



Gift of the Givers  
FOUNDATION



## Project Proposal – COVID-19 Response March 2020

**“Best Among People are those who Benefit Mankind”**

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## Profile: Gift of the Givers

The Gift of the Givers Foundation is the largest disaster relief organisation of African origin on the African continent. We have delivered over R2.8 billion in aid to 43 countries around the world. We have designed and developed the world's first and largest containerised mobile hospital, which was deployed in Bosnia. It was comparable to the best hospitals in Europe and remains unmatched to this day.

Our assistance is purely humanitarian and unconditional. We assist irrespective of race, religion, colour, class, political affiliation or geographical boundary. We are entirely neutral in our approach to mankind in need, are non-judgemental and have an open-minded approach to all situations. We work with governments to get our assistance delivered but do not align ourselves politically to any party. We have an excellent partnership relationship with the South African Government for the delivery of our local projects, as well as for foreign aid delivery.

Our projects cover 21 different categories covering the fields of education, health, poverty alleviation, disaster response and agriculture among others. These are administered by our teams in South Africa, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Mauritania, Yemen, Palestine and Syria.

We actively seek to build bridges between people of different cultures and religions engendering goodwill, harmonious coexistence, tolerance and mutual respect in keeping with the divine injunction:

"O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Almighty is (he who is) the most righteous of you." (Sura Hujurat/the Inner Apartments, Chapter 49, Verse 13.)

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## Introduction and Context of the Disaster

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

At the end of 2019 – several cases of pneumonia were reported in Wuhan City in China. In January 2020, it was recognised as a new virus – in the same family of the SARS and MERS virus. The virus was named COVID-19.

By the end of January – several hundred cases were reported across China – and new cases identified in Thailand, Japan and Korea. Most of these were traced back to people travelling from Wuhan City.

The situation reports from the World Health Organisation show a rapid spread of the virus – both in terms of number of people affected and the geographical regions. By March 2020 – Europe was considered the epicenter of the disaster – with new cases being reported in the Middle East and Africa. As at 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 there are almost 180 000 confirmed cases and just under 7500 deaths reported.

The spread of the disease was declared a global pandemic – with many countries instituting travel restrictions, shutting down schools and universities, prohibiting public gatherings, encouraging voluntary quarantine and taking measures to improve sanitation.

With an increasing number of cases (62 confirmed) and the first confirmed cases of local spread - South Africa followed suit – with President Cyril Ramaphosa declaring the COVID-19 a national disaster.

## Approach to Disaster Response

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike any other disaster that we have encountered before. There are a number of challenges – including:

- Lack of comprehensive information on the (newly discovered) virus
- The speed at which it spreads
- The fact that South Africa is now experiencing local spread
- The high rates of HIV and TB amongst our population
- The already overburdened public healthcare facilities
- The panic and fear in the general public – and the spreading of false information
- The treatment protocols requiring a different approach – especially when it comes to infection
- The impact on schools, institutions and public gatherings – and the requirement to catch up on missed syllabus for many pupils
- The services that were rendered via the school – such as the nutrition programme ensuring that kids receive a meal everyday
- The secondary impact on jobs and productivity and the impact it has on already many struggling businesses and employees that may be the sole breadwinners for their families

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The address from the President and the measures announced in the speech are a step in the right direction – and should hopefully prevent a full-scale disaster. However, the state, the corporate sector, non-profit organisations and the public as a whole – all have a role to play.

A national plan covering the among other essential aspects: communication and risk awareness; monitoring of new cases and disease spread; controlling the points of entry/exit (land, sea and air); scaling up facilities for testing and treatment – and the influx of patients; disease prevention and control – including the need for specially allocated quarantine facilities for infected patients; has to be managed centrally by the state.

