



## Human Development Organization (HDO) - Sri Lanka

### COVID 19 - POSITION PAPER

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold (UNICEF : 2020).

*"The virus does not care about ethnicity or nationality, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly. The most vulnerable – women and children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced – pay the highest price,"*  
- UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres -

The COVID-19 disease has achieved pandemic status. The World Health Organization has issued guidelines for handling the problem from both biomedical and psychological points of view. Coronavirus affects mental health in a terrible volume and intensity all over the world and also affected Sri Lanka. In reality as per the psychological view we don't think there is a single human being who is not feeling some degree of stress or anxiety. The intensity and impact may diverse from person to person. We are living in unexpected times on the globe. The onsets of the new Covid-19 and its fast-tracked extensions have not only led to the declaration of a global pandemic by the WHO, but also highlights how fragile health services are, and how helplessness most vulnerable populations are around the world. Pandemics affect different population groups in different ways, exacerbating the inequalities that already exist in society.

In the case of Sri Lanka, this health emergency has led governments to take measures to prevent the spread of this disease. These measures range from declarations of quarantine, Airport closures, social isolation, imposing curfew, strengthening of health systems & services and information dissemination, among others, seeking to protect the entire population.

Sri Lanka, using global WHO guidance documents, implemented a Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. The country is rising up to the challenge to prevent, detect, and respond to Covid-19. Containment of Covid-19 is feasible and remains the top priority in Sri Lanka. With early, containment measures, countries can slow or stop transmission and save lives. Curfews remain in effect throughout the country with changes announced on short notice.

## COVID-19 - Situation Report Sri Lanka

Total Number Confirmed	649
Total Number of Deaths	07
Total Number Recovered	139
Confirmed and hospitalized	503
Suspected and hospitalized	187

*(Ministry of Health & Indigenous Medical Services, 30/04/2020)*

According to the COVID 19 situation report on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020 total number of confirmed are 649 and reported 7 deaths while first death was reported on 28th March 2020. Meanwhile the curfew in force in the all districts until further notice. Since the ongoing viral pandemic of Corona many sector in Sri Lanka are currently experiencing difficulties due to disruptions in global trade and tourism. Sri Lankan government has requested the general public to practice hygiene methods and self quarantine methods to safe guard from the disease while disruptions of daily routine, economic activities (including import and export), government decided to grant several benefits for the people. To combat corona virus government introduced a relief fund called "COVID 19 Health Care and Social Security Fund". According to the media source it's early to predict accurately how long the COVID 19 will last or total impact of Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government has been taking necessary steps to fight against Corona Virus. However, in certain sectors, due to high levels of poverty and marginalization, presents an additional challenge, since a large portion of the population lives in conditions of extreme vulnerability, including predominantly Plantation peoples, IDPs, Women in Agriculture sector, fisher folk, urban workers, farmers, children, Informal sector workers, street sellers.. etc. These conditions translate into high rates of hunger, malnutrition, inaccessibility to health, services, precarious infrastructure and low visibility. This pandemic finds in a really vulnerable health situation. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate and characterize the vulnerabilities that affect the marginalized population the most in order to better focus efforts on the containment and control of the pandemic.

Nervousness, fears of contamination, constant reassurance seeking behaviors, panic attacks, sleep disturbance, excessive worry and feelings of helplessness, probability of an economic slowdown, potential job losses, financial burden, uncertainty about future possibilities, Fears of running out of food and necessities etc, are some major triggering factors to depression and anxiety and further worsening depression may leads to severe mental health issues and suicidal thoughts.

As the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on March 3, health workers face “real danger” due to the lack of protective equipment. The WHO statement warned that “without protecting

health workers” COVID-19 “cannot be stopped.” According to Medical personnel, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like eye masks, face masks and coats, sanitizer liquid required, goggles, gowns etc for staff members at out-patient departments, intensive care units (ICUs), and wards for treating patients are severely inadequate. The PPE also inadequate among the field staff of Medical Officer of Health (MOH)( Doctors, Public Health Inspectors, Public Health Midwife etc) in several districts of Sri Lanka.

