THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK COLLECTION IN PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

MPOX – 2024

Collecting community feedback during a public health emergency, has proven to be crucial to allow NS to respond in the most effective and appropriate manner. Lessons learned from various Ebola outbreaks and COVID-19 shows plenty of evidence now that demonstrates the harm that can occur when local needs, voices, and perspectives are not integrated into the design, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and operations.

To appropriately address the current Mpox situation, we must ensure to collect, analyze and use feedback continuously throughout the outbreak and response. This is critical to understand behavioral and social drivers, to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of strategies

Social data matters for the following reasons:

- **Tailored response**: understanding community needs and perceptions allows NS, health officials and other partners in the response, to tailor their response strategies. This ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive and relevant to the specific concerns and behaviors of the different communities.

    o Feedback received during the COVID-19 response showed that a ***one-size-fits-all approach was ineffective***, allowing NS to tailor messages to different demographic groups, addressing specific concerns and needs. This helped in reaching ***vulnerable populations*** and ensuring inclusivity.

- **Building trust**: engaging the community and acting on their feedback helps build trust between NS, public health authorities and the community. This trust is essential for ensuring compliance with public health measures, such as vaccination, practicing good hygiene, and avoiding contact.

    o Establishing trust through ***transparent and consistent communication*** during the COVID-19 response was vital for encouraging public adherence to health guidelines. The involvement of ***trusted community leaders*** and ***volunteers*** helped in disseminating accurate information and gaining ***community support***.

- **Identifying gaps**: community feedback can reveal gaps in the public health response, such as misinformation, lack of access to healthcare, or language barriers. Addressing these gaps improves the effectiveness of the response and ensures that no group is left behind.

  - The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of reaching **marginalized and vulnerable groups** who were often left out of mainstream communication channels. The Red Cross movement prioritized these groups by using **inclusive messaging** and ensuring that communication materials were accessible in **multiple languages and formats**.

- **Reducing stigma and countering misinformation**: by understanding the fears, misconceptions, and social dynamics within the community, NS, public health authorities and other partners in the response, can develop targeted communication strategies that reduce stigma and counter false information. This helps to create a more informed and supportive environment, encouraging individuals to seek help, adhere to public health measures, and engage in open discussions about the disease without fear of discrimination.

  - The COVID-19 pandemic saw a surge in misinformation. The RCRC movement emphasized the need for proactive communication strategies to **counter myths and false information**, using **fact-checking**, **community dialogue**, and **partnerships with media outlets**. Efforts were made to reduce stigma related to COVID-19 by promoting messages of solidarity, emphasizing that the virus does not discriminate, and **encouraging compassion** and **support** for those affected.

- **Monitoring and adaptation**: feedback provides real-time information about the effectiveness of ongoing interventions. NS and public health authorities can use this information to adapt and refine their strategies to better address the evolving situation.

  - Feedback mechanisms, such as **hotlines**, **surveys**, **action research** and **social media**, were crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic for identifying misinformation and community concerns in real-time, allowing for timely and accurate response and adaptations to the response.