

COVID-19: COMMUNITY FEEDBACK REPORT

#15 - AFRICA REGION – 20 JULY 2020



Community feedback considered in this report was collected between the **1 and 7 July 2020** and shared by Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) focal points in **8 African countries**.

Community feedback was collected during conversations with community members during social mobilization activities in three countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo (2061 feedback comments), Gabon (10), and Côte d'Ivoire (5). Feedback collected through social media, WhatsApp groups and interactive radio shows in Gabon (188), Cameroon (5) and Côte d'Ivoire (1) has also been included. Feedback relating to COVID-19 received through National Society hotlines in Sierra Leone (57) and Gabon (8) was also shared. Focal points in three countries shared the main rumours, observation, beliefs, questions or suggestions they are hearing in their countries: Eswatini, Malawi, and Mozambique.

The topic of **face masks** was discussed most widely across the countries who shared community feedback. Some community members said they didn't think masks would help to stop spread the disease, others that less and less people were wearing them. In DRC it was often criticized that politicians, military and police don't seem to wear masks or practice physical distancing. There were also questions about face masks for children, how to wash your hands if there is not enough water available, as well as challenges in terms of physical distancing.

A common question was also about the **length of the pandemic**, with some wondering

if we will have to live with it, and other saying that it will pass just like other epidemics.

Community members also asked many **questions** and shared **suggestions relative to response activities**. They asked about the availability of support on areas such as livelihoods and handwashing. Suggestions included requests for a scale up of community health promotion or the provision of hand washing utensils, face masks and livelihood support. Some also asked **why sick people are not shown in media** and suggested to do so.

Another common topic was the treatment of **COVID-19**. People often asked about the existence and availability of medication for COVID-19 and some wondered how it is possible that people are recovering, if there is no cure. There were still mentions of herbs and traditional medicine to be used as treatments.

Common were also comments relative to **health care services**. Community members were asking about where COVID-19 patients are treated, and shared concerns about the **quality of health care**, especially for diseases other than COVID-19. There were also comments about vaccines, with people either voicing negative views on vaccinations, and others suggesting to vaccinate people against COVID-19.

There were still comments **indicating mistrust in people or organizations** in relation to the outbreak. Most commonly it was mentioned that the outbreak is used to **make money**.

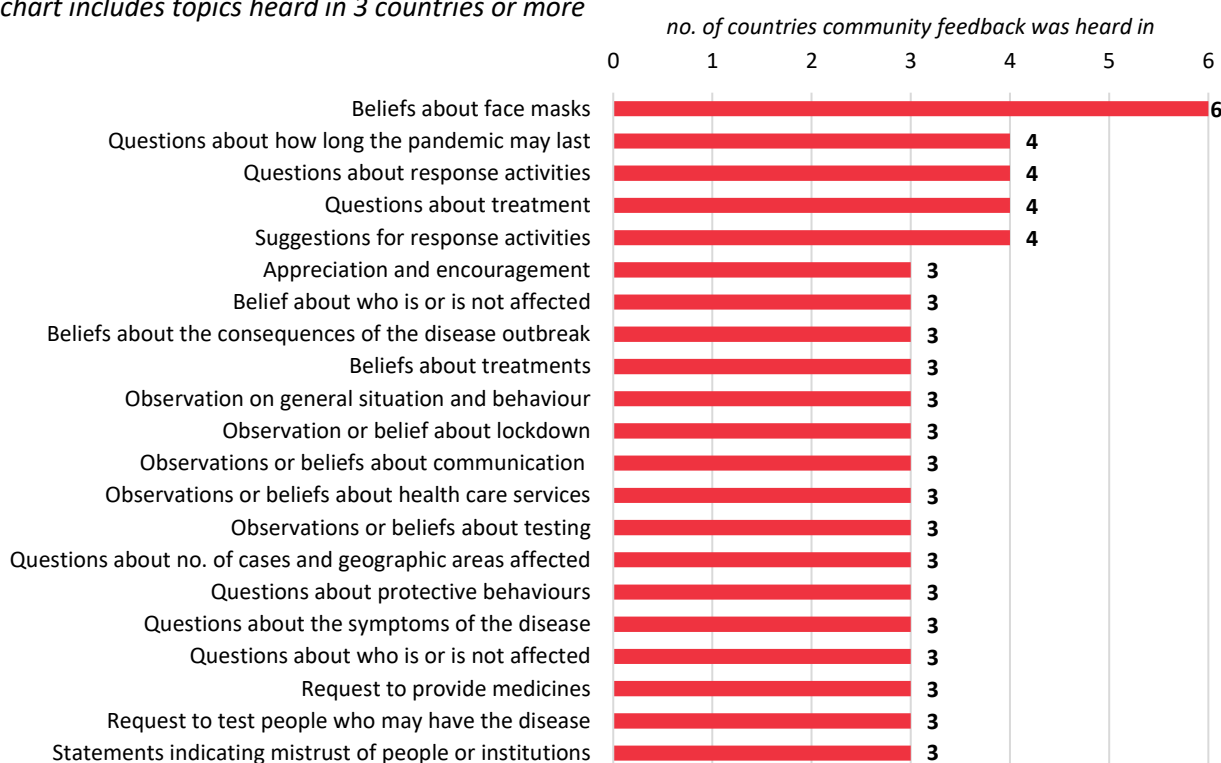
TO ADDRESS THIS FEEDBACK, WE NEED TO:

