EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Standard Operating Procedure

How To Disseminate Continuous Information On Hazards

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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

This SOP describes the nature and processes of information dissemination during risk and crisis situations. The dissemination of information, before, during and after a crisis is a critical aspect of preparedness and response. For guidance on preparing key messages, kindly visit the SOP "How to Develop Key Messages."

3.0 Scope of the SOP

This SOP is intended to provide guidance on how to disseminate continuous information to people at risk and affected populations before, during, and after crises.

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 Stages of Risk and Crisis Communications

There are five basic stages of risk and crisis communications:

- **Pre-crisis** – directed to public and response communities to provide messages, alerts. warnings, and guidance;
- **Event risk management** – directed to public and affected groups to reduce uncertainty, mitigate effects and increase self-efficacy;
- **Maintenance** – continues communications efforts from lessons learned, including updates;
- **Resolution** – provides updates and new information on the state of events; and
- **Evaluation** – directed to response agencies and communities to build on new understandings and document lessons learned.

6.0 Actions to Take at Different Stages (steps to be followed)

- **Pre-crisis** – Build alliances with stakeholders (policymakers, media, community leaders, response personnel and other relevant groups); and establish mechanisms for coordination
- **Event risk management** – Inform people of risk, using plain language, and using appropriate communications channels;
- **Maintenance** – Provide necessary updates, responding to public feedback, and empowering decision-making;
- **Resolution** – Examine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), maintain preventive measures, persuade the public to support policy and resource allocation; and
- **Evaluation** – Review communications plan performance; document lessons learned, determine specific actions to improve the dissemination plan.

7.0 Dissemination Channels

- **Interpersonal (face-to-face)**
  - Professional to patient; service provider to client; informal conversations
- **Group delivery (meetings)**
  - Small public and/or private gatherings
- **Public communications**
  - Presentations to larger audiences and gatherings
- **Organizational communications**
  - Discussions between stakeholders and partners, often through organizational messages, websites, and publications
- **Contemporary media**
  - Newspapers, print materials, broadcast media
- **Social media**
  - Twitter, Facebook, SMS, YouTube
- **Social Groups**
  - Religious;
  - Community groups (women; youth; elderly)
  - Traditional and cultural

8.0 WHO Communications Continuum

Increase awareness:

- Disseminate messages that are simple, easy to recall and repeat;
- Use traditional media and social media;
- Widen the reach of social media by designing messages that can be shared by other organizations and networks;
- Leverage credible sources to increase acceptance of messages;

Support understanding:

- Create a connection to the health issue at personal and community levels;
- Show the health issue's effect on potentially impacted audiences;
- Create a sense of urgency to prompt decisions and action;
- Direct media attention to a relatable incident or story;
- Highlight threats that are close to home by highlighting community members who have experienced or are susceptible to the risk.
- Consider the target audiences' perspective

Promote the knowledge of solutions:

- Use messages that describe desired actions;
- Explain where to find information and resources to support actions;
- Consider which sources the target audiences support and consider credible;
- Use interpersonal communications channels to enhance education and learning of proactive skills;
- Encourage interactive communications with target audiences;
- Considerations
    - Different learning styles
    - Varying education and literacy levels
    - Complexity of information
- Conduct educational meetings and workshops

Instill the confidence to act:

- Have a clear call to action; using a step-by-step description if possible;
- Teach skills, beginning with achievable goals and advancing to more complex tasks once mastery is perceived or gained;
- Create opportunities for audiences to practice the skills they learn
- Ensure that audiences have a feeling of control and self-efficacy; and
- Show that individual actions will make a difference.