



Report: Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Meeting

4 June 2020

Introduction

The Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP) convened a Zoom call on 4 June 2020, to discuss the coordination of food relief efforts between Government and NGOs in Cape Town and the Western Cape, and to find a common approach to the strategic challenges emerging in this area.

This was one of a series of such weekly calls. Detailed reports on the previous calls were produced and circulated to all participants, and copies of these reports are available on request.

The future role of the forum

The meeting focused on the issue of the future role of the forum. As introduction, Andrew Boraine from the EDP raised the following points for discussion.

1. Every process, including a response to a crisis, goes through different phases:
 - a. Structures that are set up to respond to a particular moment of crisis need to consider repurposing themselves, to sustain momentum and to remain relevant for participating stakeholders. They need to be adaptive.
 - b. Otherwise they can quickly peter out, and the gains that have been made, and relationships that have been formed, can be lost.
2. The original purpose of this coordination forum was to:
 - a. Organise a whole-of-society approach towards food relief during the COVID-19 crisis
 - b. Strengthen relationships between all role-players
 - c. Collect NGO and grassroots data to identify gaps, avoid duplication, and promote transparency and accountability in food relief efforts
 - d. Discuss issues affecting food security, i.e. violence, government regulations, etc.
 - e. Share information and knowledge
 - f. Consider risk factors affecting future food security
 - g. Connect to existing food security movements and programmes in the longer term.
3. What have been the gains made by the forum, both specific and at a wider level?
 - a. It has connected organisations and sectors that otherwise may have worked in isolation.
 - b. It has introduced grassroots community structures (such as CANS), NGOs and faith-based organisations to intermediary food providers.

- c. It has provided relevant information to participating stakeholders.
- d. It has generated data (from the public sector and civil society) on vulnerability (areas and groups), and on the activities of food relief organisations, systems, and networks.
- e. It has highlighted food relief innovations.
- f. It has raised broader awareness on the issue of food security.
- g. It has educated the public sector about the powerful role of civil society.

4. Changing context

- a. There is a shift from total lockdown to partial lockdown.
- b. There is a shift from 'crisis' to 'recovery' mode. There is a focus on opening the economy, the return to schools and universities, people going back to work, the stimulation of incomes and livelihoods, and on community economic recovery. This impacts to some extent on those donating and volunteering in terms of their available time.
- c. There has been a psychological and emotional shift, beyond the initial solidarity shown during the lockdown, to getting on with the 'new normal'.
- d. There is a public sector shift from widespread provision of emergency food relief to focused health and fatalities management in hot spots, with targeted testing, provision of quarantine and isolation facilities, public education on health and safety, ICU facilities, and masks. Food relief is now a relatively small component of the hot spot strategy.
- e. Continued social relief from the government is now through the SASSA Special COVID-19 grant and school feeding schemes, rather than food parcels. Food relief is only now seen as a last resort contingency, rather than a programme of government.

5. Implications and risks

- a. Many households remain food insecure. The danger is that this is treated as part of the 'new normal' and not as a crisis.
- b. Humanitarian needs in Cape Town usually increase during cold and wet winter months (with an increased need for food, shelter, warm clothes, and blankets). This will happen at a time when many public sector and donor resources are depleted.
- c. COVID-19 infections and deaths in many vulnerable communities and hot spots will further exacerbate hunger and food insecurity, through loss of breadwinners, closure of spaza shops and informal traders, etc.
- d. SASSA Special COVID-19 grant and school feeding schemes will not meet the gaps in food requirements.

6. Implications for this forum:

- a. A coordination forum that focuses only on food relief, and the work of food NGOs, may no longer be fit for purpose from a government point of view.
- b. Government engagement and coordination with civil society, in the next phase, needs to:
 - i. Be able to focus on specific vulnerable areas / geographies from a health management perspective.
 - ii. Include a wider cross-section of civil society, i.e. health, education, shelter, trauma, and communications, as well as food relief.
- c. This forum, in terms of its current purpose and constitution, cannot easily meet these needs.

7. Proposed discussion points for repurposing:

- a. NGOs: What are NGO needs as civil society organisations involved in food relief? What are NGO needs in the next phase? What do NGOs need / expect from government?

- b. Government: What are public sector needs for engaging and coordinating with civil society in the next phase of managing the crisis?
- c. Both: How do we preserve the gains in the relationships that have been made during the past eight weeks? What format of NGO-Government engagement will fit our purpose in the next phase of the crisis?