Gift of the Givers Foundation will act in a supporting role – assisting the state healthcare facilities. Given the many unknowns – it is extremely challenging to draw up a plan to address all issues – especially where it requires huge financial resources from the state. However, there are general principles that will guide our interventions:

1. The need to act on rational and real evidence – not on fear and hype.
2. Given the potential scale of the problem – realistically, it is not possible to assist everyone. We need to recognize that some people are more at risk than others – especially people that have been affected. Resources have to be prioritized appropriately – and the guidelines from the state and the NICD try to take this into account.
3. While the fear may be around the COVID-19 strain – the existing healthcare challenges and patients should not be compromised.
4. There is a need to be prepared for different stages of the pandemic – with a large focus on prevention and mitigation – which will hopefully be successful in preventing a full-scale disaster
5. The intervention of Gift of the Givers will be primarily focused in South Africa – and may be extended to regions where we have our own teams. Any region outside our areas of operation need to have special motivation.

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## Current Interventions

After consulting with professionals and decision-makers at different levels of government – including a number of hospitals, the private sector as well as many of the medical volunteers – several areas have been identified as being practical areas where Gift of the Givers can add value.

### Reduce Risk of Spread and Burden on State Hospitals and Resources

One of the key lessons that Gift of the Givers has learnt through the experiences of responding to multiple disasters – is that regular ailments, and medical incidents and accidents continue. This means that there is a need to be prepared for the disaster – while maintaining capacity to respond to the regular medical requirements.

The risks for immune compromised people and the fear and anxiety created by the COVID-19 virus – places a burden on the healthcare facilities. Questions arise related to:

- How to assist patients that may be healthy or have the common cold or flu-like symptoms – but need reassurance of the health status?
- How to prevent an infected person from spreading the disease to other patients (immune-compromised) seeking treatment at the hospital?
- Hospitals will still see medical and trauma patients. How to prioritise patients – so that COVID-19 cases are not ignored/missed – but that the standard of treatment and response times for other severe cases is still maintained?

This is not easy to answer and requires multiple, concurrent initiatives:

- Hospitals have already indicated that non-essential and elective procedures will be postponed. This will reduce the load on medical staff and also increase the number of beds available.
- The state has already designated a number of hospitals to isolate and manage infected COVID-19 patients.
- A number of support centres – providing email, WhatsApp and telephonic support have been set up.
- A set of guidelines has been prepared for laboratories and hospitals providing testing and treatment.

These are all great initiatives. To support and supplement these initiatives – Gift of the Givers have identified the following interventions:

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## Provision of Medical Supplies

This will be done in controlled manner and will initially focus on healthcare professional at state institutions. The price and availability of the N95 or similar masks have created a problem for people wanting to assist. While this is not yet a major issue – Gift of the Givers has sourced 10000 FFP2 masks and identified a few hospitals that require these. The list of these facilities was provided by the National Department of Health.

There have been a number of requests for sanitiser. As far as possible – water and soap should be used to avoid an artificial demand. Where there are institutions that have a lack of running water – we are willing to provide sanitisers. This again will be done via the hospitals or in coordination with the Department of Health.

Gift of the Givers will NOT be going on a drive to collect or distribute these supplies at schools or to individuals – as in this case – it is neither practical nor a priority.

Additionally, as is our normal procedure – Gift of the Givers facilitates the donations of medicines and medical supplies from companies to state-run hospitals where we have a long-standing partnership. The medical staff and management of these hospitals are transparent and provide feedback on the usage and disbursement of the donation. This will continue.

## Availability of Medical Equipment

Reports from Europe and the United States mentioning the lack of ventilation equipment as one of the major challenges that prevented patients with severe respiratory symptoms from receiving life-saving treatment.

It is not enough to simply purchase more ventilators and related equipment. Unfortunately, many of the public hospitals still lack the bed space and dedicated personnel to utilise this equipment effectively and efficiently. Given that the public facilities are already operating under severe strain – the simple provision of equipment will not solve the problem.

Secondly, there is still hope, that by taking the preventative and mitigating measures as a country – this phase could be avoided.

