# NIRAS

# Response in times of COVID-19

The NIRAS Group is an international multidisciplinary consultancy firm with Scandinavian roots and values. We have 51 offices in 26 countries around the globe. For more than 45 years, our International Consulting business unit has been delivering tailored, innovative, value-creating, and results-driven solutions in a variety of sectors to ensure a better, more equal, and stable world in line with the SDGs.

COVID-19 has highlighted the need for new approaches, greater flexibility and fast responses to the changing environment. This health crisis, which has since become a social and economic one, also requires new and adjusted services. NIRAS is working with governments and development stakeholders to mitigate the current obstacles caused by the pandemic and can support in building resilience against future crises.

## Services we can offer you ...

- A rapidly customisable online fund management platform to oversee, monitor and evaluate donor support and projects to mitigate COVID-19
- Management of water, sanitation and hygiene projects in challenging and high risk conditions
- Gender analysis and budgeting tools to ensure economic, social and health responses are inclusive and effective
- Logistics, market intelligence and connections for agribusinesses to sustain value chains and stabilise rural livelihoods
- Disaster risk management experience and experts equipped to operate in complex emergency contexts
- Innovative digital tools for training and remote management of projects, monitoring, learning and evaluation
- Vulnerability mapping and rapid market assessments
- Post-emergency programme design and delivery to build back better and mainstream resilience

## FUND MANAGEMENT
### Rapid and digital deployment and management of funds

NIRAS's fund management activities cover the entire grant lifecycle: from programming and start-up including outreach / marketing, to the call for proposals, evaluation and selection. This includes due diligence on applications, administration and disbursement of grant projects, and subsequent continuous monitoring and evaluation. Over the years, we have managed a portfolio of hundreds of millions of euros for a diverse group of clients across the globe supported by our global network of offices and experts. We manage funds across sectors including agriculture, governance and civil society, vocational education, climate and renewable energy, as well as forestry and technology development. Our portfolio as of mid-2019 stood at €400 million, and includes management of funds for clients like KfW, Danida, UK Aid, EuropeAid, SDC, MCC, and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Finland and The Netherlands.

This work is carried out using SmartME, the online fund management system built by our IT partner Adalia, which serves all elements of the grant cycle and provides for a continuous learning process where monitoring data is fed into the revision of work planning. The system increases the efficiency of the operational team by automating many aspects of the facility's work and providing the team with easy access to all relevant information and full transparency in the application and selection process. More importantly, **SmartME facilitates a 100% online management of the call process** – with online application forms, online evaluation grid, award and subsequent monitoring (uploading of information, validation and communication) – **enabling the distribution of funds across the globe in a time where social distancing and restricted travel challenges our regular way of working**. Our fund management team, independent evaluators, observers and applicants / grantees can access the system wherever they are as long as a minimum internet connection exists. Given the GDPR-compliant data-secured platform, applicants can upload sensitive data that can be coupled with remote-sensing data to facilitate an online due diligence and subsequent monitoring of activities and milestones. Thus **SmartME enables collaboration by bringing people across borders into the same online workspace** and allows easy and secure access to data and reports with restricted and defined users rights , preventing the misuse of funds. The system can easily be adjusted to donor-specific requirements.

> During the COVID-19 crisis, we have learned it is not only possible to continue with the important work we are doing around the world, but that in many cases we have been even able to do more thanks to digitalisation, our strong technical organisation, and national experts who ensure continued service delivery. We are helping our clients with new and innovative ways of working and developing strategies in response to the pandemic to modify interventions, keep the wheels turning and ensure a rapid remobilisation of resources when the time is right."

