

Proposed Communication Plan for Ebola Prevention & Control

When the public is at risk of a health emergency, effective communicating plays a key role in maintaining public trust, transparency and disseminating appropriate guidance according to the development of the situation -- all of which are essential in preventing panic and rumours that pose a major challenge to the management of the emergency. Communication preparedness is also important to ensure uninterrupted coordination within the government and collaboration with partners. During the recovery phase, effective communication helps the society recover from an outbreak and minimize negative economic impact.

The proposed communication plan encompasses three phases: I. prevention and preparedness, II. crisis communication and III. recovery.

I. Prevention and preparedness

• Awareness information to the public for prevention purposes

- Websites; The MoH, RBC, RCA, RDB websites will have a section or banner, with brief updated information on the prevention, symptoms and treatment of Ebola, and another one that provides updates on numbers new cases in the affected country and new outbreaks. The MoH and RBC websites shall display weekly updated brief information that provides what is known about the outbreak and control measures.
- A radio spot in Kinyarwanda to be aired on all major Radio stations
- Brochures, flyers and posters in both Kinyarwanda & English to be produced & printed for distribution to the public, especially at the borders. To be also posted on the MoH & TRAC Plus websites. To be done immediately.
- Information and education materials to be availed to the population and displayed at key and strategic locations like airports, border points, hotels etc.
- Prepare messages for different segments i.e. in case of an outbreak what specific actions should be taken by health workers, communities, families and individuals as well as border control, transportation and aviation industry.

• Public communication leadership

- Create a strong Communication task force led by the RBC-RHCC Communication team. This task force should be supported with the communication team at the

Office of the Government spokesperson, as well as technical experts who can quickly validate the content of the information. Prepare in advance protocols and templates to speed up routine procedures.

- **Internal coordination and partnership**

- Create a group e-mail and contact list of potential partners or involved institutions i.e. key communication contacts, persons in all the concerned institutions, including those from other ministries, business sectors, and international organizations.
- Contact donor countries to fundraise for communication activities.

- **Media relations**

- Press Conferences; The first press conference to inform the media about preventive measures that that Rwanda has put in place (proposed for next week) Another press conference might be convened if any case is confirmed within East Africa and any countries in the great lakes region.
- Media training will be organized to key government officials and spokespeople to prepare for surge of media appetite from both national and international media.
- Educate key media partners on socially responsible reporting in the eventuality of health emergency. Maintain regular dialogue with major media outlet – trusting relationship and pro-active communication will help contain misinformation.
- A focal person at RHCC will monitor and scan the media (international, regional and local media and the WHO media center). To find out how the media is covering the outbreak, this will help to neutralize misinformation. A summary report of the media coverage of the outbreak should be sent to the to the contact list of key heads of the concerned institutions and communication team.
- Continue to update the media on how prepared is Rwanda in case of an outbreak, and prevention measures. RBC-RHCC will take a lead on this.

- **Listening strategies**

- A hotline (114); currently located at RBC-RHCC will be responding to the asked questions. The EID and RHCC divisions will draft questions & answer (Key questions regarding basic information on Ebola to be given to the hotline staff responding to the questions.) This will also serve as a channel to gather information about public concerns and rumours. A daily or weekly report to be done by Rwanda Health Communication Center hotline team and be shared with the technical team.

II. Crisis Communication Plan once a case is reported in Rwanda

• Information to the public to contain virus and maintain calm

- An immediate national statement from the Minister of Health informing the public and providing the GoR measures will be distributed to all local media outlets (press conference).
- Booklets to be updated and avail them countrywide, with the help of the Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Disaster Preparedness and the Ministry of Internal affairs.
- Use all available communication channels (radio, print, opinion leaders, school, and local authorities) to describe actions individuals and communities can take to protect themselves. Help people know when – and when not – to seek medical care. Prevent stigmatization of outbreak victims. Ensure that the messages will reach everybody including those who do not speak Kinyarwanda and children.

• Public communication leadership

- Communication task force led by RBC-RHCC team will be strengthened by deployment of focal point persons from concerned institutions (Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Disaster Preparedness and the Ministry of Internal affairs) and work closely with the Office of the Government Spokesperson.
- The Minister of Health, State Minister appears on national TV and Radio during the news with regular updates (e.g. three days a week). In case the two officials are not available they can delegate the Ministry of Health Spokesperson.

• Internal coordination and partnership

- All officials in Rwanda and concerned embassies to be notified immediately by a written statement.

• Media relations

- Set up a media center that will provide information to the general public through the media and websites on a 24/7 basis.
- A press debrief every single day through a press release to be sent to all local media & regional media.

- An information kit to be given to all radios, especially the most popular radios and request them to regularly update the public in their most popular shows.

- **Listening strategies**

- Media monitoring and hotline will continue to detect any rumours or misinformation as well as panic or social disruption which needs to be reported to relevant authorities.

III. Recovery phase

- Communicate ongoing need for vigilance with disease prevention steps to prevent upswing in disease.
- National statement from the Minister of Health informing the public of the end of health emergency.