However, due to the demand that is now created for these devices – it is not possible to procure them quickly. Gift of the Givers medical team maintain equipment to set up a field hospital from scratch – this includes four ventilators, five monitors and three oxygen machines. These machines are currently being calibrated, tested and supplies procured to ensure that if the need arises – they can be provided at no cost to a state institution – for the duration of the pandemic.

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## Pre-triage

A number of doctors at state hospitals have requested assistance to create “pre-triage” facilities away from the main hospital building.

The idea is that:

- Patients seeking non-virus related treatment/support – are directed to the regular hospital facilities.
- Patients that enter – that are deemed high-risk for corona (visual assessment) – are immediately directed to an isolated area of the hospital to get a proper test done
- Patients that are low-risk and showing some symptoms are directed to a separate area for assessment and patient history. Due to the cost-implications of the tests - only patients that fit the category of needing tests are directed to the hospital lab. Low-risk/No-risk patients are attended to and advised on preventative and monitoring measures to put in place.
- Low-risk patients that insist on getting tested are directed to private facilities.

Gift of the Givers is willing to intervene in this aspect – by:

- Erecting and/or equipping temporary zones for pre-triage within the hospital area
- Provision of medical personnel – volunteers offering their services at no charge OR where necessary a nurse or doctor to be paid for a period of up to six months. These medical personnel would have to work under the supervision of full-time hospital employees.
- Consumables (masks, gloves, sanitisers, etc) that would be required
- Where the personnel (volunteer or paid) are supplied by Gift of the Givers – basic equipment such as BP monitors, stethoscopes and basic examination tools will be supplied

We are currently discussing this proposal with a number of hospitals – as there are implications of providing external medical personnel and consumables to hospitals – both in terms of risk/liability as well as supply-chain regulations.

## Reduce the cost of Screening for Private Patients

It is not financially viable for the state to test everyone. The cost (not just financial) will be too great. This means that many people would have to seek the services in the private sector. The current advertised rate for a COVID-19 test at a private institution is over R1400. Not all medical aids are willing to cover this cost. Gift of the Givers is leveraging its existing project – where Mullah Labs, a private pathology practice provides reduced rates for people that cannot afford medical aid or private healthcare. Up until now – we have successfully managed to reduce the cost to R750 per patient – and are trying to bring this down even further.

We will be looking to private funders that would be willing to subsidise poorer patients – especially vulnerable persons that have a history of exposure.

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## Access to Water

The most common advice offered by any professional or institution is – wash your hands with soap. This is great advice for preventing the spread of the virus. However, the sad reality is that millions of South Africans still do not have access to running water. Not just individuals – but a number of hospitals also face severe shortage or challenges in obtaining a regular and reliable supply of water.

Gift of the Givers water projects – including the distribution of bottled water (although significantly reduced), water tankers, and the drilling and equipping of boreholes will continue. Recently, several hospitals were identified as recipients. With the threat of the COVID-19 virus – site selection will be biased towards hospitals – so that they can continue to function as well as provide a basic minimum level of sanitation and disease control – that is simply not possible without water.

## Access to Basic Supplies and Provision of Food

This is an area of major concern in the context of capacity and logistical support. The assumption currently is that there would be a breakdown of primary services regarding the delivery of food and basic necessities to vulnerable communities throughout the country, most particularly those that reside in rural areas.

- Gift of The Givers has implemented a disaster mitigation plan which includes the following:
- Disaster preparedness which includes the stockpiling of foods, medical supplies and sanitary packs for the lockdown period and beyond
- Arranging with our key suppliers to hold on demand essential commodities for immediate availability
- The regular monitoring are institutions such as homes for the disabled, orphanages, frail care centres etc
- To continue our feeding scheme at hospitals and other institutions which depend on our services
- The increase in co-operation between the various stakeholders are from government and community representatives to enhance our capacity to deliver emergency and essential services when required

## Education and Awareness

While the measures announced by the President – it will not have the desired impact if the public do not follow the guidelines. Key messaging has to be maintained:

- Symptoms and identifying your risk profile – should you go for testing
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- Infection Prevention and Control (washing hands, cleaning of surfaces, avoid shaking hands, etc)
- When and how to self-quarantine
- What to do if you have been tested and confirmed to be infected – no reason to panic
- Contact information for designated hospitals and testing centres
- Contact information for support lines
- Information on where to seek advice/further assistance
- Information on how to donate/provide assistance
- Gift of The Givers has an inhouse tollfree careline, supervised by a qualified Psychologist, which focuses on a number of issues including Gender-based violence and Intimate Partner violence.

