

Tips for Applying Make Me a Change Agent Skills to WASH, Agriculture and Livelihoods Activities during COVID-19

Introduction

The [Make Me a Change Agent \(MMCA\) training manual](#) was recently adapted by [SCALE](#) and [PRO-WASH](#) for agriculture, livelihoods and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities.¹ It teaches frontline staff the skills needed to facilitate behavior change as part of their day-to-day activities. While the MMCA guide was developed primarily for in-person sessions, many of the techniques (such as good communication, participatory facilitation, and negotiation) are equally as important during COVID-19 responses as program teams pivot to implementing activities remotely.

SCALE and PRO-WASH have produced this tip sheet in recognition that USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP)-funded activities are actively transitioning their activities amidst movement restrictions, limitations on gathering sizes, and uncertainty around how long these restrictions will be necessary to ensure the safety and security of activity staff and participants. This document outlines how skills from the MMCA training manual can be adapted and used in the current context. Thus, it is primarily for program staff who are familiar with the MMCA guide. However, those not previously trained in MMCA can follow the references made to specific handouts, pages, and content within the guide, and apply these documents into ongoing training and learning activities.

Note:

Before planning social and behavior change activities, programs should refer to the current guidance prepared by national governments and the latest recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO). This tips sheet is intended to be used as guidance only and should be adapted to fit individual program needs and current country guidance. Additionally, before employing these tips, SCALE and PRO-WASH encourage partners to take time to identify how different populations may have limited access to information and resources, and understand any vulnerabilities populations may face during this time. Behavior change activities and the delivery of these activities to communities must be tailored to ensure they reach the intended audiences. Implementers must develop strategies to reach vulnerable populations, including those who do not have access to phones and/or radio and who have limited literacy or numeracy skills, as they may be the most marginalized from accessing information as well as the most at-risk for COVID-19. Programs should not increase time burdens on community groups, such as female lead farmers, savings groups' leaders, hygiene promotion volunteers, or water user committee members. They also may need to spend time on prevention or caretaking activities as a result of COVID-19 and may have less time to support routine activities.²



¹ Original guide available here: The FSN Network and CORE Group. 2015. [Make Me a Change Agent: A Multisectoral SBC Resource for Community Workers and Field Staff](#). Washington, DC: The TOPS Program

² See MMCA Advanced Lesson 11: Understanding Gender and Gender Bias, and Lesson 12: Shared Household Roles and Responsibilities for more information on gender, gender bias and household decision-making.

Applying MMCA Skills during COVID-19

This tip sheet is organized by individual MMCA lessons in order for users to easily reference the MMCA training manual. Under each lesson, you will find an introduction to the lesson, how these skills reinforce COVID-19 outreach efforts, and their application to WASH, agriculture, and livelihoods activities.

For each lesson, the MMCA skills mentioned are in reference to WASH, agriculture, and livelihoods behavior change activities that have been adapted to the COVID-19 context. These may include:

- Use of posters or print material
- Phone calls with scripts and prompt questions
- Text messages
- Short videos or voice recordings sent via WhatsApp or social media with follow-up conversations³
- Virtual discussion groups
- Radio programs and messages
- Participatory radio or TV programs with call-in or text-in options
- Using megaphones and speakers while socially distancing
- Telephone hotlines⁴

Lesson 2: Behavior Change through Effective Communication

Good communication skills help build trust between program staff and participants, which is essential for facilitating behavior change and critical during a pandemic when communicating clear and accurate information helps to save lives. This lesson teaches skills such as active listening, how to use open- and closed-ended questions, and recognizing/using verbal and non-verbal communication.

Applying Effective Communication Skills during COVID-19:

- During phone calls, **actively listen** to participants and rephrase to ensure you have understood their questions, concerns, and priorities. Listen closely for what they need, the rumors or misinformation that they have about COVID-19, and use this information to inform your programming ([pages 14-15](#)).
- During phone calls, **use open- and closed-ended questions** to ensure participants understand the key behaviors for COVID-19 prevention and response, identify barriers they face to adopting these behaviors, and discuss potential solutions ([pages 18-19](#)).
- If using text messages, use a two-way feature (if possible) to allow participants to respond with questions, comments, or concerns. For example, you can share a short text message or animated video about COVID-19 ([multiple languages here](#)) and then hold a discussion about it.
- During radio campaigns, ensure two-way communication by complementing radio messaging with radio shows when people can call in and have their questions answered.⁵
- If using the video function during calls, pay careful attention to **verbal and non-verbal cues** ([pages 12-13](#)).