Suggestions for future focus areas

An overall theme that emerged from a number of participants was that, where possible, the forum's future efforts should include considerations of job creation and economic recovery as a priority. "**Moving from relief to recovery**" was a common theme across most suggestions, with a focus on local and community economic recovery wherever possible.

There was all call to also continue the focus on food security and food sovereignty.

Many participants agreed that the forum had built up a useful momentum and sets of relationships which should not be squandered.

A number of more specific suggestions for the future role of the forum were also raised in the meeting.

- The reopening of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres was raised as a concern, particularly **unregistered ECDs** which receive no financial support from DSD. It was suggested that this forum could assist in helping these centres to gear up for operating with the threat of COVID-19. Specifically, it was suggested that a sub-group of this forum be established to determine what is needed at these centres, and then to explore opportunities to bulk-buy free-standing sanitisers, masks, cleaning materials, etc.
- The plight of the **homeless**, particularly as winter sets in, was raised again. It was said that the number of homeless people on the streets is growing, and suggested that this forum could find a way to work with the City of Cape Town to explore the release of some civic buildings, which are not being used owing to lockdown regulations, for temporary accommodation at least until the end of September.
- Utilising the expertise in the forum to address the **inequities in the food supply** system was another suggestion. Specifically, there was a call for government-NGO partnerships to address food prices, processing issues, and supply chain anomalies.
- Several participants supported the call for the forum to assist with programmes aimed at establishing **food gardens**, possibly through the establishment of a joint task team to explore possibilities in this area.
- It was mooted that the experience and knowledge of this forum should be leveraged to develop a **vision** for the next three months to three years, on what food programmes could look like. This could include considerations on how to best utilise decreasing funding for food programmes, and even how – where appropriate – to exit from such programmes while still ensuring that distribution can continue for the most vulnerable.
- One clear learning that has emerged from this forum is the lack of visibility – both to the public sector and to NGOs - of the services delivered by non-profit organisations in general. This forum could be used to **develop a platform that communicates what services are being delivered** into which communities, and by whom, to provide robust data on the activities of non-profit organisations.

- It was noted that the absence of a platform such as this hampered food relief efforts, and the existence of such a platform could prove invaluable in future crisis situations.
- In different ways, several participants suggested **leveraging off existing community kitchens**. It is felt that these operations are closest to the issues, and have extensive local knowledge coupled with deep local credibility. Some of the ways that these assets could be utilised included:
 - Making food kitchens the basis around which community gardens are established.
 - Linking food kitchens to local economic recovery efforts through, for example, leveraging local procurement to the kitchens.
 - Utilising the relationships around the kitchens for communications efforts, such as on behaviour to prevent the spread of the virus, or on reduction of the stigma associated with COVID-19.
 - Establishing public-private sector partnerships based around food kitchens to drive multiple programmes.
- Two further suggestions for the forum included **assisting with government efforts** in two specific areas:
 - **Communications**, as indicated in the food kitchen example, but on a broader basis – utilising the networks represented in the forum explicitly to communicated particular public health messages.
 - **Managing the trauma** associated with the impact of COVID-19. Community leaders and religious leaders, for example, could be recruited to assist with specific efforts in this regard.
- There was also support for the idea that the forum assists in ensuring that **psycho-social services are more easily accessible** to all communities, during and beyond COVID-19.
- In a more general sense, it was also suggested that the network be used to **test proposed ideas**, approaches and innovations across the NGO spectrum.
- Aside from the specific ideas listed above, it was also mooted that the forum act as a more general, longer-term **mechanism for collaborative decision-making processes**, information sharing, and activity coordination for NGOs and faith-based organisations.

General updates and information

A number of updates were provided on current issues and those raised in previous meetings of this forum.

Data mapping:

- Gavin Miller confirmed that the map of WCG humanitarian relief efforts is now available at <https://coronavirus.westerncape.gov.za/>. Look for the yellow tile: "View our Humanitarian Relief dashboard". It should be noted that the map now includes a map of the food gardens that are supported by the Department of Agriculture. Contact Gavin at Gavin.Miller@westerncape.gov.za with any issues or comments about the map.
- www.fooddistribution.co.za was also discussed. A learning that has emerged from this forum is that relying on small food relief organisations to input data frequently is unrealistic, owing to time and digital access issues. The focus for the next week is going to be on capturing the data from a smaller number of intermediary food relief organisations; contact Andrew Borraine at andrew@wcedp.co.za about this.

