

Analysis Report: Infodemic Management Landscaping

2024

Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology:	4
Key findings	5
Community Interaction Strategies for Gathering Feedback and Addressing Misinformation During Recent Outbreaks	5
Strategies used to identify and verify truth and misinformation during recent outbreaks	6
Commonly used tools and methods for Information Collection during Outbreaks	7
Organizational Information Analysis.....	7
Protocols for handling urgent feedback and communication during outbreaks.....	8
Decision-making process for addressing rumors and misinformation	8
Community feedback mechanisms for emerging information	8
Collaboration and Data Access for Rumor Analysis	9
Challenges in managing rumors and misinformation during an outbreak.....	9
Recommendation.....	10
Annex:	11
Action Plan	11
Questionnaire	12

Acronyms

ACT	Advocacy Communication and Technical Working Group
BA	Breakthrough ACTION
DHIS2	District Health Information System 2
DVO	District Veterinary Officer
MoFL	Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock
MGEE	Ministry of Green Economy and Environment
MoH	Ministry of Health
NAIS	National Agriculture Information Services
NHCs	Neighborhood Health Committees
OH	One Health
PVO	Provincial Veterinary Officer
PZDs	Priority Zoonotic Diseases
TWG	Technical Working Groups
ZANIS	Zambia National Information Services
ZNPHI	Zambia National Public Health Institute

Introduction

Zambia faces considerable challenges in regulating rumors and misinformation, particularly during public health crises.¹ A key issue is the rapid transmission of misleading information on social media and other digital platforms, which can cause public panic and obstruct effective response operations. Furthermore, the lack of access to accurate information in isolated and rural locations exacerbates the problem, as these populations frequently rely on word-of-mouth or unconfirmed sources. While the participation of traditional, religious, and community leaders is critical in these areas, their impact is limited. Furthermore, while coordination across many ministries and organizations is improving, there are still hurdles to guaranteeing the distribution of timely and accurate information.

To address these difficulties, Zambia is increasingly adopting the One Health concept, which emphasizes the interconnection of human, animal, and environmental health. This multi-sectoral plan encourages collaboration among the Ministries of Health (MoH), Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL), Ministry of Green Economy and Environment (MoGEE), and other key stakeholders. By combining current technologies with traditional communication means such as social media platforms, public address systems, and community involvement activities, the One Health strategy ensures that correct information reaches all sectors of the population to reduce the spread of disinformation.

Infodemic management is a systematic approach to detecting and mitigating the spread of misinformation and disinformation during health emergencies to protect public health. It encompasses the routine analysis of on- and offline data, the promotion of accurate health information, and the building of community resilience to misinformation.²

Breakthrough ACTION implemented an infodemic management landscaping exercise that took place in two parts: a survey of stakeholders and then a workshop to discuss and validate the insights from the landscaping survey that included a training on infodemic management concepts. The training took place from July 29th to July 31st, 2024, in Kabwe, Central Province. This exercise sought to assess existing activities, strengths, and shortcomings in infodemic management at both the national and subnational levels. The major goal was to develop recommendations to improve the efficacy of current strategies and provide a better coordinated response to mis- and disinformation during health crises.

Methodology:

The methodology for this infodemic management landscaping exercise involved distributing questionnaires to the relevant members of the One Health Advocacy Communication and

¹ Mudenda, S., Chileshe, M., Mukosha, M., Hikaambo, C. N. A., Banda, M., Kampamba, M., ... & Daka, V. (2022). Zambia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic: exploring lessons, challenges and implications for future policies and strategies. *Pharmacology & Pharmacy*, 13(1), 11-33.

² <https://www.who.int/news/item/11-12-2020-call-for-action-managing-the-infodemic>

Training (ACT) Technical Working Group (TWG) at national and provincial levels. An interview guide was designed and sent to 16 OH ACT TWG members (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, Ministry of Local Government, ZANIS and NAIS) to identify current activities, strengths, and weaknesses in infodemic management. The responses were analyzed and presented to the 25 workshop participants, including the 16 who completed the survey. This process was followed by group discussions for the participants to review, provide feedback, and validate the findings. This approach provided valuable insights into the existing infodemic management efforts for PZDs, enabling stakeholders to understand the current landscape and identify areas for improvement. Following the landscaping exercise, the Breakthrough ACTION team trained participants on key concepts related to infodemic management including social listening, identification and rumor tracking, best practices for responding to rumors, risk communication, and partnership collaboration.