**Tor Lundström, VP NIRAS International Consulting**



| FUND FORMATION | ELECTRONIC APPLICATION | ELECTRONIC EVALUATION | CALL STATISTICS | RESULTS FRAMEWORK | MONITORING | EVALUATION | DONOR REPORTING |

### Automated oversight and remote management

*With travel bans and social distancing measures making onsite verifications visits impossible, COVID-19 is resulting in project implementation delays. In addition, there is a need for additional funding and support to those adversely affected by the crisis. With SmartME, an emergency response fund can be up and running in FIVE days. This comprehensive fund management suite and M&E tool allows clients to run a Call for Proposal or grant application process; rapidly evaluate projects in most need of relief funding; monitor projects; collect live monitoring data; and verify data collected remotely through the SmartME App*

## GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
### Ensuring a holistic response when crisis hits

When implementing response strategies to COVID-19, or any crisis for that matter, it is highly important to ensure policies and interventions speak to everyone's needs. This is a fundamental step in understanding the primary and secondary effects of a health emergency on different individuals and communities. Recognising the disproportionate impacts of such crises, the needs of women and girls should be at the centre of response efforts be they fiscal, financial or health-related. Read more on our thoughts about the importance of implementing an inclusive response to the crisis.

We are currently joining forces with our development partners, international organisations and gender and financial experts to ensure responses to the pandemic do not exclude vulnerable groups. Specifically we are researching **the gendered impacts of COVID-19** in areas such as health, community resilience, fiscal and financial response, vi-olence against women, and unpaid and care work. A rights-based approach to COVID-19 contains many important aspects, primary among them: the right to health, equality and non-discrimination, freedom of peaceful assembly, association and movement, as well as an adequate standard of living. Emergency responses and restrictions imposed by governments must respect human rights. Decisions and measurements need to consider their possible differentiated impacts, for example on people with disabilities, the elderly, and minorities.

NIRAS has been implementing **gender equality and human rights** projects for 25 years, and we are particularly proud of our work in gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) and our support to the EU on integrating gender into EU Structural Investment Funds and providing gender help-desk services. We can assist government in the development of methodology and deliver a high-level assessment of the financial response to COVID-19 using gender analysis and gender-budgeting tools and approaches. In addition, we can design and deliver **trainings on gender equality and GRB with a COVID-19 lens** as we are currently doing for the DFAT-funded Partnership for Economic Development (Prospera) project in Indonesia. Where new tax policies are being drawn up, we can advise on the inclusion of a gender perspective.



## AGRICULTURE
### Keeping agri-value chains alive

COVID-19 has affected agricultural value chains differently – some positively, some negatively. The trick is knowing how to capitalise on the positive and work to mitigate the negative. In many of our ongoing programmes, our clients have asked us to shift activities to mitigate the economic effects of lockdowns. In our responses, we try to support smallholder farmers and agribusinesses to be prepared when lockdown ends and they face a potential upsurge in demand in parallel with an economic recession and surplus of unemployed labour. In helping them cope with "the new normal", we have put some key measures in place, including:

- providing financing to SMEs and farmers using our fund management tools (e.g., SmartME) in support of micro financing;
- supporting partners with logistics, market intelligence and connections during lockdown. For example, we are offering digital solutions for data collection on food stocks and connecting farmers to traders as part of emergency response. We are also doing rapid market assessments in Malawi, Uganda and Nepal as part of DFID's Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA) programme to study the impact of restrictions on specific value chains;
- providing distance learning (radio, mobile phones, online etc.) and business development support to farmers, agrobusinesses and processors to upskill during lockdown; and
- lobbying for new policies that benefit smallholder farming systems or advocating against those that are too restrictive.

As this crisis resulted from poor hygiene at a Chinese wet market, food safety aspects will be prioritised when the main health concerns have been handled. While many countries have the necessary regulatory frameworks, they lack access to affordable testing and knowledge of hygienic production, handling and processing, and have low enforcement capacity. Compliance with food safety standards facilitates market access, increases the commercial value of products and hence can improve farmers' incomes.

## LAND
### The critical role of well-functioning land administration

Successful investments in lands sector reform, urban and rural land administration systems and sustainable and participatory land-use planning have tangibly improved the livelihoods of millions of people, but COVID-19 could undo many of these gains with its uneven impact on vulnerable communities.