There are a number of agencies that have already prepared very useful and effective messaging. It can simply be packaged and provided to the public in easy-to-digest bits – and continually reinforced. Examples could be to play the videos on promotional screens in-store or within a bank.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation and bad advice being circulated – especially on social media. Additionally, there are a number of well-meaning individuals/entities – that want to provide some sort of relief – but without the proper measures in place to prevent or control the spread of infection – these may actually have negative effects.

## Longer-term Proposals

As soon as the COVID-19 virus is considered to be contained – and the risk is reduced – people will be eager to return to some form of normalcy as soon as possible. At this point – one of the most important interventions we are considering is how to assist educators and learners – especially in matric – to complete the syllabus. These are currently open-ended and needs further thoughts – as the focus at the moment is on the medical aspects of the crisis.

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More and more, countries are entering a phase of lockdowns, which severely impacts the economies of the globe. The South African government has announced measures to not only combat the spread of the virus, but to support those hit most severely, whether the poor, informal traders, small and medium businesses or the homeless. Government relief measures in neighboring countries, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe may not be as comprehensive as the countries are less strong economically. It is in this context that the region is looking to support government actions to reduce the impact of the virus on the most affected in our communities.

In understanding the impact on our communities, we need to recognise that we have a significant number of employees living in these communities who are exposed to the same risks as our local community members. These communities are often subject to high levels of unemployment, poor housing in some areas, poor service delivery and a high percentage of elderly and child headed households, which will increase the risk of the spread of the virus impacting our employees and the communities at large.

The proposed Community Response Plan has been developed by engaging with our communities, traditional and faith leaders and government agencies to understand their identified needs across the region. Once the needs were established, they were consolidated across the various operations to identify common themes.

The themes were further prioritised based on:

- intervention with greatest impact of infection control,
- early detection through temperature testing,
- consideration of supply chain bottlenecks,
- alignment with government guidelines.

This gave us the immediate priorities that we believe will have the greatest impact on our communities and our employees who live in these communities.

**Our Regional Priorities are deemed to be:**

- a. Community Vulnerability Assessment and Support
- b. Food Security for Vulnerable, Quarantined Households
- c. Water Provision
- d. Local Government Clinic Support
- e. WeCare Plus+ Community

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## Potential for Collaboration

The areas of collaboration would ideally be in:

- Food Security – either for individuals or families that have to undergo voluntary isolation or quarantine, as well as families that have suffered a loss of income
- Water Provision – clean water for drinking and sanitation is not only an essential right – but also a key aspect in the fight of the spread of the virus
- Support for Healthcare institutions

The response will need to take into account the needs of the community, but also respect the rules of the lockdown as well as the prescribed precautions to reduce and avoid the spread of the disease.

### Food Security

The normal modus operandi of the Gift of the Givers teams is to identify local leaders (through tribal or community structures) through which an accurate assessment of the community can be provided. A Gift of the Givers Community Liaison Officer (CLO) will be dispatched to the area to meet with the community representative/tribal chief – with the aim of verifying the information provided. This step is the first step to building trust and ensuring that the partner on the ground represents the needs of the community.

Once this is done the next step is to establish the needs, quantities and intervals that are required as part of the intervention.