³ Programs must consider phone data use implications when promoting video, text messages or phone calls during COVID-19. Community volunteers may need additional vouchers for phone credit or data plans if they are being asked to take on additional program responsibilities.

⁴ Existing hotlines (health services, agriculture extension, etc.) can be an excellent way to maintain communication. Make sure those operating the hotlines have access to accurate information and are regularly updated. Adapted from: [BBC Media Community Engagement from a Distance](#).

⁵ [Organizing Radio Talk Shows: A 10-Step Guide for Quick Programming in the COVID-19 Context](#), AAH, [Community engagement : The New Radio Show Guide and Running Order](#), IFRC

- Recognize that key staff and partners such as those at health facilities, tap stands, public latrines, markets, and stores will be very busy but can play a role in ensuring that communities have access to high-quality information. Brief these groups on **good communication techniques** ([Handout 2-1 on page 20](#)) and ensure that they have accurate, up-to-date COVID-19 information and are able to record/manage feedback.⁶

Agriculture/Livelihoods example: With face-to-face trainings suspended in many places, some programs are switching to using radio programs to share technical information, such as good harvesting and post-harvest practices. This one-way communication channel can be complemented by linking farmers to a mobile call center where a technician can **actively listen** to farmers’ challenges and **use open and closed-ended questions** to understand their issues and discuss solutions.

WASH example: Hold virtual discussion groups on WhatsApp or other telecommunication platforms with water user committee members and leaders. Use **open and closed-ended questions** and **actively listen** while discussing strategies for key hygiene promotion activities, such as handwashing with soap and water, increased cleaning within the home, and understanding and responding to issues related to breakdown in operations and maintenance of water infrastructure. Discussion groups can also be “cascaded down,” similar to the mother-leader approach, to support households to practice key COVID-19 prevention behaviors, such as regular handwashing.

Lesson 3: Communicating with Empathy and Respect

Being empathetic and showing respect improves program staff’s relationships with participants and enhances their ability to help people address barriers to behavior change. The skills taught in this lesson—showing empathy towards others, being respectful and accepting differences—are always critical for Behavior Change Agents (BCAs) to use, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when program participants may have additional responsibilities or concerns during this time.

Applying Empathy and Respect Skills during COVID-19:

- When answering phone calls, sending messages, etc. **practice empathy** by asking questions, actively listening and putting yourself in others’ shoes. For example, recognize that community volunteers may have families and loved ones who are requiring additional attention due to COVID-19 prevention or caretaking responsibilities so openly ask how they are managing. Brainstorm together ways to reduce their workload if their personal responsibilities have increased during the pandemic ([Handout 3-1, page 34](#)).
- **Be respectful** when answering phone calls or calling others by ([pages 31-32](#)):
 - Ask how participants’ and their families are doing during the pandemic. Listen actively to concerns and record complaints/concerns accordingly.
 - Ensure that the staff answering phone calls speak the right local dialect so they can communicate clearly with the community members who are calling.
 - Build trust by showing empathy. For example, dedicate a few moments at the beginning of each phone call to asking about how the person is doing, how their family is doing, and recognizing verbally that these are challenging times.
 - Show respect by listening attentively to any myths or misinformation the person has around COVID-19 and respectfully provide the most accurate information without shaming the person.

Agriculture/Livelihoods example: Some programs are working with community-based field agents to continue savings groups activities during COVID-19. Staff should **be empathetic** towards field agents, recognizing that they may have additional responsibilities or concerns during this time. **Show respect** by taking time to express

⁶ [BBC Media Community Engagement from a Distance](#), BBC Media

appreciation, ask how they are, and listen to any questions or concerns they may have. Work together to find solutions to continuing savings groups activities, such as door-to-door collection, smaller group meetings with a centralized deposit spot, or exploring digital solutions.

WASH example: Be empathetic to hygiene promotion volunteers who may have concerns about community mobilization activities during COVID-19, including personal safety and safety of participants. Offer alternatives to door-to-door activities. If possible, support volunteers with phone/internet credit to use other modalities that do not require face-to-face activities.