As analysis of Ebola outbreaks has shown, disrupted agri-production threatens food security and nutrition and rural unemployment can force people into poorly planned urban settlements – where contagious disease spreads fast. Without income, smallholders, many of whom are women, cannot serve their loans, which puts tenure security at risk as millions of land titles are held as collateral. There is also a risk that people return to unsustainable land use practises due to movement restrictions, and land-related conflicts flare up.

The current crisis confirms that well-functioning land administration systems are a pre-condition for successful early warning – especially where biological disaster risk prevention tools are built in – and crisis impact monitoring. In our land sector work, NIRAS supports government in making evidence-based decisions and offers advice on approaches and robust low-cost digital solutions, for example:

- using earth observation and GIS data and other tools to monitor land use and the spread of the virus, control movement of goods and people, direct relief efforts, and predict potential conflict;
- planning for post-crisis interventions, prioritising the most needy;
- promoting roll out of integrated land information systems;
- stabilising land markets and mitigating the impact of stalled investments in the lands sector that impact the most vulnerable groups;
- digitalisation of property markets; and
- strengthening landholder rights, speeding up legal reforms.

The crisis provides strong arguments for continuing investments in the formalisation of the lands sector. NIRAS is committed to assist government counterparts in keeping ongoing sector reforms on track.

## FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY
### Healthy ecosystems means healthy human beings

NIRAS has a long track record in biodiversity management, and COVID-19 has given a sense of urgency to our work in **protected area management** and stemming **illegal wildlife trade**, which has been implicated in the origins of the current pandemic. The EU's Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas (BCAMP) project and the ADB/GEF's communications outreach to tackle poaching of endemic species in The Philippines are two good examples of our work in this area.

Our efforts in biodiversity conservation often draws on our competence in integrated forest management and an important tool we use to **track deforestation and degradation** – earth oservation – which allows us to monitor forest management programmes remotely and measure deforestation rates that are likely to rise during and after the pandemic. Good forest management acts as a protection against the spread of viruses. NIRAS has a long history in designing and managing forestry programmes in emerging economies. For example, today we are supporting the management and monitoring of Brazilian national forests, which encourage the sustainable use of resources and improve oversight of logging practices, and promoting the growth of small and medium commercial tree plantations in Mozambique to enhance local livelihoods while mitigating climate change. As the pandemic hits the timber economy, we can use our fund management systems to help governments deliver emergency grants to small business owners.

**Monitoring forest degradation from space**
*Implemented between 2016 and 2019 in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, the Satellite Monitoring for Forest Management (SMFM) project aimed to improve global knowledge and capabilities for forest degradation assessment and monitoring dry forest landscapes by building upon and complimenting existing international programmes. Funded by the World Bank and the European Space Agency, SMFM supported selected countries in developing their EO capacity. The project tested new or improved methods to process and analyse new satellite EO datasets, with assessments of EO processing methods completed through practical implementation in Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia.*

*With the right approaches to risk management, EO can add value in pandemics like COVID-19. For example, such data is crucial for understanding the location of transport networks and commercial ports, their real-time use, and where closures need to be made to restrict the spread of disease.*

*For more information, read our brochure outlining our EO/ GIS services.*
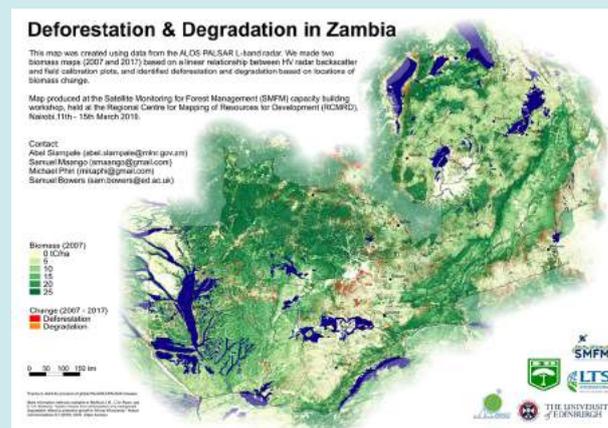


