLOBAL FINANCING FACILITY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19



MAY 2020

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly swept the globe, causing widespread economic and social disruption. As the pandemic escalates in low- and lower-middle income countries, the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF) is deeply concerned about the growing risk of widespread and potentially devastating disruptions in access to reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition (RMNCAH-N) services.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to global and national efforts to end preventable maternal and child deaths and achieve universal health coverage, especially in the poorest countries. Considerable evidence from the 2014-16 West African Ebola outbreak exists of the massive negative impact these health emergencies can have on access to basic health and nutrition services. New estimates¹ by researchers based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health suggest that, under a scenario in which COVID-19 causes similar disruptions to what was seen in West Africa during the Ebola outbreak, almost 1.2 million children and 57,000 mothers could die over just the next six months. This would represent a 45 percent increase over existing child mortality levels.



COULD DIE OVER JUST THE NEXT SIX MONTHS. THIS WOULD REPRESENT A 45 PERCENT INCREASE OVER EXISTING CHILD MORTALITY LEVELS.

Emerging evidence from GFF-supported countries shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is already halting delivery of essential health services such as ante-natal care visits, attended births, delivery of child vaccinations and access to family planning, which have been key drivers in recent global reductions in maternal and child mortality. Supply of these and other vital services for women, children and adolescent health is likely to fall due to the closure of health facilities to non-emergency cases and the impact on the health workforce and global supply chains for key RMNCAH-N commodities, while demand for these services is also likely to drop due to fears of COVID-19 infection in healthcare settings. This is being compounded by government restrictions on population movement imposed to prevent COVID-19 transmission as well as the massive economic shocks, which are likely to push tens of millions of people into poverty, increase food insecurity and reduce resources available for both transport to facilities and the ability of women and their families to pay for health services. Although the number of COVID-19 cases are still relatively low in the 36 GFF-supported countries as compared to other areas of the world, a recent rapid survey of these countries suggests that nearly half may already be experiencing substantial service disruptions.

¹Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study, The Lancet, May 12, 2020.

PRIORITIES FOR THE GFF'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The GFF has a unique role to play in helping ensure that safe and equitable delivery of essential health and nutrition services for women, children and adolescents is a central part of an effective global COVID-19 response and recovery.

At the global level the GFF is calling attention to both the near-term and potential longer-term impact of COVID-19 on women, adolescents and children's health.

Top leaders representing the GFF Investors Group issued a [call to action](#) on April 23, warning of a secondary health crisis due to disruptions in access to essential services. The GFF will continue to advocate to keep the issue of protecting essential RMNCAH-N services prominent in policymaker dialogue and decision-making.

At country level, the GFF is supporting its 36 partner countries to protect and maintain essential health services for women, children and adolescents as part of their COVID-19 response and recovery efforts in three ways:

1. DEPLOYING CORE GFF CAPACITIES TO SUPPORT COUNTRY PRIORITIZATION AND PLANNING



NATIONAL ADVOCACY, PLANNING AND COORDINATION

The GFF has activated its network of **country platforms and country-based GFF Liaison Officers** to support partner countries to continue delivery of essential health services as they flex their national systems to fight COVID-19. **Pulse surveys** are being conducted in each GFF country to monitor and assess potential disruptions and inform policymakers and partners. As COVID-19 is forcing governments to make difficult decisions about priorities and trade-offs in the face of limited resources, the GFF country-driven approach and platforms provide a valuable asset to drive evidence-based prioritization. The GFF Secretariat has also prepared a series of [country-specific policy briefs](#) which present the potential impact of COVID-19 on essential services and inform countries how to maintain essential health services for women, children and adolescents and continue implementation of their country's Investment Case.



HEALTH FINANCING

The GFF is supporting partner countries to conduct **resource mapping and expenditure tracking** to help ensure their response plans are sufficiently and efficiently financed. The World Bank, the GFF and the Revisiting Health Financing Technical Initiative of the **Joint Learning Network (JLN)**, in coordination with P4H and other partners are collaborating on the health financing resilience initiative to help policymakers address both the immediate and longer-term health financing challenges resulting from COVID-19 by creating a platform for real-time information sharing and dialogue between countries. The GFF will provide technical assistance to support accelerated implementation of health financing reforms that will be required as countries adjust to the new macro-fiscal context in both the response and recovery phase.



KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

The GFF has been deploying its robust knowledge and learning (K&L) infrastructure to facilitate **a series of webinars to enable the rapid, real-time sharing of new information and translation of good practices** across GFF countries in maintaining essential services. The first webinar on the importance of maintaining essential health services saw Liberia share their rapidly developed RMNCAH and Social and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) response, based on its Ebola experience. Subsequent webinars on topics such as global supply challenges in the context of COVID19 and the importance of resource mapping and expenditure tracking of both COVID19 and essential health services, have attracted strong participation from governments, financiers, civil society and development partner organizations in the 36 GFF partner countries. The GFF developed an online **K&L platform** for countries to provide examples and lessons learned. The GFF is also responding to country demand for learning activities that will help countries think through how to optimally adapt and strengthen the frontline service delivery in the COVID19 context. The **Service Delivery Learning Program** has now launched to nine countries.

