EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Standard Operating Procedure

How To Develop Key Messages

Speaking with 'One Voice' for a common goal

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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 (GHSA), 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

The purpose of the SOP is to describe how to develop accurate and effective key messages to help people at risk and those faced with emergencies make informed decisions to mitigate the effects of a threat or hazard, and in doing so, take protective and preventive action.

3.0 Scope of the SOP

- Provide guidance on content and prioritisation of key messages;
- List the steps needed to develop and compose key messages; and
- Define the expected outputs of key messages.

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 Goals of Key Messages

- To share timely, accurate information about a risk or hazard;
- To provide information, advice, and guidance to key audiences to prompt action that will protect the health of individuals, families, communities, and regions;
- To promote risk-reduction behaviors and practices;
- To reduce and dispel rumours;
- To ensure consistency, continuity and accuracy in risk and crisis communications;
- To increase trust between the public and EAC and Partner States in advance of and during a crisis or emergency.

6.0 Communication Standards

Effective key messages are:

- **Concise** – Short and to the point;
- **Strategic** – Define, differentiate, and address risks and actions;
- **Compelling** – Include meaningful information to drive action;
- **Relevant** – Appropriate to the situation and audience;
- **Understandable** – Use plain language; avoid jargon and acronyms;
- **Memorable** – Easy to remember and repeat;
- **Accessible** –Delivered through effective channels, and respectful of the culture, of target audiences;
- **Actionable** – Give audiences steps they can take to mitigate risk, encourage self-efficacy, and support community engagement; and
- **Accurate**: Factual

7.0 Process of Developing Key Messages

Step 1: Identify the issue or situation to be addressed.
Step 2: Review relevant documents, including emergency guidelines and background materials.
Step 3: Identify the affected communities and people, their needs and concerns, and key channels to reach them
Step 4: Conduct a rapid assessment on social/cultural/behavioral attitudes of the affected communities
Step 5: Conduct brainstorming sessions with technical experts and relevant stakeholders (including those people involved in the approval process) to establish and prioritise the communications goals and audiences to be addressed by the key messages.
Step 6: Identify messaging needs, and determine the nature of the key messages:
　　a. Long-term risk messages;
　　b. Messages designed to support specific issues, emergencies or situations; and
　　c. Combinations of long-term risk communications messaging, and specific crisis emergency messaging
Step 7: Draft key messages and pretest them.
Step 8: Align audience, channel, and communication objectives in each set of key messages as the messages are being developed.
Step 9: Tailor key messages to audiences based on situational awareness and factors motivating and influencing behavior change – including level of risk and potential impact of the event.
Step 10: Over time, routinely revisit the key messages to ensure they continue to be relevant, accurate and should reflect the most recent updates available.

8.0 Development Tasks

Step 1: Identify the top three priority key messages for each identified audience, in order of importance, based upon knowledge gained through brainstorming sessions and the information collection process.
Step 2: Apply the 27/9/3 rule.

- *27 = the number of words of each message.*
- *9 = the number of broadcast seconds likely given to a key message.*
- *3 = the average number of messages within a press release or official statement that will receive media coverage.*

Step 3: Compile top three overarching messages in a draft document, using the Message Mapping Tool (Annex 1). Follow the instructions on the tool to create 12 messages – three primary key messages, followed by three supporting messages for each primary message. Repeat this task as necessary to develop key messages targeted at individual audiences.
Step 4: Pretest the key messages among technical teams and target audiences, and update accordingly.
Step 5: Solicit necessary approvals from leadership and technical clearance chain. There are likely to be multiple revisions and updates to DRAFT key message documents.

Step 6: Refine and update key messages based on changing circumstances, new information and as requested by leadership and technical staff, following the naming conventions referenced in the section **Version Control and Naming Conventions** in this SOP.

Step 7: Deliver the approved key messages, marked FINAL, to personnel authorized to speak on behalf of Partner States and the EAC.

9.0 Version Control and Naming Conventions

- Draft key messages must be created based upon approved procedures and templates.
- Draft key message documents must include identification as key and topic (disease or event) name, version identifier, date, and the word DRAFT. (Example: Key_RVF_v1_15Oct2018_DRAFT)
- Superseded key message documents must be removed from circulation and, when possible, be marked with the date and initials of the person updating the document status.
- Once review, revision, and authorization processes are complete, remove the word DRAFT and include the word FINAL in the name of the final, approved key message document.
- Approved key messages must be retained in a non-editable format (such as PDF) and be accessible for use by Partner States as reference materials.
- Key messages may require frequent updating, depending on the nature and scope of the event or emergency.

(Please note that version control and naming conventions may not always follow standard version control processes. However, these guidelines help ensure that the correct version of documents are reviewed within the clearance chain.)

10. Key Message Dissemination

All media activity, including questions arising from the distribution or release of key messages, shall be directed to personnel authorized to communicate on behalf of Partner States and the EAC.

EAC Risk and Crisis Communication Message Mapping Development Tool (Annex 1)

Key Message (Fact 1)	Key Message (Fact 2)	Key Message (Fact 3)
Support Message	*Support Message*	*Support Message*
Support Message	*New Message to Support Fact 2*	*New Message to Support Fact 3*
New Message to Support Fact 1	*New Message to Support Fact 2*	*New Message to Support Fact 3*

Objectives and Metrics:

Objectives	Measures
To protect the health of individuals, families, communities, and regions through the dissemination of accurate information	• Audience response
Consistent and accurate communication between partners and the public.	
Timely provision of technical and logistical support through accurate communications	