## CLIMATE CHANGE
### Leveraging learnings from COVID-19

COVID-19 and its associated challenges has been compared to the "climate emergency" we face today. Both crises are global and yet their impact is mostly felt on a local or individual level. Like the virus, climate change can increase respiratory and other illnesses, strain infrastructure and services, and hit vulnerable populations the worst. Both have a significant indirect impact on economic livelihoods – showing us just how unprepared we really are for risks that are staring us right in the face. On the basis that 75% of all infectious diseases come from wildlife, the UN has called COVID-19 a "clear warning shot". With increased global warming and the destruction of natural habitats, we are creating the breeding ground for new dangers.

On a more positive note, the crisis is giving the world a break from pollution and over-consumption and reminding people of nature's ability to regenerate when human activity is restricted. With oil prices in free fall, there may be a surge in investment in renewables, and there is significant opportunity for green innovators who are well-positioned for the rebuilding to come. The COVID-19 pandemic is also in many ways a dress rehearsal for the biggest challenge facing our planet. Many lessons can be pooled from this experience and applied to "flattening the climate curve" through public solidarity, awareness raising and engaging people to change their behaviour and be more environmentally responsible.

NIRAS has been working on climate risk modelling and can help governments enact risk mapping processes to target climate actions at vulnerable populations. As regulators inject funds in economic recovery plans, we can work with partners to make these plans climate resilient and minimise the displacement of future populations by climate-related disasters. With over 20 years' experience contributing to conflict prevention and mediation and building of stability in fragile contexts, NIRAS can apply its disaster risk management expertise to help partners design and deliver COVID-19 response projects.

We have been delivering climate and resilience programmes for decades, and supporting the development of coping strategies within poor communities is something we excel at. In DFID's "Building Resilience and Adapting to Climate Change" programme in Malawi, we provide knowledge, policy and implementation support. Helping communities diversify income streams and recover quickly from unexpected climate shocks to rebuild livelihoods is a task directly transferrable to COVID-19. The food insecurity crisis expected to follow the pandemic will leave the most vulnerable in even more precarious situations. We can work with you to design early intervention programmes to ensure no-one is left behind.

## INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
### Equitable access to safe water, sanitation & hygiene for all

Today, NIRAS has over 250 in-house water professionals who collaborate with over 500 external water sector specialists, implementing more than 120 water-related projects and programmes worldwide. Our **strong experience** from water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects and **extensive network** of specialists, local partners, government authorities, and NGOs puts NIRAS in a unique position to support and contribute to any activities **on short notice** to limit the spread of COVID-19 in densely populated urban or rural areas in Africa and Asia.

One of our main ongoing projects is the Sida-funded **Sustainable Urban Water and Sanitation (SUWAS) international training programme** targeting countries in Africa (Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) and Asia (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Nepal) and focusing on organisational changes with the purpose of improving water, sanitation, and hygiene activities and services in cities in the ten countries. Together with our partner WaterAid, in the last four years, we have enrolled and trained close to 400 WASH professionals across Africa and Asia.

Another example is the **Community-led water supply and sanitation development (CoWASH) project** in 76 rural districts and five regions of Ethiopia, a result of decades of bilateral cooperation between Finland and Ethiopia in the WASH sector. Our staff is currently operational at the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy in Addis Ababa coordinating CoWASH efforts to help **mitigate the COVID situation in Ethiopia** and mobilising communities to increase their resilience by improving basic sanitation and hygiene. Interventions include measures such as training on proper hand-washing and the use of soap at waterpoints, establishing demarcated washing areas with good drainage, arranging for disinfection of water pumps, ensuring social distancing at the water points, advising on the cleaning of jerry cans and safe water storage in homesteads, and mapping out the most vulnerable households. The project is also involved in setting up sanitary facilities for hand-washing, raising awareness on how to reduce exposure – such as the use of facemasks in public places – establishing protective practices for elderly and sick people, and arranging for quarantine measures including delivery of water, food and removal of waste. Small enterprises are being trained to produce hand-washing facilities (tippy-taps, jerry-cans with a tap), soap, faceguards, and possibly chlorine, all of which can be ordered and transported to schools, market places, churches, mosques etc.



