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BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES FOR EMERGENCIES

Keep in mind the following basic principles for your BCC initiatives. These principles are built around the CCCs and thus contribute to overall efforts to prepare and respond to emergencies.

Before an emergency strikes:

- **Prepare accordingly**

Planning and preparation for BCC are vital steps that must take place long before an emergency strikes. UNICEF country offices have the responsibility to identify and develop 'Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans' (EPRP) for potential natural or man-made disasters. Based on experience and evidence from past emergencies, define what kinds of results, that is, behaviours, in terms of specific knowledge, attitudes and practices your intended audience groups need to develop, perform or reinforce, and sustain. You need to also define what kinds of communication support and resources your team of partners would need so that the BCC response would support the overall humanitarian response.

- **Invite different partners to come together to plan jointly**

BCC initiatives are prepared with partners from different sectors, including government, UN agencies, NGOs and humanitarian agencies. Keep in mind that communication efforts, to influence positive behaviours, have to be closely linked to other programme, service and supply plans for an emergency. Therefore, you will need to ensure that you establish a sustained collaborative arrangement with relevant partners.

- **Engage communities in preparing and planning for emergencies**

The human rights-based approach to programming stresses participatory approaches that engage communities in planning, implementation and monitoring

processes. This means that we should build on what people already know and that we recognize their social and cultural strengths. However, communities are not homogeneous. Keep in mind that vulnerabilities related to age, gender inequalities, ethnicity, caste, socio-economic status and disability, are factors that may affect people's ability to take part in decision-making processes.

- **Invest in communication research**

Communication research addresses the critical information gaps that you need to fill to enable you to adequately prepare and plan for emergencies.

Conducting communication research will be a wise investment for it will save you time and resources later. Ensure that you disaggregate data from such research by sex, age and other variables which can impact on people's behaviours, such as ethnicity and income levels. In the face of an emergency, when information from previous communication research is not available, the best alternative is to conduct a rapid communication assessment. Prepare a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan as well. M&E enables you to track your progress and impact at given periods of the emergency response in terms of message and channel reach, resource use and most of, all in terms of desired behaviour results.

- **Prepare action oriented communication materials**

Be ready with sample messages and materials that have been pre-tested such as those on maternal health, nutrition, immunization, disaster-related stress, water and sanitation, and child protection. This will save you precious time and resources. Countries with landmines will also need mine-risk education materials in advance. Having a central website with downloadable files ready for printing will be useful preparations for an emergency. It will also be handy to set up a database of available writers, editors, designers, printing houses, and radio and TV producers so that contracts could be quickly drawn up.

- **Develop a communication protocol and partnerships that will collaborate in communication efforts**

During an emergency, information overload and confusion is likely to happen, especially when the impact is large scale and if there is little coordination among different actors providing assistance. Agree with key partners and have a plan which outlines how communication efforts will be coordinated, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Agree on how information will be managed. This should also help to prevent and manage rumours and misinformation, two unwanted results that often happen during emergencies.

- **Train service providers in interpersonal communication skills**
In times of stress and trauma caused by a disaster, health workers and other service providers need to possess and maintain good interpersonal communication skills to inform, motivate, counsel and encourage people affected by emergencies. They also need to know how to deal with the distress and anxiety experienced by people who come for assistance as well as among themselves.
- **Test the communication plan by drills and exercises**
Many BCC plans for emergencies fall short when they clash with harsh realities. You need to test your assumptions and nurture positive mindsets and skills that can be harnessed when everything is in chaos. Test your communication approaches. Carefully test and review them with affected people, to ensure that these are practical and feasible under the circumstances of the emergency. This also implies that your BCC plan should help build the necessary confidence and skills among staff and partners to overcome fear, stress and anxiety.

If an emergency strikes

- **Establish a central health education and communication coordination centre**
Partners from government, UN agencies, NGOs, religious communities, media, children and youth groups and others need to coordinate, plan, manage and monitor communication initiatives with affected communities during the emergency response. This will avoid duplication, misunderstanding, rumours and misinformation and maximize communication efforts.
- **Participate in sectoral assessments**
When health, water and sanitation, child protection and education assessments are conducted in the initial phase of an emergency, it is critical that the different sectoral assessments also identify any high risk practices that have implications for behaviour change communication among affected caregivers and communities. This information is critical to map out the detailed emergency responses for different sectors.
- **Conduct a rapid appraisal of communication channels and resources**
Assess the availability and reach of media and other communication channels. Determine media access among affected communities. Are media and other communication channels (e.g., national, provincial and community based radio) still functioning? What about commercial as well as university based radio stations, are they ready to support BCC in an emergency? Can they be

mobilized, for instance, for hygiene promotion, disease prevention and the protection of displaced/unaccompanied children? What logistical requirements, as well as gaps and problems could you anticipate? What appropriate, low-tech communication channels could be urgently set up that would work without electricity? As the response unfolds, look out for new as well as existing opportunities for persuasive interpersonal channels that existing or newly set up community communication channels could support - for example, the Military, Red Cross workers, children and youth groups like Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Child Clubs, other community-based channels - for communicating quickly with affected populations.

- **Focus on re-establishing existing behaviours and norms**
In the initial emergency phase, concentrate on re-establishing positive behaviours that existed prior to the emergency. Focus not only on individual behaviours and actions, but seek to re-establish positive social and cultural values that are temporarily disrupted. However, depending on the situation, be aware that emergencies might also provide opportunities to promote new behaviours.
- **Forge alliances**
Build alliances to include relief workers, service providers, journalists and others so that they are able to support directly desired behaviours of affected people.
- **Facilitate community and children's participation**
Be pro-active in creating opportunities for affected caregivers and communities, including children and young people, to participate in determining issues and solutions in the emergency response. Take particular care to include especially vulnerable groups, whether this requires inviting representatives from children and young people's organisations, women representatives, religious leaders, asking vulnerable populations to nominate spokespersons or advocating with camp management and local authorities to consult affected communities.
- **Follow humanitarian imperatives**
Humanitarian needs should always take precedence over political and other agendas. In our communication efforts, we also might have to advocate for cross boundary cooperation, support and compassion.
- **Have a detailed communication plan**
Based on your emergency preparedness plan, develop with your team and partners the details of the communication initiative(s) for the different phases of an emergency. In the following section, you can gain from an overview of the essential steps in developing a communication plan.