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Rumour management plan template for insecticide-treated net (ITN) distribution

**This template should be used in conjunction with the *Guidelines for the development of a rumour management plan related to insecticide-treated net (ITN) distribution* (**<https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Guidelines_Rumour_Management_ITNs_032023_ENG.pdf>) **to ensure a complete and detailed rumour management plan.**

This template outlines the key items to include in a rumour management plan for ITN distribution. For the purposes of this document, “ITN distribution” refers to any programme or project that distributes nets for malaria prevention to population groups and can include ITN mass distribution campaigns, continuous distribution through schools or community, or routine-based distribution through antenatal care (ANC) or Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) visits. The rumour management plan (RMP) is an integral part of the Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) Plan of Action, and as such must be completed as part of macro level planning. Like the risk and mitigation plan, mis/disinformation and rumours are constantly evolving and the RMP needs to be a living document and updated as and when needed. This template provides suggestions for the content and structure of an RMP. Contexts will vary, and national malaria programmes should include information that is related to their particular situation and replace the suggested text with their own narrative.

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**Introduction** **and context**

In two or three paragraphs explain:

* What are rumours (include a definition of mis- and disinformation)?
* What are the risks associated with rumours in ITN campaigns and during continuous distribution?
* The specific context for the planned mass distribution campaign or for the continuous distribution channel(s) that might influence potential rumours. Examples can include federal or local elections, multi-product campaigns, distribution of nets with a non-preferred textile or colour, disease outbreak, etc.

**Purpose of the rumour management plan**

In one or two paragraphs explain:

* The main purpose of the RMP
* The main components of the RMP
* Past experiences with rumours and lessons learned that will be implemented in this RMP (this can be put in a table format)

**Potential rumours and rumour mitigating measures**

In table format, list potential rumours, their source(s) and the potential impact if they should spread.

Responding to a rumour takes time, energy and resources. It is better to prevent the rumour from happening rather than developing and implementing a response. For each of the rumours identified, explain what mitigating measures have been planned to reduce or eliminate the risk of the rumour happening, or the impact that the rumour may have on the ITN distribution outcomes. See Table 1 for an example.

Despite the mitigating measures, there is still a risk that the rumours occur and may require an immediate response to reduce any negative effects. To allow a quick response in the case of rumours, list the key messages that can be used to counter the different potential rumours identified. It is important to note that during implementation, circumstances and context will change. Planned counter messages must be reviewed at the time that rumours occur to see whether they are still appropriate.

***Table 1: Potential rumours (source, potential impact, mitigating measures and key response messages) - sample***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rumour/mis- or disinformation | Source of rumour | Potential impact from the spread of the rumour | Planned mitigating activities | Response: key messages if rumour occurs |
| Poor quality of the nets being distributed | A result of occasional side reactions that have been reported by ITN users including headache, common cold symptoms, skin irritation, burning sensation in the eyes and nausea. | * Rejection of nets by the community * Low use of nets received * Lack of trust in government-supplied commodities | Ensure that SBC messages being disseminated through the different channels include:   * How to correctly air and use the net. It is critical that these messages are disseminated before and during the ITN distribution. * Malaria is a dangerous disease. It is important for households to protect themselves and their community from malaria by always sleeping under an insecticide-treated mosquito net. | If there are no changes in context, the following key messages can be disseminated to affected communities:   * Malaria is a dangerous disease. It is important for households to protect themselves and their community from malaria by always sleeping under an insecticide-treated mosquito net. * Before using the net, air it in the shade for 24 hours. * All the nets distributed during the campaign are approved by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health. They have been rigorously tested to ensure that they are safe to sleep under. * These nets are distributed in all malarious countries and can protect people against malaria when used correctly and consistently. * The quality of the net can be sustained through appropriate care and repair behaviours by owners. |

**Coordination**

Explain the coordination structure for the management of rumours. The narrative should explain the roles and responsibilities of all actors at each level (e.g. community to national) in the rumour management structure.