A general food parcel will contain:

- Maize
- Rice
- Sugar Beans
- Salt
- Sugar
- Cooking Oil
- Tea/Coffee
- Jam/Peanut Butter
- Long Life Milk
- Baked Beans
- Tin Fish
- Noodles/Macaroni/Spaghetti

Items can be added/removed and the sizes varied – based on:

- Financial Budget

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- Balancing the weight and volume (optimizing logistical costs)
- The demographic of the population
- The proximity of the distribution point to their homes (and the availability of transport) 

While the common option is to put in as many items as possible – the problem arises when people cannot transport their hampers to their homes (e.g. the elderly or people living far away). In general, a 30kg to 35kg hamper is reasonable and can be completed at a price of about ZAR450.00 including packing and transport.

## Water Provision

Gift of the Givers has been working in water-scarce communities in South Africa (and other parts of the world) and have experience with a number of different approaches. Depending on each community – the following will have to be clarified:

Does the community already have access to a reliable supply of clean, potable water?

If not – is there a water source nearby that can provide water to the community?

If there is a water source – how accessible is it? What can be done to improve the access?

If there is no existing water source – is it possible, and more importantly, is it feasible to drill a borehole to provide water to the community?

The answers to these questions will generally guide the response. This could be any (or combinations) of the following:

- Drilling new boreholes within or near to the communities (preferably within community centres such as schools, clinics, tribal courts or even the police station).
- Identifying if there are existing boreholes that have suitable water quality and yields that simply need to be activated
- Identify if there are existing boreholes – that have a significant yield – that can be developed to service a larger population than it is currently – by adding pumps and pipelines to extend the water system closer to the affected community
- Identify if there are existing boreholes or other water sources – where tankers can be filled and then used to deliver waters to tanks in nearby communities

While all of the above may be possible – the COVID-19 virus means that there is a need to work more urgently to a solution. While it is possible for Gift of the Givers to quote on the sighting, drilling, equipping and maintenance of boreholes (which will be in the range of R350k per borehole) – there may be existing options that can provide faster and more cost-effective solutions.

- Is it possible to open these sites or make water available from these sites to the communities (by adding tanks or taps)

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## Support for Healthcare Facilities

This is something that is absolutely necessary. The public healthcare system is already under severe strain – even before the COVID-19 outbreak. Lack of personnel, resources, consumables and supplies are commonplace. While the big focus may be on COVID-19 or potential patients with COVID-19, there are still the common day-to-day problems for which people seek treatment. There are already a number of medical professionals that are afraid to provide treatment – even for regular patients – due to fear of being infected with the Corona Virus. This is not from lack of commitment – but from lack of basic protective supplies.

With the above said – the Department of Health at national and provincial level has a responsibility to provide the required gear to medical and support staff in the communities. As and NGO and the private sector – with finite resources – a blanket approach of supplying all clinics with supplies will neither be practical nor cost-effective. Clinics need to be prioritized based on a number of factors:

- Vulnerability and Risk Assessment – i.e. what is the likelihood of COVID-19 exposure and infection
- Number of patients visiting the clinic for medical assistance
- Ability for the clinic to refer patients to larger facilities (and even hospitals) – where treatment may be sought
- Proximity and ability for follow up, monitoring and evaluation

By prioritizing sites in this manner – resources don't have to be split evenly or "fairly" – but are rather distributed in a way that will maximize efficiency and reduce the risk of infection as far as possible. With this being said – there is new information being released about this strain of the virus very frequently – with experts often contradicting each other. This may affect how the vulnerability and risk assessment is carried out – but the overall approach will remain.

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**In Summary:**

Time does not permit me to present a thorough biopsy of our disaster response strategies and Intervention.

The current situation in lockdown mode, calls us to re-examine our modus operandi and operate in a different space. Hence, we contacted all stakeholders and partners which include all tiers of the Department of Social Development, Disaster Management, National Health, the various Municipalities, Civil Society and Ngo's to strengthen corporation and encourage the collaborative efforts to fight the immense challenges facing South African Society.

There is an urgent need for us to act in the present and we have over the past 27 years built a solid reputation for integrity and transparency amongst our citizens and those around the world. Our International and local track record will testify our suitability to bring relief intervention timeously.

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