Organisations that are inputting their data, however, are requested to continue doing so, and, if possible, to update their information by Wednesday of each week to accommodate planning meetings that occur on Thursdays.

SASSA Special COVID-19 Relief Grant:

Over 13 million applications nationally were made, of which 6.9 million were invalid due to being incomplete, duplicates, or containing inconsistent data. Of the remaining 6.5 million valid applications, 3.5 million have been processed to date. 1.5 million of these have been rejected as the applicants are already receiving some form of grant. 665 000 applications have been approved and 1.2 million are pending. 30 000 applicants have been paid, with just over 2 000 of these being in the Western Cape.

There are two main conclusions:

- There is considerably more lag between application and receipt of funds than was anticipated.
- The process will also have left large numbers of people with dashed expectations, which could have consequences in terms of civic action.

It was noted that DSD are considering implementing a food voucher system, to cover the gaps where there is inadequate food security and food parcels are not possible. Learnings from this forum, from existing food vouchers schemes, should be fed into this process.

Decentralised approach to the provision of quarantine and isolation facilities via NGOs:

This has not yet been approved by WCG.

Public health education

The WCG has made media available. However, it may be that NGOs are in the best position to 'land the message'.

Masks and sanitisers:

Every learner going back to school will be provided with two masks. The WCG is continuing to focus on the production and distribution of public masks, which could help stimulate community economic recovery.

Mayor's Relief Fund:

The Mayor's Relief Fund of R12 million is targeting families that are receiving no form of aid (including the Special COVID-19 Relief). Beneficiaries are being identified with the help of ward councillors. The distribution of this aid, via vouchers or parcels, is projected to begin this week, initially in 7 of the 24 sub-councils.

Community-based Teams:

The Community-Based Teams that were discussed in the forum meeting on 28 May have been focused on the Covid hot spots, with Tygerberg being the most urgent. Contact details of those CBTs that are up and running will be supplied at the next forum meeting. The proposal is to focus on the Delft area as a pilot. The Delft Action Network indicated its willingness to be involved in these efforts, via Fadly Issacs at fadly.isaacs@uct.ac.za.

Suggestions and offers of assistance

In the course of the meeting, a number of suggestions and offers for assistance were made.

- There was extensive discussion on the group chat about the use of vouchers (in preference to food parcels).

- The issue of vouchers not contributing to local economies, due to only being redeemable at mega stores, was raised. However, digital vouchers for vendors using FLASH can be redeemed at spaza shops and local vendors. More information is available at <https://www.warehouse.org.za/food-justice-during-covid-19/>. Those interested in exploring this option should email covidvouchers@warehouse.org.za.
- It was also noted that there are developments pending on mobile money and cash options.
- The issue of beneficiaries queuing for food in the rain was raised again as a concern. Any suggestions on how to relieve this issue without breaching social distancing requirements, or any concrete offers of assistance, would be appreciated. Contact Karen Cain of The Service Dining Rooms at karen@sdr.org.za with any ideas or offers.
- The Warehouse is still distributing food vouchers on a weekly basis. Zukile Ngqeza can be contacted in this regard at zukile@warehouse.org.za.
- The Peninsula School Feeding Association (PSFA) is able to assist with the packing and distribution of food parcels if necessary. Contact Petrina Pakoe at petrina@psfa.org.za.
- The FoodGov Community of Practice is hosting a panel discussion on food relief in the COVID-19 context on 23 June. Contact Florian Kroll on florian@plaas.org.za for more information.
- And finally, there was a general request to move the language of the forum away from 'feeding people' and 'feeding schemes' to 'food programmes' and 'food initiatives'. This would move away from depicting beneficiaries in a purely passive light.

Next steps

It was agreed that this report would serve as a summary of the suggestions raised in the meeting as to the future purpose of this forum. Participants are encouraged to circulate these suggestions, and to contribute comments during the course of the coming week. Additional suggestions should also be raised.

Both new suggestions and comments on existing ideas should be sent to Andrew Borraine at Andrew@wcedp.co.za.

The next meeting of this forum, on 11 June, will then be devoted to any further discussion on the options raised, and to reaching some decisions on the future of the forum.

This group will reconvene on **Thursday, 11 June 2020 at 2:00 p.m.** Invitations will be sent out; participants are encouraged to nominate other role-players in this area who would benefit from, or contribute to, the discussion.

For further information or questions about this report, contact Andrew Borraine of the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP) at Andrew@wcedp.co.za.

Attachment 1: Food relief coordination meeting attendees – 4 June 2020