*The Water for Eastern Equatoria project in South Sudan provided training on hygiene to 135,000 beneficiaries*

NIRAS also specialises in working with **WASH in fragile states** – such as South Sudan, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Somaliland – providing safe water and improved sanitation, including hygiene education, at community and school level. We are therefore experienced and well-equipped to operate successfully under challenging and stressful conditions.

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### Keeping the momentum – capacity development in water and sanitation even more critical in times of COVID

The ultimate goal of the Sida-funded Sustainable Urban Water and Sanitation (SUWAS) international training programme (ITP) is to make urban water and sanitation service systems more sustainable and equitable. Working with senior staff from water utilities, government agencies, local and county governments as well as NGOs and academia, together with WaterAid, NIRAS is strengthening the capacity of individuals, who in turn initiate changes in their institutions, strengthening the systems for service provision in the long run.

At the core of the training programme lies the critical aim of improving water and sanitation services for the most marginalised groups in communities, the ones not yet accessing safe and adequate services today. **The spread of the COVID-19 virus and its consequences for societies across the world is challenging the very systems that the SUWAS intervention is trying to strengthen and support, and coming at huge personal risks to those who provide essential services and are responding to the impact of the immediate crisis**. As in most crises, the most vulnerable – or the ones with the least means – are the hardest hit.



*How to provide sanitation services in challenging environments is one of the areas addressed within the SUWAS ITP. Photo @Jenny Fredby, Kampala 2019.*

We are currently preparing to run our last round of SUWAS programmes. An important aspect of the ITP approach is to hold trainings in both Sweden in key countries across the world. These enable hands-on study visits and cross-country exchange of experiences and provide exposure to best practices as well as challenges with the ways services are provided in various contexts. We are now assessing how the pandemic will affect our last round of programmes and how best to manage the impact to ensure SUWAS can successfully continue and that the ITP can still offer that platform of connecting professionals across countries and peer-to-peer learning.

Despite a lot of uncertainty about the year ahead – one thing is sure: the upcoming programmes will include lessons learned on how the WASH sector responded to the pandemic in various cities and countries. Also, thinking beyond the immediate crisis, the crisis pinpoints the sector's investment needs, and the urgency of tackling current inequities in WASH between and within countries and cities. Maybe, post-COVID-19, there will be stronger call and push for more equitable systems for public service provision, and we will see societies and governments investing more in the infrastructure, the systems and the key ingredient, the people needed to deliver what is essential to all of us: safe water and sanitary services.

## PEACE AND STABILITY
### Decades working in and on conflict

The global pandemic is having a profound impact on national healthcare systems, and the world economy is suffering immensely. The potential consequences for global peace and stability could be grave, as existing conflicts risk worsening and new ones arise. The usual conflict triggers are already under pressure as we observe increased disruption in vital food supplies – commercial as well humanitarian aid flows – peace operations, and ceasefire monitoring. Democratic elections are being postponed, increasing hostile environments for opposition groups and civil society.

As we have seen so many times before, this crisis is hitting the world's most vulnerable groups worst: fragile states with weak systems and low resilience, women and children, refugees and internally displaced persons. But equally, this crisis has the opportunity to bring about positive change in some conflicts as we have seen in the aftermath of natural disasters, where opposing parties ending their hostilities and instead focus on rebuilding their societies.

For more than 20 years, NIRAS has been working in conflict zones supporting both governments and civil society in **dealing with conflicts directly and conflict triggers** at large through, for example, natural resource management, climate smart agriculture, water resource management and resilient governance systems. From an organsational point of view we take pride in our advanced **Human Resource and "Duty of Care" instruments** when we work in hostile and difficult settings, such as South Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Mali and various refugee camps in East Africa. We have a highly developed **logistical support mechanism** in place for all our projects, including a well-established presence in 18 countries in the global South. This network of offices and the tested ability to create results in the toughest of environments combined with our multi-disciplinary technical capabilities makes NIRAS a relevant resource both in an ongoing global health crisis as well as on the recovery side.

