

Local democracy response to COVID-19 – Discussion material

ICLD is monitoring the development of COVID-19 closely, following the updates from the Public Health Agency of Sweden, WHO, as well as recommendations from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is our understanding that in a time like this, it is of utmost importance to pay attention to trusted sources of information to prevent the spread of misinformation and harmful content of COVID-19. The challenges faced by local governments across the globe are multifaceted, as are the responses to the virus outbreak. Due to the rapid change in the pandemic situation and the continuous change of preventive measures recommended in Sweden, the aim of this document is not to summarize or comment on the current challenges faced by local governments and national government alike.

One of ICLD's missions is to foster opportunities where people can meet, face-to-face, to exchange knowledge and experience. The current outbreak of COVID-19 has put much of this year's planned meetings on hold for many. It is uncertain when international travel may be feasible, leaving many uncertainties in regard to the ongoing partnership work. While you in your partnership may not be able to meet physically, we strongly encourage you to find alternative solutions, perhaps in using digital tools when possible, and thereby continuing the partnership work. Below you find discussion material which you may find useful in discussing with your partner in these troubled times. We have divided the questions in regards to ICLD's four core areas of democracy. The questions may or may not be applicable to your partnership or your situational context – we advise you use them where you see fit!

General discussion questions reg. your partnership

- What aspects of your objectives in your project are you able to carry out?
- A pandemic of this magnitude was unthinkable for many. Have you identified a need of updating your risk management plan?
- A useful tool to problematize the current crisis is by placing your partnership work in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. It may be used as a framework to develop strategic planning.

ICLD Core areas:

Equity/inclusion

- The coronavirus is affecting people unequally, already vulnerable groups may have less opportunities to access information, healthcare and medicine, and may lose their income. These are important aspects in coronavirus response. Discuss which groups are particularly affected by (local and national) authorities' decisions and how / if their burden can be eased and how they can be included in decisions.
- One of the challenges with reducing the spread of the virus is to make sure accurate information reach everyone. ICLD has collected information from our partner municipalities about how they are communicating with their citizens regarding the virus, these are some examples: Local television and radio, municipality's webpage, social media, hotlines, WhatsApp platforms, public notice boards, billboards, flyers (translated in several languages). Some had youth councils distributing flyers, others had public vehicle posters or a vehicle going around making safety measures announcements. Many municipalities are also spreading information through other channels such as religious groups, healthcare workers, ward councillors and ward committees, or

through home schooling on how to make hand sanitizers and how to make simple masks etc. Discuss the methods used to communicate with the citizens in your municipality. Consider if the information reaches everyone and if other methods and channels are needed to reach certain groups.

Transparency

- Extraordinary decisions and measures need to be taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19. These measures often require citizen trust and engagement, it is therefore vital to make information that underpin the decision-making accessible for the citizens. Discuss how citizens can access information regarding the decision-making in your municipality.

Possibility to demand accountability

- Do procedures exist for citizens whereby they can express their opinions on decisions taken to limit the spread of the virus?
- Is it clear to the citizen who is responsible for which decision?

Citizen participation

- The division of responsibilities and work between authorities and health care facilities may look different in Sweden and in your national/local context. Describe this division of responsibility in your national context, and/or discuss how citizen participation is incorporated in your public health work.
- The virus naturally poses challenges for the physical meeting of citizens in your municipality and may thus have impact on the ability for the citizens in your respective municipality to partake in the ongoing work of your municipality. Connecting to the question under Equity/Inclusion – have you established alternative contact points for your citizens?