**Plantation people** are particularly vulnerable due to their poverty, poor housing condition (Line Rooms), poor health status compared to that of the general population and owing to the lack of access to healthcare. In some parts of the country, plantation people and **IDPs** are not registered at voters list, and therefore they face difficulties to access to government subsidies. **Youths:** In terms of employment, youth are normally disproportionately unemployed, and those who are employed often work in the informal economy on precarious contracts or in service sectors that are likely to be severely affected by COVID-19. **Disable Persons :** In districts in the country, persons with disabilities are disproportionately likely to experience poverty and to face challenges in accessing health-care services, education, employment, and other essential services, due to lack of availability, accessibility, affordability, as well as stigma and discrimination. **Elder People:** Increased social isolation of older persons at a time when they may be at most need of support. **Women and Children :** Women and children are most marginalized and excluded in societies. Women and girls are more vulnerable in their sexual and reproductive health. Therefore they should be given more consideration.

## Position of Human Development Organization

The international community is facing a global emergency affecting people and communities with no distinctions. In this particular time the Human Development Organization – Sri Lanka, with all its partners and community groups all over the country, wants to share its concerns and solidarity with all the people suffering from the Covid pandemic. In this current situation we stand together with those who are suffering from corona, with all the affected communities, women and children. We salute our special thanks to all health and medical personnel & facilities, the staff of government sector, security forces and people working to stop outbreak.

This emergency is an evident to shows us, how **universal public health systems (UPHS)** are essential for the life of all people. Health is a fundamental Human Right. We demand our government to take actions to strengthen public health systems.

HDO is active in promoting human rights, people centre development and environmental & gender justice. HDO's one of the commitment since 2015 has been the lobby on SDG 3, where all our people in concern work to gather for equality in access to public health. In this Covid 19 disaster, we are aware of the risks faced by the most vulnerable people like plantation people, IDPs, returnees, women in agriculture sector, fisher folk, children, migrant women, farmers, small sellers etc.

Furthermore, it's very significant to provide employment and income support, facilities to access to food and basic needs. Work from home is appropriate for white color jobs, but a lot of jobs can't be done from home: workers in the plantations, workers in the informal sector, workers in agriculture sector, small business, workers in community development, fishermen, construction workers are paying a higher cost from the crisis. They are losing their livelihoods, and this pushes people into hunger and malnourishment. Health facility, security, Local authorities and the public/citizen bear a big responsibility to respond to the challenges of covering the spread of the epidemic, and ensure good health and medical care for the infected and provision of basic needs for local communities.

**Human Development Organization has initiated number of immediate steps to be taken in the form of program activities to combat Corona Virus in Central Region. They are:**

- **Support and Solidarity to/with Health & Medical Facility :** HDO received number of requests from Regional Director of Health Service, Nuwara Eliya and Kandy districts, Medical Officers of Health (MOHs) and government authorities to provide them medical equipment / Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the use of doctors, nurses, Public Health Inspectors, Public Health Midwives, Sanitary workers etc. Although the equipment are scarcity in the market/ pharmacies, **HDO able to support even during the Curfew period in 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March with the special police permission** following PPEs: Face Masks, Gloves, Hand wash Sanitizers... to RDHS Nuwara Eliya, RDHS Kandy, MOH Officers in Maskeliya & Galaha, District Secretariats, Divisional Secretariats, Police Stations in Kandy area. Thanks to **Foundation MDM France** who supported for this initiative.





(Nuwara Eliya Regional Director of Health Service)



(Kandy Regional Director of Health Service)

**Public Awareness Creation :** At this point of time, we the CSOs and the general public join as one family and as entire country to respect and support decisions taken by the Government. Among the plantation community, rural women, informal sector workers, migrant workers, children lack of public awareness, hospital preparedness and infrastructure are some of the serious gaps identified by the authorities working across the country. In this context, the HDO has been organizing awareness programs on Covid 19 through **Radio broadcasting programs “VIDIYAL”** through Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (Up-country Service). Lack of Tamil speaking officers, and the information are other challenges, therefore we organize awareness programs in Tamil language to the benefit of plantation community and the other minorities. The broadcast /program reach Central, Uva and Sabragamuwa Provinces.



(Recording of Radio Programs – Awareness on Covid 19 & Protection....)



**Coordination between Authorities and Communities by HDO Volunteers :** HDO Community Volunteers and the Staff are building and strengthening coordination between authorities and public on information on Covid 19, health facilities, government subsidies, vegetable & food items delivery etc.. to the benefit of public to access public services.

**IEC Materials:** Sri Lankan Government is updating the status of Covid – 19 in every district by Media Network and Mobile phones. It also shows that how to protect oneself from the spread of Corona Virus through pictures so that the illiterates can easily understand and practice to combat Covid – 19. In Isolation the family members can easily understand and practice it to stop the spread of the Virus and be all safe. However, still there is a need for awareness creation among the marginalized groups in their own language. Protection is better than cure. Therefore HDO is proposing of designing, printing and disseminating IEC material like, Leaflets, Posters, Stickers, Booklets, CDs on Covid 19, combating and protection. Already HDO staff designed Posters and Stickers.