Specifically we can provide COVID-19 related services on:
- Inclusive and sustainable **conflict prevention and peacebuilding**, focusing on the potentially dire consequences of the current crisis;
- Tested teams of **respected professionals highly experienced in managing complex and sensitive conflict and emergency contexts** combined with local presence;
- **Strong conflict and emergency management capacity** combined with easy access to our database of thousands of relevant external experts, including health experts, nutrition experts and food security experts;
- **Capacity building** of public institutions and civil society organisations in fragile and COVID-19 crisis contexts via **virtual tools** and **local partners**;
- Conflict sensitivity analysis – conflict integrated assessment and planning– and **COVID-19 mapping of expected impact on conflict**;
- "**Do No Harm**" principles across programming and high standards of "**Duty of Care**" procedures and human resources;
- **Remote monitoring, evaluation and learning** (MEL) tools applicable to the COVID-19 context within fragile states and environments;
- Facilitation of **online training courses**, e-learning and workshops/seminars on peace and stabilisation engagements.

Learn more about our extensive work in peace, stabilisation and migration around the globe.





*During the Covid-19 outbreak, the* **NIRAS Peace and Stabilisation Response (PSR) team** *has played a significant role in repatriating Danish citizens working in crisis missions. We are providing the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs with advice, data, and procedures relating to the duty of care of deployed experts in times of crises – practices that the Ministry has extended to the management of its own deployed staff. NIRAS still has several experts serving as essential staff under EU capacity-building and peace monitoring missions in places like Libya, Palestine, Ukraine, Georgia and Kenya.*

*In the* Danida-funded **Mali fund management project (FAMOC)**, *supporting young drivers of change in civil society for peaceful coexistence and reconciliation, we have developed new operational plans incorporating guidance and best practices for handling COVID-19. These have, for example, been shared with the FAMOC consortium of grantees' projects promoting participatory citizenship and human rights in the observation of the two rounds of legislative elections that took part on March 29 and April 19, 2020. The grantees reached* hundreds of Malian citizens in avoiding the spread of misinformation and tensions related to COVID-19 with a focus on the continued implementation of actions promoting peaceful co-existence respecting the new procedures and best practices.

*In North Macedonia, the* **Civica Mobilitas** *team has formulated a COVID-19 situational analysis and continency plan – approved by the donor Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) – on how the programme can work with civil society and authorities on the crisis. The objective is coordination, activation, mobilisation and support of the grantees, community and civil society at large to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Based on the plan, SDC supports partial reallocation of the Small Grants Fund, to be used for speedy ad hoc funding of activities related to the pandemic. We have also identified various CSO crisis response activities in support of the wider community and particular target groups (elderly, ill, the poor). We are coordinating grantees activities and publishing the details of those who are active in crisis response on the Civica Mobilitas website.*

## DIGITALISATION
### Using digital data to tackle COVID-19 challenges

NIRAS Data Futures Hub is working with UK DFID's Frontier Technologies Hub to understand how to apply the most promising big data sources to the development context within the evolving data landscape. The soon-to-be-released research involves use-case analysis and global consultations on some of the key questions for the future use of data.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Data Futures Hub team has already drawn some conclusions on three categories of **new data sources** that can provide faster and newer kinds of insights – not available from traditional methods –in managing short- and longer-term challenges in international development.

With the right approaches to risk management, new data sources can be utilised during the pandemic to add value in prevention and surveillance, diagnosis and treatment, and the mitigation of economic impacts:
• Earth observation (EO) data (from satellites and geo-sensors);
• Passive locational data from mobile phones; and
• Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques to analyse digital datasets.

You can read more about these new data sources and their application to the current crisis in this blog from our data experts.