**Rumour management process**

This section should explain the process for the management of rumours. Rumour management typically has four major steps (as explained in the guidance for developing a rumour management plan).

**Step 1: Discovering the rumours:** Explain in detail the process and structure that have been put in place to identify any rumours and report these to the national level. An example can be advocacy sessions with community leaders on rumours.

Describe the tools that will be used to report any rumours from one level to the next and how these will be documented. Annex any tools that have been developed for this process. Table 2 below is an example of a tool on how rumours can be catalogued.

***Table 2: Cataloguing identified rumours - sample***

| Rumour/misinformation/disinformation | Causes of rumour | Impact / potential impact from the spread of the rumour |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The chemical in the net is toxic and bad for our health. You need to wash the net before using it. | An error on the ITN package which stated that ITNs needed to be washed before they are used, caused households to believe that the insecticide in the ITN was harmful to their health.  *These types of health-related rumours can also occur if for example, households receiving ITNs impregnated with deltamethrin report increases in coughing when sleeping under the new ITNs*  *Rumours can also occur where new or different ITN types (e.g. PBO vs. standard long-lasting insecticide-treated nets [LLIN] or polyethylene vs. polyester) are being distributed in different geographical areas.* | The result was that many households washed their ITNs before using them, thus reducing the insecticide and therefore the effectiveness of the ITN. Other households refused to collect or use the ITNs as they believed they were detrimental to their health. |

**Step 2: Analysing the rumour**: Describe how any identified rumours will be analysed to assess scope and scale, and how this will inform the response. Explain the different scales that will be used to inform the response (e.g. rumour is localized to only two communities), the tools that will be used (these tools should be annexed to the RMP), and those responsible for conducting the analysis. Figure 1 is an example of a tool that can be used to undertake a rapid analysis of the mis/disinformation or rumour if the scope and scale are currently unknown.

Figure 1: Rapid assessment tool for rumour management for an ITN campaign

**ITN distribution campaign**

**Rapid assessment of scale and scope of rumours**

**Objective:** This table is designed to help national malaria programmes, regional and district health teams and their partners to quickly assess the scope and scale of the rumours affecting ITN access and use, or the general activities of the campaign. The results of this rapid assessment will help national malaria programmes and partners in refining the rumour management plan and associated activities, tools and materials to respond to these rumours.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of region/district |  |
| Submission date |  |
| Name of person reporting |  |
| Name of service providers overseeing distribution |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **RUMOUR TRACKING** | | | | |
| **What** is/are the rumour/s that you have identified regarding ITNs? | What is the **extent**of the rumour(s)? E.g. (i) limited to one or two communities only  (ii) One or two districts only  (iii) More than 50 per cent of the communities  *List the affected communities below.* | What is the **result** of the rumour?  E.g. People not trusting that the ITNs are effective | **How** is the rumour affecting ITN distribution?  E.g. people not accepting nets.  People burning nets. People with vouchers now refusing to come to collect their nets | **What** activities, if any, have already been carried out to counter the rumours? What messages were used? What channels were used? |
|  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COMMUNICATION CHANNELS** | | | |
| List all **completed campaign SBC activities** | List all **pending ITN campaign SBC activities** (these can be used to respond to the rumour) | What are the **existing communication channels** that are strong and effective in the affected areas? E.g. radio, community leaders, CHWs | List the names and responsibilities of all **focal/influential persons** who support the ITN distribution in the region/district |
|  |  |  |  |

**Step 3: Correcting the rumours (response):** Describe the process and steps for responding to the mis/disinformation and rumours based on the analysis above. Explain how pre-developed messages (as shown in table 1 will be validated) or how new messages will be developed to respond to the rumours. The description should detail who will be involved in formulating the messages, when they will meet, and how they will then ensure that these messages are disseminated to respond to the rumours. Using table 3 below, explain which communication channels will be used and why it has been decided to use a specific channel for each mitigating action.

