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A Message on COVID-19 from Global Communities President & CEO David A. Weiss

During this time of upheaval and uncertainty, Global Communities is using its past experience and technical expertise in the effort to address the COVID-19 crisis. At their core, Global Communities' programs around the world focus on building trust with, and empowering, local communities and local governments. Now, we must translate that trust in creative ways to support activities for behavior change as well as other actions that support infectious disease response activity. Our field offices are proactively engaging donors and other stakeholders to discuss and plan for the impact that local COVID-19 response measures are likely to have on the implementation of our ongoing work. We are identifying areas where existing budget and staff resources can be re-purposed from originally planned activities to activities that bolster the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are considering new program initiatives as well.

Global Communities has always risen to the occasion when faced with crises, and we have a demonstrated tolerance for operating in and managing high-risk environments. Beyond staying safe and healthy, our focus must remain on our mission and our communities. Our longtime reputation in water, sanitation and hygiene and our experience with other public health emergencies including Ebola, Zika and cholera make us uniquely qualified and positioned to play a role in responding to COVID-19. Here is a small sampling of some of our activities that are currently underway.

- Global Communities is exploring how best to expand our existing humanitarian programming in Syria to respond to COVID-19. Through funding from USAID/OFDA, Global Communities is already providing essential water, sanitation and hygiene services to the Atmeh camp cluster, which is home to approximately 154,000 displaced Syrians. To ensure that the camp population is ready for a potential COVID-19 outbreak, we have provided our staff with protective equipment (masks, gloves, hand sanitizer). We are also increasing water trucking services to provide additional clean water to camp residents, distributing additional soap and hygiene supplies, along with information on proper handwashing, and discussing additional funding with our donor to install additional handwashing stations throughout the camp. Our protection teams continue to provide case management services via phone, and are monitoring rumors in the camp and developing information campaigns to dispel them and provide residents with accurate information around COVID-19.
- As in other countries, COVID-19 has led to lockdown in major cities in Iraq and is exerting pressure on the healthcare sector all over the country. As medical facilities and municipal services are essential to sustain overall continuity, Vitas Iraq, a wholly owned subsidiary of Global Communities, is supporting these organizations with a series of humanitarian initiatives. In one province, a team of Vitas Iraq staff distributed healthcare kits including facial masks, medical gloves and gowns, alcohol and medical disinfectants, and laser thermometers to several hospital emergency units. Masks were also given to local security forces who are working hard to enforce order through this critical time. Vitas Iraq also participated in a municipal conference where measures aiming to contain the spread of the virus were examined and established. The governor, the chief of police, the director of the health sector and many other key local figures singled out Vitas Iraq as an example for its active role within the government and society in the face of the crisis.

- We are currently implementing the Improved Services for Vulnerable Populations, or Twiyubake, project in Rwanda, which is designed to help vulnerable groups access health and social services that enable them to live productive lives. USAID/Twiyubake is currently adapting its implementation strategy in support of the Government of Rwanda as it works to contain the spread of COVID-19. Global Communities is supporting the Government of Rwanda in two main ways: 1) by utilizing our existing implementation channels to reach our beneficiaries within recommended safety measures using the current budget and work plans; and 2) by modifying the program and ultimately the budget to redirect resources in response to the outbreak. The majority of our operations will be based on recommendations from USAID/Rwanda and the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Rwanda Biomedical Center, with which we maintain a close working relationship.
- In Sri Lanka, Global Communities implements the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) program, which works to strengthen local governments and community-based organizations that provide critical services to the most vulnerable. SCORE and SCORE sub-grantees, in collaboration with Sri Lankan Government Health Authorities, are working to protect communities by responding to urgent needs of hospitals and health workers. SCORE sub-grantees are also raising awareness about the virus to stop the spread of COVID-19, and working with them to prioritize needs and interventions. SCORE is working with hospitals to establish isolation units and providing sewing machines to beneficiaries to sew masks and gowns for health workers. And youth members of SCORE are producing videos with information from the Sri Lankan Health Promotion Bureau. The videos will provide information about COVID-19, including how to stop the virus from spreading; updates on local district situations and government messages; and how to report false news around the virus to relevant government authorities.

Since its inception in 1952, Global Communities has been and remains today a resilient community. We stand committed to work with our partners from all sectors, in all regions to help support the most vulnerable communities around the globe. I am confident we can and will emerge from COVID-19 not weakened, but even stronger, in partnership with those we serve.

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Global Communities