

COVID-19 National Emergency Response

Risk Communication, Social Mobilization and Community Engagement Strategy

April - September 2020

The purpose of this strategy is to inform the South Sudan Risk Communication Social Mobilization and Community Engagement (RCSMCE) Technical Working Group (TWG) work for Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). It is a living document that will be regularly updated as the situation evolves in the country.

Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 that started in China in December 2019 continues to pose a significant risk to international public health security and has been declared it as a pandemic. South Sudan is on high alert and has activated the EOC and national task force. The RCSMCE pillar is a critical part of COVID-19 emergency response and preparedness. Several partners come together to undertake the risk communication activities effectively to the communities of South Sudan.

The findings of the UNICEF Knowledge, Attitude and Practice studies across varied disease outbreaks and lessons learned in addressing a number of public health emergencies in South Sudan over the past several years clearly indicate the importance of risk communication, social mobilization and community engagement in preventing and responding to disease outbreaks. Thus, with lessons learnt, expertise and knowledge gained during past outbreak responses will be crucial in responding to the CoVID-19 national health emergency.

Objectives

Overall Objective:

The national CoVID-19 RCSMCE strategy aims to empower individuals, families and communities to make informed decisions, positive behaviour change and thus maintaining trust in the response through varied communication approaches and mechanisms.

Specific Objectives:

- Disseminate timely information
- Track and mitigate rumors related to COVID-19
- Effectively involve communities in the response to control the outbreak
- Share information and advice between experts, communities and officials

The COVID-19 risk communication strategy aims to encourage vulnerable population to make informed decision making, positive behaviour change and thus maintaining trust in the health system delivery through varied communication and community engagement mechanisms. The strategy will be led and coordinated by the RCSMCE TWG whose critical focus will be to ensure accurate and timely information at all levels so to maximize the effective outcome of the CoVID-19 response.

Risk Communication Mechanism

COVID-19 is a high hazard, high outrage response where crisis communication is critical; and everyone is considered a stakeholder. In crisis, the nature of the population is to sense fear and mis-trust and hence the task of the crisis communication is to develop “**risk perception**” among the population by increasing awareness, stimulating “**intent**” by building knowledge and “**action**” (informed decision making) thus contributing to practicing positive behaviors and maintaining trust in the response. Following socio-

ecological framework, risk communication efforts will target individual, family, community and institutional levels.

Barriers for Communication

Interpersonal communication and community dialogues are the best modality of largescale community engagement in South Sudan and is well complemented by mass media (radio & mobile miking) and traditional theatre. Community mobilizers are key in this communication process. However, the COVID-19 response focused on personal distancing may limit the inter-personal and community engagement processes to a smaller scale.

This strategy will explore other relevant forms of communication channels that trigger human to human interactions such as print, radio, tv, public address system, megaphones, telecommunication (SMS, ringtones), tapping church and religious institution mass communication systems to ensure effective dissemination of life saving messages reaching the population timely.

Audiences

Primary target audience: at risk vulnerable populations, including international travelers, caregivers, pastoralists and mobile populations, IDP and refugee camps, elderly, health workers, transporters and community mobilizers.

Secondary target audience: community influencers, including community/religious leaders, Govt. officials, key political figures, journalists, youth and women's leaders, traditional healers, teachers, uniformed forces, frontline health workers, hoteliers, transporters, Boda Boda operators, business communities etc.,

Key Activities

The RCSMCE TWG will focus efforts on building trust, increasing awareness and create social support. This will be achieved through:

- a) Increased COVID-19 risk perception communication activities
- b) Self-health care practices (self-hygiene, self-isolation, community care)
- c) Promotion of personal distancing
- d) Regular and proactive (two-way) communication with at-risk (and/or affected) communities through appropriate channels

Communication Channels

- Mass Media – radio, print
- Radio jingles and radio talk shows
- Consistent messaging through the development and dissemination of multilingual IEC materials (posters, leaflets, banners)
- Social mobilization through megaphone & mobile radio announcements
- Strengthening the rumor tracking/two-way communication mechanisms
- Community engagement through community mobilizers
- Telecommunication broadcasting – SMS, CoVID-19 ringtones and advisories
- COVID-19 helpline – 6666
- Aerial dissemination of COVID-19 pamphlets through helicopters
- Audio and miking systems from Mosques and Churches

COVID-19 Helpline - 6666

For the purpose of increased COVID-19 risk perception and information seeking, the established hotline '6666' will be used. Additional capacity building, human and financial resources will be needed to enable prompt response to the community enquiry and provide coverage to the whole territory of South Sudan.

Tools, including SOPs, community mobilizers' guide, training handbooks, FAQs etc. will be discussed, developed and agreed upon at the RCSMCE TWG and NTF to promote and enable the consistency of information shared. It will be critical to ensure an interpillar approach with Case Management and Surveillance pillars to fully maximize the potential of the Helpline in the provision and collection of information.

RCSMCE TWG will also coordinate all relevant stakeholders – MoH, Govt. of South Sudan, other relevant Ministries, humanitarian clusters, political and diplomatic communities, UN, INGO/NGO, business enterprises and donor community.

Risks & Mitigation Measures

Social distancing will challenge our ability to reach communities with lifesaving messages, impact trainings, orientations and other traditional means of communication and community engagement in South Sudan which can create lack of trust among caregivers and community members. Hence there will be a strategic shift to focus on using electronic and mass media in this response where the human to human interaction can be limited. Trainings and orientation will be conducted with good physical distancing mechanisms and considering the context of infrastructure available in-country catering to these needs, only 10 participants will be able to attend any given session. Social mobilizers may be at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19, so community orientations will be discontinued and house to house mobilization will continue with proper physical distancing measures.

Budget

Please refer to RCSMCE Budget TWG (2,8 million).