## ***Table 3: Identification of geographical extent of rumours and appropriate communication channels for mitigation: sample***

| Geographical extent | Communication channels | Rationale |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Localized to one or very few communities | Use trained[[1]](#footnote-1) religious, traditional/ community leaders[[2]](#footnote-2), CHWs and health facility staff to disseminate information to households via community visits using megaphones  Community radio and town criers/motorized street announcers | The rumour is still contained and can be managed through limited IPC. Influential leaders or trusted members of the community have demonstrated that they can quell the rumour before it spreads further.  Individuals that are trusted within the community will be the best sources to dispel the information in the rumour.  Limit the risk of spreading the rumour outside the affected areas by using communication channels that are focused and targeted to the area where the rumour is spreading. |
| Rumour extends to several communities | Use trained religious, traditional/ community leaders, CHWs and health facility staff to disseminate information to households via community visits using megaphones  Community or district level radio, town criers and motorized street announcers/CHWs with megaphones | The rumour is still relatively contained and can be managed through IPC and community/district media channels.  Limit the risk of spreading the rumour outside the affected areas by using communication channels that are focused and targeted to the area where the rumour is spreading. |
| Rumour extends to most (or all) of a district | Use all district and community-level channels to try to address the rumour, including radio and TV, social media (where this has previously been identified as an effective communication channel), town criers/motorized street announcers (safety permitting), religious and traditional/community leaders and other people with influence on people’s thinking and beliefs. | Rumour is no longer localized to a few communities. While IPC will still be effective in some communities, it is necessary to extend the reach of messages through use of broader channels.  There is a risk that the rumour spreads from the district to the whole country. It is therefore important to start using mass and mid-media to disseminate information. |
| Rumour is circulating at a national level and affects all communities | Use as many available communication channels as possible, as described in the SBC Plan of Action (PoA)   1. Use all available local and national radio stations for airing of short messages and radio debates/talk back/call-in shows 2. Use TV spots and TV discussion programmes 3. Use social media (where this has previously been identified as an effective communication channel) 4. Use town criers/motorized town announcers/CHWs with megaphones | If the rumour has spread to the national level, then the response needs to reach the whole population. The SBC PoA and the risk assessment and mitigation plan, in addition to the rumour management plan, should already have identified and engaged some of the best communication channels for the country and should have already pre-tested materials and messages with different segments of the population using the most common dialects. The same channels should be used to disseminate new messages to respond to the rumour. |

The following table can be part of the rumour management plan and be used when drafting key messages that will be used to respond to identified rumours.

**Table 4: Messages for countering rumours**

| **Rumour (sample)** | **Messages to counter rumour (samples)** |
| --- | --- |
| **The government is only distributing the good ITNs to their supporters. The rest of us are getting substandard ITNs** | * Mosquito nets are being distributed by the government free of charge. They are being distributed to everyone in the country/region/district. * The ITNs are being distributed to everyone to protect us from malaria. * All the ITNs being distributed have been approved by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health as safe to use and as an effective way to prevent mosquito bites and malaria. * Remember to air your ITN for 24 hours in the shade before using it for the first time. * Sleeping under an ITN every night can help protect you and your family from malaria. |

**Step 4: Monitoring the response:** Explain the process for monitoring of the response to ensure that any rumours have been quelled. Describe what the process will be if it is discovered that the initial response did not stop the spread of the rumour.

**Adoption and dissemination of the RMP**

In one or two paragraphs, describe how (and who) is responsible for approving the RMP, how the contents of the RMP will be disseminated to all stakeholders and how workers will be trained. Explain how amendments and updates to the RMP made on a continuous basis are communicated to stakeholder

1. Simple job aids with one-page instructions and one-page key messages should be provided. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See AMP guidance: *Engagement of community leaders in ITN campaigns in the context of COVID-19 transmission*. <https://allianceformalariaprevention.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Engagement-of-community-leaders-EN.pdf>. Note that the information is relevant even when COVID is not an issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)