Lesson 4: Behavior Change through Effective Facilitation

Behavior Change Agents (BCAs) typically spend much of their time promoting behavior change by facilitating education sessions (e.g. trainings, meetings, and demonstrations). Given how frequently these activities take place, effective facilitation skills are one of the most important skills needed by BCAs and trainers. Even though many of these in-person activities are paused during COVID-19 outreach, it is critical for staff to continue using the skills taught in this lesson through remote outreach.

Applying Effective Facilitation Skills during COVID-19:

- Continue to use **participatory activities**. For example, use question/answer through text or call-in options or use engaging videos that promote specific behaviors, with accompanying discussion or quiz questions sent via WhatsApp or social media ([pages 38-39 and Handout 4-3, pages 44-45](#)).
- Use **adult learning principles** and focus on immediacy and relevance during this time. Adults learn best when what they are learning is immediately applicable, which may be key behaviors for COVID-19 prevention and response during this time. **Actively listen** to what participants share as their priorities and adapt WASH and agriculture activities accordingly ([Handout 4-2, pages 42-43](#)).
- Write a script to **remotely train facilitators** on essential behaviors they can teach to staff and volunteers (along with a script) to discuss by phone or text with the intended audiences. Keep scripts as short as possible (5-10 minutes).⁷ Share with facilitators the MMCA **building blocks for effective facilitation** handout ([Handout 4-1, page 41](#)).

Agriculture/Livelihoods example: In areas where small groups of <5 people are still permitted to gather, Lead Farmers or extension agents should continue using **participatory activities** as they train farmers. Plan ahead of time how to take mitigation measures, such as having a handwashing station with soap and by spacing participants a safe distance of 2 meters apart. Demonstration sites (e.g. a kitchen garden site) can be a good educational tool to use during COVID-19 as it allows participants to visit the site at separate times. The demonstration site can be accompanied by a poster visualizing/describing the techniques.

WASH example: If you need to organize face-to-face trainings for hands-on activities, consider facilitating these activities with a smaller group. Plan ahead of time on how you will take mitigation measures. For example, have a handwashing station with soap at the entrance to where you are training, ask participants to wash hands with soap and water before and after the training, and space chairs at the training to be at least two meters apart. If possible, hold the training outside instead of inside or in a place with a strong airflow. In addition, remind participants of key COVID-19 prevention measures at the beginning of the training and practice these prevention measures throughout the activity (e.g. social distancing, respiratory hygiene, handwashing with soap and water, etc.). Remind everyone to follow the national government's latest recommendations on holding meetings.

Lesson 5: Negotiated Behavior Change

In the process of adopting a new behavior, people often encounter challenges. BCAs can help their target audience to overcome the barriers to adopting a new practice or behavior by applying negotiated behavior

⁷ [Five Tips on Adapting SBC Materials in the Time of COVID-19](#) (used with permission from Food for the Hungry)

change (NBC) skills. The skills in this lesson (understanding ideal/next best behaviors and the eight steps of negotiating behavior change) are necessary for BCAs to use during COVID-19 response, especially when they may be supporting the adoption of WASH or agriculture practices from a distance.

Applying Negotiated Behavior Change Skills during COVID-19:

- Understanding participants' **ideal and next best behaviors** (pages 47-48) related to good practices is important for facilitating behavior change. These discussions can be added into scripts, phone calls, or radio programming. For example, discuss with participants to **identify new barriers** to key WASH behaviors (Handout 5-1, pages 53-54) or key agriculture behaviors (Handout 5-2, page 55) that may have arisen due to COVID-19, and discuss potential solutions.
- If creating a script for staff who are making agriculture or WASH-related programming calls to participants, train them to use the **eight steps of negotiation** (*Greet, Ask, Listen, Identify, Discuss, Recommend & Negotiate, Agrees, and Appointment*) in their discussions. The "Appointment" can be the next time someone will call them to follow-up (Handout 5-6, page 68).

Agriculture/Livelihoods example: Programs may choose to increase messaging around seed savings during COVID-19, in case seed supply markets are disrupted. Have discussions with farmers to understand barriers to adopting good seed savings practices, such as using hermetic bags like Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags. If cost or market availability is an identified barrier, work with participants to identify **next best behaviors** such as saving seeds in an airtight jerry can or plastic bottle.^{8,9}

WASH example: One of the most effective ways to prevent COVID-19 transmission is through handwashing. People may perceive washing hands with running water as using too much water, especially in water scarce areas or where the price of water is too high. Negotiate with the person the **next best behavior** such as the technique in this [UNICEF video](#).

