



EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Standard Operating Procedure

How To Manage Rumours



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| Authors | -- Members of the Technical Working Group (TWG) Risk and Crisis Communications (RCC) Sub-Working Group -- Suzanne Kerba, RCC Consultant, Paris France |
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1.0 Background

The East African Community (EAC) Regional Contingency Plan for Epidemics Due to Communicable Diseases, Conditions and Other Events of Public Health Concern (2018 – 2023) (hereafter referred to as the Contingency Plan) was designed to strengthen governance in managing the risk and the response to infectious disease outbreaks. It is oriented towards different key international standards, such as the Global Health Security Agenda (GHS), which supports efforts between countries, international organizations, and public and private stakeholders, to promote global health security as an international priority. The development of the Contingency Plan was guided by the International Health Regulations (IHR) and related World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, and the World Animal Health Organization's (OIE) instruments on veterinary Public Health and environmental frameworks, including the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the area of infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics.

The analysis of the EVD epidemic clearly demonstrated the importance of rapid, clear and efficient risk and crisis communication, and of tailoring communication to impacted communities in ways that respected their cultural and social backgrounds.

Risk communication comprises the standardized, continuous and timely flow of relevant information to help people personally assess the risks they face and make informed decisions about how to protect themselves. Crisis communication kicks in when there is an emergency. It aims at delivering clear and easy-to-understand information designed to mitigate the impact of an outbreak or disaster.

Risk and crisis communication is based on trust and therefore needs to follow a 'One Voice' approach. Risk and crisis communication exercised by the crisis management structure will be guided by the 'Risk and Crisis Communication Strategy for the EAC Region' and will be implemented according to standard operating procedures. The Contingency Plan crisis management structure shall establish capacity to conduct effective and efficient risk communication in 'peace time' and crisis communication in times of emergencies.

2.0 Purpose of the SOP

This SOP is intended to describe processes for active listening and rumour management. A rumour is defined as unsubstantiated information that is transmitted from one person to others. Rumours are often plausible, associated with news and information available to the public, and spread widely.

There are two basic types of rumours:

- Misinformation
 - Incorrect information spread through a lack of understanding without the intent to deceive.
- Disinformation
 - Incorrect information spread with the deliberate intent to deceive or manipulate others.

3.0 Scope of the SOP

- Provide guidance on dynamic listening; and
- Describe strategies to address rumours and stop their spread;

4.0 Target audience

This document is relevant for:

- Risk and Crisis Communications (RCC) structures within EAC and Partner States
- External support personnel deployed to perform communications functions

5.0 Key Approaches to Rumour Management

Rumours often occur during emergency situations. If not managed well, rumours can hinder preparedness and response efforts. It is therefore important to proactively look out for rumours and act on them appropriately. Some of the key approaches to rumour management include dynamic listening and situational analysis.

5.1 Dynamic listening:

Dynamic listening is the process of listening and conducting two-way conversations with people affected by emergencies and events. Tactics for dynamic listening include:

- Step 1:** Listen to people and communities at risk of being affected by a threat to their health, social or economic wellbeing;
- Step 2:** Know what audiences are concerned about;
- Step 3:** Observe and respect nonverbal signals;
- Step 4:** Express empathy and understanding;
- Step 5:** Concentrate on what people are saying; and
- Step 6:** Take appropriate action based on listening.

5.2 Situational analysis:

In the context of rumour management, situational analysis is the process of identifying rumours, determining their sources and how they are spreading, and responding accordingly. Tactics for situational analysis include:

- Conduct media monitoring, including social media, to understand and follow information circulating in the public sphere;
- Perform rumour surveillance online;
- Identify and track sources of misinformation and rumours;
- Create a rumour log to track rumours, myths, errors, and trends (Annex 1);
- Ensure a mechanism is in place to address rumours and respond with accurate and consistent key messages.
- Confirm that official information is being provided by authorized spokespersons (and not others acting in official capacities).

(Note: Steps associated with situational analysis are subject to change in sequence depending on the situation.)

6.0 Processes for Rumour Management

Step 1: Define the nature of the rumour:

- Misinformation
- Disinformation
- Based on fact or fiction?
- Impacted audiences

Step 2: Determine how rumour is spreading:

- Word of mouth
- Traditional media
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
- SMS
- All of the above

Step 3: Assess potential consequences of the rumour:

- Could it cause harm or loss of life?
- Could it stop people from seeking or accessing services?
- Could it result in risky behavior?
- Could it put certain groups at risk?

Step 4: Respond:

- Provide accurate information through all available channels;
- Create a hotline to identify sources of rumours and monitor them;
- Increase frequency of information dissemination;
- Be empathetic to people who believe the rumour;
- Give evidence that the rumour is false;
- Acknowledge why people might believe that the rumour is true; and
- Ensure follow-up with impacted communities.

RCC Rumour Management Log (Annex 1)

| Remarks | Monitoring | Response | Channel | Description of Rumour | Location | Date |
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