**Capacity Building of Health Workers / Volunteers:** Covid 19 is a new challenge in the health and medical field. Number of Health staff and Volunteers are supporting health authorities to defeat the Corona. In this regard we propose to organize capacity building trainings for Health workers and volunteers of CSOs on the technical side of the Covid 19 and the future challenges for the local communities.

**Facilitation of Cooperative Service :** HDO is proposing a Facilitation Service between producers/farmers (vegetable, dairy goods, food items, fruits, Ayurveda medicinal items...) and consumers to ensure quality goods for fair price to benefit both consumers and farmers. A discussion was initiated with the District Secretariats, Divisional Secretariats, Agriculture Department, farmer groups and CBOs on the building of cooperative system and social business. At present, some of the media highlighted about the exploitation of consumers as well as political intervention. Therefore HDO propose to build mobile fair market system.

**Feeding Future – Livelihood Support for Self Sufficiency :** International organizations are beginning to fear that the already high number of COVID-19 victims will be aggravated by deaths linked to the lack of food, especially in the world's most vulnerable countries. According to FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, Uncertainty about food availability can induce policymakers to trade restrictive measures in order to safeguard national food security. ... In 2007–2008, these immediate measures proved extremely damaging, especially for low-income food-deficit countries and to the efforts of humanitarian organizations to procure supplies for the needy and vulnerable. ... The health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on some of the poorest countries are still

unknown. Yet, we can say with certainty that any ensuing food crisis as a result of poor policy making will be a humanitarian disaster that we can avert.

All these warnings are signaling that food supply chains are under tremendous pressure and that there is a risk of major disruption. The most vulnerable populations like plantation community, IDPs, rural women and children, daily wage workers... will face increased food insecurity. The threat of not having access to particular desired foodstuffs is obscured by the threat of not having any source of income or access to food at all. According to media without a doubt, the number of people experiencing hunger is going to increase dramatically.

In this context, the HDO and the CSOs propose to support local communities to initiate local food production. Home gardens, small vegetable and fruit production, animal husbandry, support small scale farmers, promoting micro and small business etc. The HDO is in the process of discussing with the Seeds Production Unit of Agriculture Department, Peradeniya on this regard. We are planning to provide vegetable seeds to communities in our target areas. HDO also requests the political representative of plantation community, plantation management and the government to release the bare / spare land available in the plantations to the unemployed youths and families for the agriculture purposes. ***HDO is looking for generous support from partners and sponsors to initiate the project.***

**Food First – Daily Food :** The HDO is planning to provide basic food items to thousands of underprivileged, women and children in plantations, daily wagers, disable persons, elder persons who have limited access to basic food during this lockdown period. This initiative will be launched to feed the needy people. The Organization is planning to provide basic provision for families for the lockdown period and following till the situation gets normal to go out and earn for their livelihood. Target families directly will be fed for one month from the project area in the number of districts. ***HDO is looking for generous support from partners and sponsors to initiate the project.***

***“A society’s overall health depends on the health of its poorest people,” stressed. UN DESA Head, Liu Zhenmin, in a message on the COVID-19 pandemic.***



Meeting with Government Agent/ District Secretary Kandy & provided PPE





Meeting with Divisional Secretariat Deltota and Kandy and provided PPEs.



PPE packs prepared by HDO Staff and Provided to Health & Local Authorities

*"Thanks to HDO, you are the first and only organization who approached us and provided support of PPE, even in the critical and curfew time" RDHS.*

**Contact:**

P.P. Sivapragasam (Director)  
Human Development Organization (HDO)  
P.O. Box 171  
Kandy 20,000, Sri Lanka.

Mobile : +94 777 160 150

Tel : 0094 81 2232217 / 0094 81 5675420 Fax: 0094 81 2232217

Email: [hdo.srilanka@gmail.com](mailto:hdo.srilanka@gmail.com), [Sivahdo@gmail.com](mailto:Sivahdo@gmail.com)

[www.hdosrilanka.lk](http://www.hdosrilanka.lk), Face book: [www.facebook.com/HDOKANDY](https://www.facebook.com/HDOKANDY) , [www.facebook.com/hdosrilanka](https://www.facebook.com/hdosrilanka)