Social listening report, 16-31 May 2020
Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) sub-committee
Zambia COVID-19 response, No. 6

Highlights

This report presents the results of social listening in the fortnight ending 31 May 2020 across a variety of platforms in Zambia by those in the RCCE sector. A few highlights and themes are summarised below:

- It is proving easier to encourage handwashing with soap than the wearing of masks, with corresponding levels of behaviour change. Some just wear masks when they see a police checkpoint or enter a school.
- The school reopenings have created concerns among some parents and caregivers. But for others, it is taken as a sign that the danger has now passed.
- Myths continue to abound including: that COVID-19 can be treated with ginger and lemon cures; that it only targets the rich and the old; that it is a conspiracy against Africa; or that it is a money-making scheme.

The report has been divided into sections below, and contains a full annex of COVID-19 media...
The majority of news stories focused on COVID-19 announcements, including updated figures. The below points have been picked out from the coverage for relevance to those leading COVID-19 messaging:

- The COVID-19 epicentre in Nakonde was the focus of much news coverage in the period, including the closing and then reopening of the border.
- Other key topic categories included the economic impacts, the management of donations, the risks posed by truck drivers, public sensitisation around fake cures, risks related to the cold season, improving border post screening, and the two ministerial COVID-19 infections.
- Preparations for the school reopening and the protection measures needed was another key focus for media coverage and phone-in shows. Many parents reported feeling apprehensive, though others were happy that children would not be left behind. But some parents did say they wouldn’t be sending their children back to school, notably boarding schools.
- In line with the ‘new normal’ there was discussion of longer-term measures including how to make mask wearing and physical distancing part of regular behaviour.
- There was radio discussion of a widely circulated message attributed to a doctor calling for a return to normal.
- Overall, the messaging around COVID-19 prevention has declined in terms of news prominence, which may need a redoubling of efforts by the RCCE sector.

To view analysis by Brandcomm on radio and TV discussions on COVID-19 in Zambia in the period 15-22 May 2020, click here. For their report on news coverage in the same period, click here.

The following issues and beliefs were noted by the Community Engagement sub-group and responders during the fortnight, following social mobilisation work in communities:
• There are continuing complaints in communities about being unable to afford/access face masks, soap and hand sanitizer. Obtaining clean water for handwashing is also an issue for many.
• The school reopening has caused concerns with fears about large class sizes and limited WASH facilities. On the other hand, for some it is a sign that the emergency has passed.
• Food security remains a challenge with loss of livelihoods.
• With limits on group meetings, sensitizing communities and sharing information is proving more difficult.
• For some people, masks are only worn for check point controls, and then removed.
• In some rural areas, the messaging has had difficulty arriving. In some areas, the belief is that the emergency has passed. Other rural residents are reporting having heard of COVID-19 but not realizing the outbreak was underway in Zambia.
• Community sensitizers report that the messaging on face masks is struggling to land, while handwashing has met with much more success. This may be related to longer term campaigns on handwashing, and the recent cholera response. People have a lot more questions around masking.
• Lack of knowledge on treatment procedures - People feel that they would rather lock themselves up in their homes than be subjected to medical attention because they feel whenever you’re picked up by an ambulance then “that’s the end of you.”
• How do babies achieve social distancing when they have to be in care of an adult (who might be infected)?
• Inadequate knowledge on droplet infection transmission
• Lots of questions about the effects for people with HIV or sickle cell disease. Some people reference the coronavirus disease to HIV, for which there is a treatment but not a cure. There has been some confusion on the similarities and differences between the common cold/flu.

A perspective on challenges for persons with disabilities:

• Social distancing – “most of us rely on guides for the visually impaired and personal assistants for physical disabilities”
• Difficulties to use tap stands and water stands; not disability friendly
• Assistive devices need constant sanitizing
• Coughing in elbow doesn’t work for the blind who are led by the elbow
• Carers are unsure of what they should do
• Those in wheelchairs with physical disabilities have to lift themselves up by handrails in public bathrooms which means more touching of surfaces.

Still lots of myths, misconceptions...

• “The COVID reports are fabricated”
• “It’s a strategy to get rid of Africans”
• “Young people are immune to the pandemic”
• Communities without soap say maybe they can use very hot water for washing hands. “What is the minimum temperature at which the virus will die?”
• People say masks are not meant for them but for a particular class of people and race
• “COVID-19 is cured by drinking ginger tea”
• “The people involved are just doing it for money’s sake”
• “COVID is for the rich”
• “God is annoyed with humans because they have abandoned Him by stopping to gather for worship”
1. Social media

With a social listening lens, the following types of comments were picked out this fortnight:

- The move away from daily COVID-19 media briefings did dampen the online discussion. Some wondered if it would reduce the information flow and the profile of the disease, while others thought it was wise given the ‘new normal’.
- The reopening of schools has been one of the major points of discussion in the period, with many parents reporting they are concerned about the safety of their children.
- Although not as prominent as previously, the discussion around face masks remains strong. There is some resistance from those saying that if the government wants them to wear masks, they should be distributed free of charge.
- The positive tests for the Minister of Health and Minister of Information & Broadcasting provoked a lot of discussion including many messages from well-wishers. Given the recognised issue with stigma, some wondered if it was a ploy to try and encourage people to take COVID-19 more seriously.
- Some social media users used their accounts to highlight the continued issues with crowding at markets and on public transport.
- There the discussion about the ‘new normal’ and the need to adapt to a situation that might not quickly disappear.