*For more information, read our brochure outlining our EO/GIS services.*



*Governments, industry, and scientists have long recognised the critical importance of EO as an information source that supports many sectors of society. In terms of COVID-19 specifically, EO data can play a crucial role in understanding the location of transport networks and commercial ports, their real-time use, and – where closures need to be made – to restrict spread. EO data can also monitor changes in key outcomes related to economic activity and human well-being as well as changes in trade (by tracking cargo moving through ports) and economic activity within commercial and industrial areas (eg., by monitoring road traffic and air pollution).*

*Working in a variety of areas like climate change and food security, NIRAS has developed extensive EO and geospatial information systems (GIS) experience. With our cross-cutting competencies – such as cartography, visualisation and mapping; modelling; and spatial analysis – and multiple in-house developed EO tools, packaging methodologies and approaches, we are well-positioned to support prevention and monitoring efforts as well as interventions to limit economic ill-effects.*
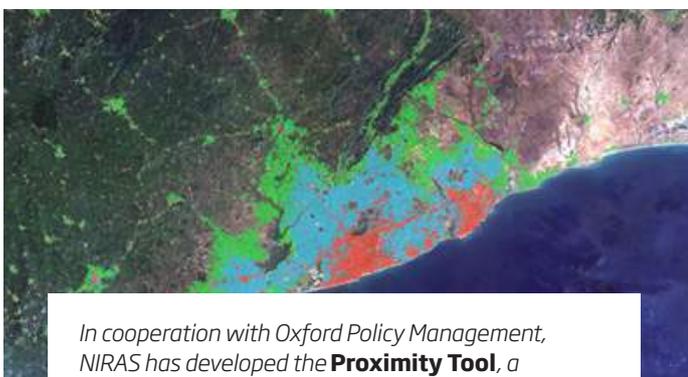


*In cooperation with Oxford Policy Management, NIRAS has developed the **Proximity Tool**, a geo-tracking digital payment system that is designed to record events and shocks in the context of where and how we live and work.*

*The tool is currently used in the context of fund management but can be customised in crisis response for:*
• *the payment of salaries of health worker, contract tracers and community outreach workers (G2P);*
• *effective public health awareness campaigns to reach relevant communities fast, increase screening and improve desired hygiene behaviours;*
• *effective case management, tracking and body management; and*
• *vulnerability analysis of communities, risk assessment to markets and agricultural value chains.*

*Pro-inclusion financial services providers in Ghana are using the tool's satellite imagery processing and machine learning applications to track individuals and transactions, but the tool can easily be customised to track households, health events, or response activities.*

## MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING
### A plethora of remote data collection tools

One of our core competences, monitoring, learning and evaluation (MEL) lies at the heart of much of our development cooperation work. Our demand-driven, rigorous evaluations and robust monitoring systems support adaptive management and learning, leading to more evidence-based critical decisions.

In times of COVID-19, we can offer a wide array of well-tested tools that can function well with travel and social distancing restrictions in place:

#### Data collection
• Virtual qualitative interviews with automated speech-to-text using speech recognition software)
• Online surveys and discussion web platforms
• Earth observation measuring a range of outcomes
• Social media and news articles automated web-scraping
• Existing project and public data sources (e.g. World Bank resources and mobile-tracking data)
• Crowd-sourced information from project stakeholders
• Mobile-phone surveys for interviewing large beneficiary samples (SMS, phone calls, interactive-voice-response used in NIRAS impact evaluations)

#### Analysis of remotely collected datasets
• Qualitative data analysis software
• Text analysis using machine-learning software
• Social media data using sentiment and network analysis

#### Interactive visualisation tools to explore digital data
• Dashboard software options like NIRAS SmartME
• Custom-built options

## Mitigating impact and ensuring the health and safety of staff in times of crisis

NIRAS has a long history of working in high-risk and conflict-prone areas, and we acknowledge our "Duty of Care" toward our staff and all the experts with whom we work. We place the utmost importance on ensuring a high level of health and safety standards in all our projects.

