

Communication Strategies for Rumor Control and Crisis Prevention Management

Crisis Prevention

The UCC communication strategy seeks to maximize a spirit of inclusiveness as a means of preventing the development of resistance to the campaign's activities. For this reason, it is critical to include diverse actors from the political and religious spheres in a range of communication activities.

At the national level, the campaign plans to conduct advocacy with parliamentarians from the major political parties to garner their support and to include parliamentarians from the major political parties in TV and radio spots promoting the campaign in the provinces from whence they come. To foster this spirit of inclusiveness, it is also important to select as malaria champions individuals with broad-based national appeal.

Likewise, at the provincial level, the DPS should brief provincial assembly deputies from the main political parties about the campaign and solicit their support. In producing TV and radio spots featuring provincial assembly deputies, deputies from the major political parties should be included.

For the advocacy meeting organized by the DPS in each of the provinces, it is important to include representatives from the political parties, religious leaders and other influential figures. The DPS should ask these representatives to support the campaign and to promote compliance with the campaign with their members and followers. Advocacy packages will be provided to the participants to ensure clear and consistent messages from the high-level people (e.g. fact sheets, key messages, FAQs, etc). The consistency of the messages will help with prevention of unfounded rumours.

The spirit of inclusiveness should also extend to the district level. It is, therefore, important for advocacy meetings that representatives of political parties, religious leaders and other influential figures be invited and asked to carry out activities in support of the campaign. If resistance to registration or the presence of rumors might arise, they may be asked to help counter these through appearances on community radio or through personal intervention.

Rumors

At the implementation training events, each district will develop plans to counter rumors, disinformation, and unforeseen events including areas that are missed during registration, net stock outs at distribution points, delays in distribution (e.g. distribution starts later than the date communicated) and crisis such as localized conflicts. Those involved in communication, registration and distribution will be instructed to inform supervisors and monitors of rumors, disinformation and other problems or barriers that might negatively impact the campaign. In instances of households refusing to be registered, the registrador will give a list of those

households that refuse registration to the supervisor of the Bairro/Aldeia, in order for the supervisor to pay a follow-up visit to the household to achieve registration.

If the household continue to refuse registration, the local supervisor should report this to the district supervisor, so that an evaluation can be made as to the scope of the problem and to determine what remedial communication actions may be needed. Visits by local influential personalities to households or to communities that may form pockets of resistance to the campaign may help to defuse such situations.

At the implementation training events, district campaign supervisors will have a plan in place to counter rumors, disinformation and resistance problems with counter messaging. As part of this plan, campaign supervisors should be prepared to mobilize locally influential people to provide the public with correct information through various channels, including through community meetings or via the mass media, as appropriate. The messages that are conveyed should address the very specific information contained in the rumors. These influential individuals should likely be different from those who originally championed the campaign in order to give additional credibility to the messages.

If an area is experiencing localized conflict or a natural disaster and it becomes necessary to organize an alternative approach to registration and distribution, respected figures of the community should be mobilized to explain the procedures to be followed for getting registered and / or obtaining nets.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

A conflict or natural disaster may oblige individuals to leave their households to take up residency elsewhere either on a short, medium or long term basis. Often these individuals will go to live with relatives in other communities or cities. During registration, these individuals are to be counted as members of a households where they are currently residing.

If these IDPs form makeshift households away from their normal communities of residence, they should be included in the registration as households so that they too can be protected from malaria. If formal IDP settlements emerge under the supervision of national or international agencies, a representative of the lead agency managing the settlement should become the spokesperson for information about the campaign within the camp.

Net Shortages (Stock outs) at Distribution Points and Campaign Delays

Each district will put a plan in place to communicate to the public unforeseen developments, such as stock outs at the distribution site and/or delays in the campaign rollout, particularly the distribution of nets. At times, logisticians and local public health officials will know in advance the supply of nets at a distribution site will be insufficient for those who have been registered.

Other times a stock out may be unanticipated. For either scenario, the campaign should have a communication plan in place to explain to the beneficiaries the situation and what likely remedial actions will take place. A sound communication plan for explaining stock outs is critical to ensuring crowd control and security and to give the beneficiaries who have not received expected nets information on the plan to remedy the situation.

If a shortage occurs at the distribution site, it will be important to have a plan in place for determining who gets nets and how many. It will be critical to explain to those who have come to pick up nets what will be done to make sure that they receive their nets. It is also important that if, in response to a shortage, it is decided to change the allocation to a household at the time of distribution itself, that a single approach is agreed to (e.g. one less net than planned on the voucher) so that it can be easily explained / communicated.

Similarly, if there is a delay in the campaign, it will be important to explain to the public that the registration and/or distribution will occur at a later period. As soon as accurate new information on registration and/or distribution is available, this should be communicated to the public. Linha Verde will be informed of campaign delays and expected new dates, so it can correctly answer questions from callers.

Having respected individuals publically address issues of delays and shortages will help to reassure the beneficiaries. There are a variety of channels to convey such information – through radio, mobilizadores, unidades moveis, animadores, religious leaders, etc. It will be important for the communication sub-group to devise generic back-up messages about explaining delays in its key message guide.