- Scale up risk communication about face masks with communities, explaining why they can help stop the spread of the virus, how they should be used and who should wear them. You can access face mask IEC materials, including videos and infographics, [here](#). Share these materials through social media, with volunteers and branches, and cover this topic on radio and TV shows.

- Share the feedback from community members criticizing politicians, police and military not wearing face masks and practicing physical distancing through coordination mechanisms and offer support to sensitize military and police and strengthen their awareness of role model status in the society.
- Work with communities to find local affordable solutions to meet their requests for soap, hand washing stations and masks. Read the [interagency guidance note on finding local solutions](#), which also includes good examples from National Societies across Africa. This also helps build trust and encourages communities lead the fight against COVID-19.
- Find the answer to questions about how long the epidemic will last in [Ask Dr Ben #7](#), but the important point is that the length of the epidemic is up to us and the actions we take. See last week's [Ask Dr Ben #14](#) for help to explain this.
- This week's [Ask Dr Ben video](#) tackles the question 'Where are all the sick people?'. Share the video and [Ask Dr Ben factsheet #7](#) with your volunteers and staff on social media and through WhatsApp and consider organizing a webinar with local media and asking them to help you explain this issue to the public.
- Ensure volunteers know how to answer questions about treatments and vaccines and consider doing a radio or TV show to explain this topic more clearly. [Ask Dr Ben factsheets 4, 5, 9, 10, 12 and 14](#) all help to provide answers on this topic. Next week's Ask Dr Ben video will discuss treatments and an interagency factsheet is coming soon.
- Share feedback with your Ministry of Health regarding people's questions about where COVID-19 patients are treated and their concerns about visiting hospitals. Suggest they scale up public communication through press releases and media webinars. Invite MoH colleagues to discuss this topic on your National Society radio and TV shows.

MOST COMMON FEEDBACK TOPICS ACROSS COUNTRIES

This chart includes topics heard in 3 countries or more



MOST COMMON COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ACROSS COUNTRIES

1. Beliefs about face masks and questions about protective behaviours

Heard in: Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Eswatini, Gabon, Mozambique, Sierra Leone

Rumours, observations and beliefs:

"I do not need to use any mask. I serve to God!" – Mozambique, National Society report, 6 July 2020

"Wearing a mask has become a phenomenon to be sneaky, and also when a person wears their mask properly you can't recognize them, so if someone wears their mask and attacks you, you won't be able to recognize them." – Côte d'Ivoire, focus group discussion, 7 July 2020

"People hardly ever wear masks anymore." – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

"Masks can't protect us more than God." – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

"Police officers asking people to use face mask in public places." – Sierra Leone, National Society hotline, 6 July 2020

Questions:

"If we are being advised to wear masks, are there masks for children?" – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

"Why do politicians not respect wearing masks?" – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

"Why do the police not respect social distancing?" – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

"How can we wash our hands when we don't have drinking water?" – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

2. Questions about how long the pandemic may last

Heard in: DRC, Gabon, Malawi, Sierra Leone

Questions:

"Do we see COVID-19 ending soon?" – Malawi, National Society report, 6 July 2020

"When will this pandemic be eradicated?" – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

"Will the world live with Covid-19 like malaria?" – Sierra Leone, National Society hotline, 5 July 2020

"Can the government last until 2023 with this pandemic?" – Gabon, social media, 2 July 2020

3. Questions and suggestions about response activities

Heard in: Cameroon, DRC, Gabon, Mozambique

Questions:

"What resources have been deployed and under what conditions are healthcare professionals working? Who is on the front line in this battle?" – Gabon, social media, 6 July 2020

"Where are the 5 million masks for the people?" – Gabon, social media, 3 July 2020

“How can we help people whose businesses have collapsed because of COVID-19?” – Cameroon, WhatsApp group with staff and volunteers, 3 July 2020

“Why don’t you want to carry on distributing washbasins?” – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

“Why aren’t you showing the COVID-19 cases on TV?” – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

Suggestions:

“The focus now needs to be on raising awareness of how to live with COVID-19.” – Cameroon, WhatsApp group with staff and volunteers, 3 July 2020

“The police need to be given more information because they don’t respect the measures put in place by the authorities.” – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

“They need to put washbasins at the entrances to public places.” – DRC, household visit, 4 July 2020

“We need clean water to carry out preventive measures.” – DRC, household visit, 4 July 2020

“Red Cross to provide face masks and food.” – Sierra Leone, National Society hotline, 6 July 2020

4. Questions and beliefs about treatment

Heard in: Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Eswatini, Gabon, Sierra Leone

Questions:

“If there still isn’t a medicine for curing COVID-19, how come we are hearing about people who are being cured every day?” – Côte d’Ivoire, focus group discussion, 7 July 2020

“Any confirmed Covid-19 medication?” – Sierra Leone, National Society hotline, 5 July 2020

“Why is the cure suggested by Dr Pieby being met with silence?” – Gabon, social media, 5 July 2020

Rumours, observations and beliefs:

“We are treating our illnesses with traditional medicine because we don’t really trust modern medicine.” – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

“Use of alternative medicines to cure or prevent COVID-19.” – Eswatini, National Society report, 6 July 2020

“The doctor [...] may not be aware that most products in modern medicine derive their essences from the plants on which traditional medicine is based..” – Gabon, social media, 5 July 2020

“COVID-19 does not have a specific medicine.” – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

5. Comments about health care services

Heard in: DRC, Gabon, Sierra Leone

Rumours, observations and beliefs:

“Healthcare workers are neglecting patients because of COVID-19, particularly diabetics and those with HIV.” – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

“Government is testing people at check point for COVID-19.” – Sierra Leone, National Society hotline, 5 July 2020

“We don’t trust the screening test suggested by COPIL.” – Gabon, social media, 6 July 2020

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“The COVID-19 vaccine is toxic.” – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

“If the UN is congratulating Gabon, it is simply because Gabon is complying with European instructions and will be one of the first countries to use the vaccine.” – Gabon, social media, 1 July 2020

Questions:

“When will you provide us with the COVID-19 vaccine?” – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

“Where is the COVID-19 treatment centre?” – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

“Where are the people who contract the coronavirus treated?” – DRC, household visit, 6 July 2020

“How many COVID-19 testing machines are there in Ituri?” – DRC, household visit, 1 July 2020

“Why do you have to pay for a test in the public hospitals?” – Gabon, household visit, 5 July 2020

APPRECIATION - ENCOURAGEMENT

The statements of thanks and encouragement listed below represent the most frequently heard comments across countries in the IFRC Africa region.

Statements of thanks and encouragement

Heard in: Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Gabon

“Your programme helps inform the population about COVID-19.” – Côte d'Ivoire, National Society radio show, 1 July 2020

“Congratulations to the COPIL initiative to map the spread of COVID-19 in Gabon with precise zones.” – Gabon, social media, 4 July 2020

“Good luck to this awareness team who came to us to stop the spread of COVID-19.” – DRC, household visit, 3 July 2020

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON IFRC RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS ON COVID-19 IN AFRICA, PLEASE CONTACT SHARON READER AT SHARON.READER@IFRC.ORG.