Other MMCA Lessons

Other MMCA lessons may also be useful for program staff during COVID-19 response, depending on the program's activities. These include:

- **Lesson 6: Storytelling for Behavior Change** (pages 71-89). Storytelling helps BCAs connect with communities and encourage individuals to take action. Activities may consider writing new open- or closed-ended stories for their Care Group lessons ([example here](#)) or farmer field schools that address new barriers because of COVID-19.
- **Advanced Lesson 10: Introduction to Social and Behavior Change** (pages 105-129). Activities may want their staff to have a better understanding of SBC theories to help adapt programming and facilitate behavior change during COVID-19. A few examples for applying these skills include:
 - Brainstorm and Negotiate with community members what **small doable actions** they can take during these challenging times. Recommendations during COVID-19 may be new, and some may be frightening or not feasible for some households. Work with the family members to encourage the next best behavior. For example, if the recommendation is to stay at home but the person must go to work, negotiate a small doable action of washing hands with soap and water whenever they return to the home.
 - Support community leaders with **enablers** such as establishing reminders or "nudges" to encourage physical distancing in public places, such as demarcations (e.g., with paint or chalk) for properly spaced waiting lines.

⁸ [Safely store grain and seeds in hermetic containers during emergencies \(e.g. covid-19\)](#). Purdue University.

⁹ [Postharvest Loss: Jerrycan Bean Storage](#). Scientific Animations Without Borders.

- Add reminders or “nudges” at handwashing stations (e.g. footprints or posters) in key public locations including water collection points, health facility waiting rooms, markets, and other areas to encourage handwashing.¹⁰
- **Undertake formative research to identify barriers and enablers** for key COVID-19 preventative behaviors.
- **Advanced Lesson 14A: Quality Improvement and Verification Checklists (QIVCs), Giving and Receiving Feedback** (page 160-177) and **Advanced Lesson 14B: Creating Quality Improvement and Verification Checklists (QIVCs)** (page 178-182). Programs that are already using QIVCs or other quality monitoring checklists may want to adjust these to include key questions related to COVID-19 mitigation measures. For example, “Did the facilitator ask everyone to wash their hands with soap and water at the beginning of the meeting?” or “Did the facilitator ask everyone to sit at least 2 meters apart from each other?” See below a COVID-19 Checklist for Care Groups and an example of a checklist developed for house-to-house community outreach.

References & Additional SBC/COVID-19 Resources

Below is a list of additional SBC, risk communication, and community engagement resources for use during COVID-19. Many of these web links have resources available in multiple languages that can be adapted as needed.

Additional Resources:

- [BBC Media Community Engagement from a Distance](#), *BBC Media*
- [Five Tips on Adapting SBC Materials in the Time of COVID-19](#), *Food for the Hungry*
- [Guidance for National Societies on safe and remote risk communication and community engagement during COVID-19](#), *IFRC*
- [Tips for Engaging Communities during COVID-19 in Low-Resource Settings, Remotely and In-Person Version: April 20,2020](#), *GOARN, IFRC, UNICEF & WHO*
- [Care Group Lessons and Checklists for use during COVID-19](#), *CareGroups*

Resource Libraries:

- [The Compass for SBC: COVID-19 Home Base](#), *Compass*
- [COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement Toolkit for Humanitarian Actors](#), *READY Initiative*
- [COVID-19 Communication Network-resources for SBC & COVID-19](#), *Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*
- [COVID-19 Hygiene Hub](#), *Department for International Development (DFID)*
- [COVID-19 Resource Collection](#), *FSN Network*

Contact Info

If you or your organization is interested in learning more about the MMCA training or how it can be used to strengthen your WASH, agriculture or livelihood teams’ communication, negotiation, and facilitation skills or as part of your COVID-19 response efforts, please contact SCALE (scale@mercycorps.org) and PRO-WASH (prowash@savechildren.org).

¹⁰ [Tips for Engaging Communities during COVID-19 in Low-Resource Settings, Remotely and In-Person](#), GOARN, IFRC and WHO.