Using established internal protocols and safeguards, NIRAS conducts regular risk assessments and develops "risk registers" to support the management of projects, accounting for all possible eventualities that may negatively impact our workforce and our work. As a result, we have been able to respond rapidly to the changing circumstances triggered by the ongoing global pandemic and reach out early to clients, pro-actively presenting risk assessments and mitigation measures to help reduce the COVID-19 impact on project implementation. We have also adjusted our own mode of operation accordingly and been in close contact with experts, updating them on our crisis response measures and available support. Coupled with the rapid deployment of online communication practices, this has enabled us to keep project teams intact and functioning.
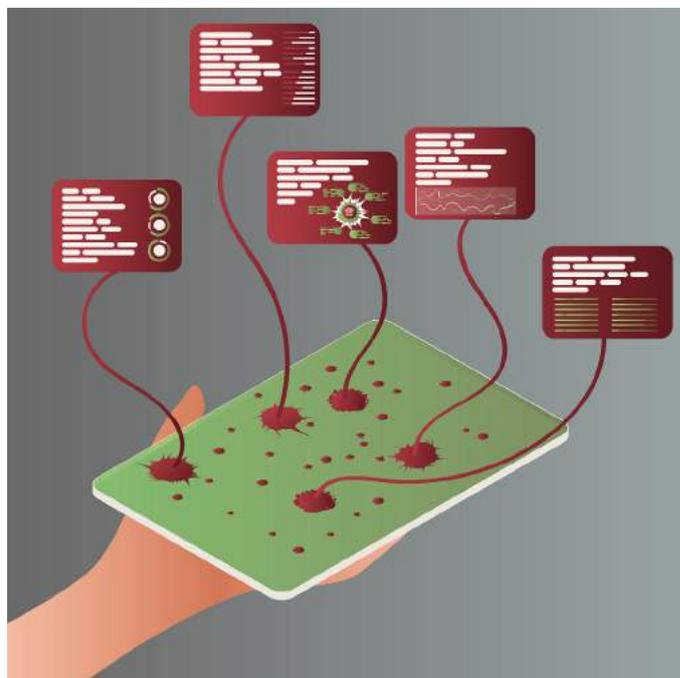


### In support of social distancing

NIRAS existing information technology and communications infrastructure allows for the use of Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business and other available online platforms to enable remote working.

We support remote working at scale by increasing online trainings for all staff on health and safety measures as well as learning and development opportunities and moving our day-to-day activities online (meetings, events etc.).

NIRAS has implemented the following measures first and foremost to guarantee the health and safety of our staff and secondly to ensure business continuity:

- Close and continuous consultation with our clients and stakeholders, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), to gather information and implement the most current health and safety guidelines across our organisation, such as health and hygiene rules (hand-washing, sanitising etc.), social distancing and quarantine protocols.

- Review of our internal travel rules, HR policies, first-aid plans to address immediate global mobility concerns.

- Provision of daily updates and notifications on NIRAS strategies to all staff.

- Coordination with our global health insurance provider, Gouda, and our security provider, Falck Group, to ensure the safety of our workforce across the world. This includes assistance with relocations and/or medical evacuations and more specific safety protocols for colleagues working in high risk areas.

- Assessment of NIRAS's remote working strategy, including asking employees to work from home and limit face-to-face interactions.

- Learning and development support on how to use tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other chat/video conferencing platforms to host meetings, webinars, and generally keep operations running in a timely manner.

**For more information contact one of our Business Development Directors**

Claes Clifford
Infrastructure
Tel: +45 29 20 74 89
Email: ccl@niras.com

Maja Bosnic
Governance and Democracy
Tel: +46 73 088 4950
Email: majb@niras.com

Jane Bech Larsen
Economic Growth
Tel: +45 6039 4431
Email: jbe@niras.com

Lizzy Whitehead
Climate Change
Tel: +44 131 440 5500
Email: lizw@niras.com

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