

STRATEGIC STAFF PRACTICES FOR OFF-GRID SOLAR COMPANIES

Lockdown and social distancing measures implemented in many countries to prevent the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have an immense impact on the business operations of off-grid solar companies in sub-Saharan Africa. This information sheet summarizes general guidance for staffing practices drawn from industry experts and does not aim to replace country-specific employment guidelines or regulations. Off-grid solar companies are advised to refer to official guidelines issued by their respective national authorities.

STAFF WELLBEING

As off-grid energy employers assess the impact of COVID-19 on their businesses and make required adjustments to allow continuity of operations, staff wellbeing remains priority and the following should be taken into account:

STAFF SALARIES & BENEFITS:



- Adhere to country-specific employment legislation and labor standards.
- Continue to pay wages and commissions on time to retain staff confidence.
- Provide staff with clarity around benefits, e.g. health insurance, pension, etc.
- Investigate payroll assistance programs, relief funds, loans, and tax breaks.

For more information, refer to:

- Respective Ministry/Department of Labor for country-specific resources and regulations
- International Labor Organization: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus>

WORK ARRANGEMENTS:



- Review workplace policies and ensure that they provide sufficient support to staff and their dependents.
- In support of social distancing measures, shift sales agents and field service technicians to be at-home customer service representatives where possible.
- Implement flexible working arrangements, including adopting telesales and telephonic/virtual customer support.
- Provide staff with the right tools and technologies to support remote working, e.g. computer equipment, connectivity, and software (such as online collaboration and video conferencing software).
- Allow remote working, flexi-time, and reduced workload, where possible. *Due to school closures and lack of childcare, this will help staff balance their workload with increased dependent care responsibilities.*
- Explore options for reduced hours for staff, and/or reduced hours of operations, before considering furloughs or staff redundancy. *Retaining staff will help to ensure that companies recover more rapidly post-crisis.*
- Stay in regular contact to provide updates, guidance, and emotional support to staff.

AVOIDING DISCRIMINATION:

- Implement measures to prevent and address discrimination in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.
- Ensure that reporting mechanisms are confidential, gender-sensitive, and safe.
- If forced to retrench staff, be aware of the risk of discrimination, even if non-intentional. *For example, using last-in-first-out criteria could impact negatively on the diversity of the workforce (in male-dominated sectors, women have recently been brought into companies as a result of previous discriminatory policies and could therefore face retrenchment before their male counterparts).*



For more information, refer to:

UN Women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/family-friendly-policies-and-other-good-workplace-practices-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

BALANCING RETAINING STAFF AND STAYING IN BUSINESS

- Ensure that planned steps support the long-term viability of the company while considering the interest of staff.
- Explore options for government subsidies or financial assistance to enable the company to retain staff.
- Assess staff positions and skills to consider internal redeployment.
- Explore across the board pay cuts to avoid/minimize layoffs.
- Freeze non-essential hiring.



For more information, refer to:

International Labor Organization: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_742725.pdf

CLEAR COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF

- Dialogue is essential – communicate with staff about health measures required in response to the pandemic and current/anticipated impact on operations.
- Consult with staff to provide opportunity to share ideas and input on decisions that might affect them. *Staff input can also fill company knowledge gaps and aid in creative problem-solving.*
- Provide frequent updates to staff through relevant communication channels (such as Human Resources) as calmly, clearly, and with as much notice as possible, particularly in the case of major changes.
- Ensure that staff have access to information on COVID-19 and encourage staff to seek applicable medical care if sick.
- Provide information to all staff about the heightened risk of domestic violence due to confinement and economic stress and share resources on local helplines, legal assistance, and counseling. *Companies should ideally have a trained designated focal point to receive gender-based violence reports and provide support and referrals to available channels for assistance as required.*