2. STRENGTHENING FRONTLINE SERVICE DELIVERY

In March, the WBG announced the establishment of a [COVID-19 Fast Track Facility](#) with an initial US\$14 billion in financing (US\$6 billion from the International Development Association (IDA) and IBRD and US\$8 billion via the International Finance Corporation (IFC)). To date the WBG has approved COVID-19 project financing for 100 countries, of which 20 are GFF partner countries. The GFF is working with WBG teams to ensure that the continuation of essential RMNCAH-N services is part of IDA and IBRD operations as well as IFC investments. A key role for the GFF is to provide technical support to GFF partner countries on how best to adapt their service delivery models, protect health workers and secure essential commodities.



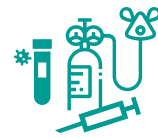
ADAPTING DELIVERY MODELS

Protecting essential services, including sexual and reproductive health and nutrition services, will require **rapid service delivery innovations** to avoid women, children, and adolescents getting infected with COVID-19 when coming to health facilities. Health services for COVID-19 patients need to be organized in ways that protect other populations, such as by segregating patient flows or providing separate facilities. Additionally, service delivery approaches for essential services need to be modified to minimize contact between women, children, and adolescents and health facilities, for example by delivering services or health information remotely through telemedicine or SMS, or by shifting services to community delivery via CHWs and/or the private sector. The GFF is offering support to countries to make rapid, safe and cost-effective modifications in service delivery, including through the use of **results-based financing** (RBF).



PROTECTING HEALTH WORKERS

COVID-19 is likely to impact the health workforce through both direct morbidity and mortality and reduced willingness to serve, given the risk of infection and staff burnout. Given existing shortages of qualified human resources in most GFF countries, there is a risk that COVID-19's impact on health workers will be one of the most important pathways through which the outbreak worsens health outcomes for women, children, and adolescents. The GFF will support governments in the **rapid planning and implementation of measures to protect frontline health workers**, including training on infection prevention and control, segregation of patient flow to minimize contact with potential COVID-19 cases, adaptation of treatment protocols to minimize contact, and provision of cleaning materials and WASH services. The GFF will also support rapid **education for community health workers** (CHWs) on safe health care practices, which can be delivered through local civil society organizations or other partners.



SECURING ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES

The WBG Fast Track COVID-19 Facility has made significant financing available to procure key commodities for COVID-19 response such as personal protective equipment, tests, ventilators, oxygen, and pulse oximeters – commodities which are also critical to ensure continued safe RMNCAH-N service delivery. The GFF is working with WBG teams and partner countries to assess the impact of COVID-19 on these and other government-financed RMNCAH-N commodities and to develop and implement **strategies to mitigate supply shortages**. As part of this work, the GFF is assessing the global supply chain constraints and identifying solutions with key global procurement partners, including UNICEF and UNFPA, which may include supporting countries to **identify alternative sources of quality products** and building on a partnership with the UPS Foundation to accelerate deliveries of key products to communities most in need. Through a unique partnership with the IFC, the GFF is providing support to bolster the global supply chain, including engaging local companies in Africa to accelerate or expand their manufacturing capabilities and strengthen local supply chains.

3. ADDRESSING DEMAND-SIDE CONSTRAINTS FOR DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Demand-side disruptions are growing as women, children, and adolescents curtail their utilization of health services, both out of fear of getting infected in health facilities and as a result of mobility restrictions and economic deprivation. GFF countries are facing an enormous need for clear communication related to COVID-19 in order to counteract misinformation, encourage positive behaviors, clarify how populations can continue to access essential services, and promote social and civic responsibility. Given the speed at which messaging must reach enormous numbers of people, the rapidly changing normative guidance, and the reality that some traditional approaches that rely on interpersonal communications or community gatherings are not possible while lockdowns in effect, there is an urgent need for new approaches. To complement the financing provided by the WBG Fast Track COVID-19 Facility, the GFF is offering technical assistance to partner countries to develop and deploy **innovative social and behavior change communications strategies** that are based on country context and are locally appropriate. The GFF also is focused on ensuring that these national and local communications efforts help promote supply and demand of essential health services for women, children and adolescents.



Photo by John Rae

As the COVID-19 situation evolves in GFF partner countries, the GFF will continue to evolve its response efforts to help prevent a secondary health crisis for women, children and adolescents. For more information visit: www.globalfinancingfacility.org/CoVid19