

Annex V



EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY


Standard Operating Procedure

How To Manage Rumours



Speaking with **'One Voice'** for a common goal

Standard Operating Procedure How to Manage Rumours

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Authors	-- Members of the Technical Working Group (TWG) Risk and Crisis Communications (RCC) Sub-Working Group -- Suzanne Kerba, RCC Consultant, Paris France		
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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) was designed to strengthen governance in managing the risk and the response to infectious disease outbreaks. It is oriented towards different key international tools, such as the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), which serves to:

- Align efforts between countries, international organizations, and public and private stakeholders;
- Accelerate progress towards a world which is safe and secure from infectious disease threats; and
- Promote global health security as an international priority.

Additional contributions to the contingency plan include the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005) and related World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, and veterinary service guidance from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the area of infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics.

Risk communication refers to the real-time exchange of information, guidance, and advice between experts and people facing threats to their health, economic or social wellbeing. It enables the public to gain knowledge and to make informed decisions.

Crisis communications are initiated when there is an emergency. They provide clear and easy-to-understand information, delivered within a narrow time constraint, aimed at mitigating the impact of an outbreak or hazard.

Risk and crisis communications are based on trust and therefore 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 (SOPs). The Contingency Plan crisis management structure shall establish capacity to conduct effective and efficient risk communications when there is no immediate threat, and to conduct crisis communications in times of emergencies.

Purpose of the SOP

This SOP is intended to describe processes for active listening and rumour management. A rumour is defined as unsubstantiated information that is transmitted from one person to others. Rumours are often plausible, associated with news and information available to the public, and spread widely.

There are two basic types of rumours:

- Misinformation
 - Incorrect information spread through a lack of understanding without the intent to deceive.
- Disinformation
 - Incorrect information spread with the deliberate intent to deceive or manipulate others.

Scope of the SOP

- Provide guidance on dynamic listening; and
- Describe strategies to address rumours and stop their spread;

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

Key Approaches to Rumour Management

Rumours often occur during emergency situations. If not managed well, rumours can hinder preparedness and response efforts. It is therefore important to proactively look out for rumours and act on them appropriately. Some of the key approaches to rumour management include dynamic listening and situational analysis.

Dynamic listening:

Dynamic listening is the process of listening and conducting two-way conversations with people affected by emergencies and events. Tactics for dynamic listening include:

- Step 1:** Listen to people and communities at risk of being affected by a threat to their health, social or economic wellbeing;
- Step 2:** Know what audiences are concerned about;
- Step 3:** Observe and respect nonverbal signals;
- Step 4:** Express empathy and understanding;
- Step 5:** Concentrate on what people are saying; and
- Step 6:** Take appropriate action based on listening.

Situational analysis:

In the context of rumour management, situational analysis is the process of identifying rumours, determining their sources and how they are spreading, and responding accordingly. Tactics for situational analysis include:

- Conduct media monitoring, including social media, to understand and follow information circulating in the public sphere;
- Perform rumour surveillance online;
- Identify and track sources of misinformation and rumours;
- Create a rumour log to track rumours, myths, errors, and trends (Annex 1);
- Ensure a mechanism is in place to address rumours and respond with accurate and consistent key messages.
- Confirm that official information is being provided by authorized spokespersons (and not others acting in official capacities).

(while undertaking the situational analysis the tactics applied may not necessarily follow the sequence above but rather depending on the circumstances prevailing)

Processes for Rumour Management

- Step 1:** Define the nature of the rumour:
- Misinformation
 - Disinformation
 - Based on fact or fiction?
 - Impacted audiences
- Step 2:** Determine how rumour is spreading:
- Word of mouth
 - Traditional media
 - Social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
 - SMS
 - All of the above

Step 3: Assess potential consequences of the rumour:

- Could it cause harm or loss of life?
- Could it stop people from seeking or accessing services?
- Could it result in risky behavior?
- Could it put certain groups at risk?

Step 4: Respond:

- Provide accurate information through all available channels;
- Create a hotline to identify sources of rumours and monitor them;
- Increase frequency of information dissemination;
- Be empathetic to people who believe the rumour;
- Give evidence that the rumour is false;
- Acknowledge why people might believe that the rumour is true; and
- Ensure follow-up with impacted communities.

RCC Rumour Management Log (Annex 1)

Date	Location	Description of Rumour	Channel	Response	Monitoring	Remarks