*Figure 1: Sentiment over time of social media conversation (positive-neutral-negative) in Zambia (Brandcomm for UNICEF)*
2. U-Report

U-Report Zambia provides information on COVID-19 through two services on the platform: a U-Report “SMS bot” that provides an SMS-based menu where users can navigate and access various COVID-19 related information categories, and then direct two-way SMS interaction with a counsellor who responds to questions.

The below analyses data for the period from 16 March – 29 May 2020. During the period, there have been a total of 254,044 message interactions on the platform, of which 206,945 (81%) were on COVID-19.

In the month of May, COVID-19 accounted for 84% (24,444 of 29,029) of message interactions. Interactions are down on the previous month due to technical transmission challenges with one of the mobile network providers, and also likely to be down due to users feeling a reduced need for COVID-19 information. The team plan to review the information currently available on the platform to keep it in-line with the emerging information needs of young people in Zambia.

The second half of month did see a significant increase on the first half (two-fold). One factor in this may have been the running of a poll on education, which is not counted in the figures but normally leads to an increase in traffic. The vast majority (81%) of information needs on the platform are dealt with by an SMS bot.

What information are people looking for on the platform?

Further disaggregation of content on COVID-19 and comparison of traffic in the month of May shows an increase in absolute number of message interactions on respective topical areas on COVID-19 (i.e. How can I protect myself; “Other COVID issues’ etc.), in moving from the first to the second half of May. Similar to previous periods, around half of users (60% 1-15 May, 50% 16-29 May) ended their search with the opening information message, which provides national and global statistics of the coronavirus pandemic. Moving on from there, the value of answers to questions like ‘How can I protect myself?’ remains evident by the continued requests for information.
Figure 3: COVID-19 content coverage on U-Report – a comparison of absolute numbers of COVID-19 messages by respective topical areas at fortnight intervals in May 2020

Figure 4: COVID-19 content coverage on U-Report – a percentage comparison of COVID-19 topical areas relative to all COVID-19 messages at fortnight intervals in May
Concerns and perceptions on re-opening of school for examination classes in context of COVID-19

Opinions pertaining to the re-opening of schools for examination classes dominated discussions under the ‘Other COVID related issues’. There were divergent opinions on this subject, although the key issues included:

- Concerns regarding re-opening of schools as the likelihood of increased spread of coronavirus is ‘very high’ in the opinion of some users
- Uncertainty on whether boarding schools can really adhere to COVID-19 preventive measures

**Other key issues included as follows:**

- Whether a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 has been discovered
- Whether there is new evidence regarding effectiveness of the Madagascar herbal medicine for COVID-19
- Concerns regarding loss of economic opportunities due to some preventive measures in place
- Concerns regarding disruption of the school calendar

It is worthwhile to note that these questions are responded to directly by counsellors who have been trained and offered with resource materials, including information on referral to trusted sites and organisations.

**Key next steps**

- Re-package messages on COVID-19 to include new information or innovate on packaging of the existing messages to maintain interests of the users.
- Develop infographics on key results emerging from U-Report polls and messages.
- Prepare, produce infographics and amplify the report on learning experiences during school closure in the context of COVID-19.
- Conduct a poll on violence against children.

**Background** – U-Report is an initiative under the National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council (NAC) with support from UNICEF. Users can access information on COVID-19 by texting ‘corona’ to 878. The service is free of charge, and since being set-up in 2012 has more than 200,000 subscribers, mostly young people. Since 16 March 2020, responses on COVID-19 are given by automated bots and designated responders. In the coming weeks, the message bot will be activated on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

**3. Internet of Good Things (IoGT)**

Future editions of this report will include data from the IoGT web platform. Since the launch of COVID-19 related content on 27 March 2020, 28,656 users have visited the platform. Content includes a quiz gauging knowledge of COVID-19, which may provide useful data on public awareness levels.

**Background** – The Internet of Good Things (IoGT) is a set of free, mobile-ready web-based resources that can be accessed for free on a smartphone / feature phone when accessed through the Free Basics platform on Airtel and MTN networks. URL – [https://zm.goodinternet.org/](https://zm.goodinternet.org/)
Future editions of this product will include weekly data from the 909 call centre (DMMU/ZNPHI) particularly with analysis of the types and quantities of calls coming in. Currently around 800-1,000 calls are received each day.

**For further information, please contact:**

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**ANNEX I – Fortnightly news review**

Please find embedded below…

Annex 1, Covid19 news review, 30 May