Key findings

The following sections summarize insights from the 25 workshop participants after reviewing the pre-workshop survey findings.

Community Interaction Strategies for Gathering Feedback and Addressing Misinformation During Recent Outbreaks

- Participants were asked how their ministries or departments interacted with community members to collect suggestions, questions, misinformation, or other perceptions in the most recent outbreak. Participants from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, and Media houses revealed their collaboration with relevant line ministries and other key stakeholders to implement community interaction strategies focused on gathering feedback and addressing misinformation at both national and subnational levels. These strategies were implemented through the National Epidemic Preparedness Response Unit, a multisectoral committee with the mandate to coordinate efforts across various ministries. The strategies and interventions discussed in these meetings are then disseminated through multiple media channels to effectively address public health emergencies. Some of these strategies include community engagement activities, public forums, and targeted communication campaigns such as: Involve traditional, religious, and community leaders to spread accurate information and gather community feedback.
- Use of a public address system to reach larger audiences during community engagement and sensitization activities.
- Organizing facility meetings for health staff to directly interact with the community.
- Leveraging community structures such as the Neighborhood Health Committee (NHC) and other community-based volunteers to conduct door-to-door visits.
- Setting up information desks at strategic locations to provide information and collect community feedback

- Utilizing social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp to share updates and to promote best practices in livestock management.
- Organize meetings in veterinary camps for staff from various line ministries and departments to directly engage with farmers, offering valuable information and addressing their concerns in person.
- Air expert-led Call-in radio programs for community members to interact with the experts and ask questions about their health concerns.
- Producing jingles to highlight key messages about animal health and disease prevention. These jingles are aired on local radio stations to reach a much wider audience.

Strategies used to identify and verify truth and misinformation during recent outbreaks

Participants were asked about the strategies used by stakeholders for identifying truth and misinformation within ministries, departments, units, and communities during an outbreak in Zambia. The survey revealed that stakeholders from relevant One Health Ministries collaboratively embark on fact-finding missions to determine the accuracy of the reported information. These missions involve comprehensive disease and outbreak investigations, including laboratory analyses. Field teams from various departments, units, and community branches collaborate to collect samples, observe symptoms, and gather data directly from affected areas. By cross-referencing field observations with laboratory results, the relevant ministries can distinguish between information and misinformation. This rigorous process ensures that only verified information is disseminated to the public, helping to prevent panic and ensure appropriate response measures are implemented. Through these coordinated efforts, the stakeholders maintain the integrity of information during outbreaks, safeguarding both Human, animal, and environmental health.

“As government at all levels attentively listen to shared information, comprehending its context and content to distinguish truth from misinformation. They trace the information’s origin to evaluate the source’s credibility. The information is then verified against reliable and authoritative sources to ensure its accuracy. The team engages with the source to resolve any uncertainties or obtain further details. Continuous monitoring is implemented to promptly address any updates or corrections...” **A participant from the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL).**

“Leveraging the community structure, MoH engages with community members to listen to their concerns, questions, and the information they receive. This process equips health staff with detailed insights to discern truth from misinformation within the community. Health staff then identify the origin of the information and verify it against trusted sources to ensure its accuracy. Once verified, they interact with the community members sharing the information to clarify and provide accurate details...” **A participant from the Ministry of Health (MoH).**

Commonly used tools and methods for collecting information during outbreaks

Participants were asked about the tools people in their department, unit, or community use to determine the accuracy of information during an outbreak. Survey responses suggested that during disease outbreaks, government line ministries collaborate with implementing partners to employ various tools and methods to effectively gather information across health departments, units, and communities. A media monitoring tool, often an app with a feedback report feature, tracks and analyzes real-time media coverage to identify rumors and misinformation. Relevant stakeholders then meet to discuss the outbreak in the communities and decide on appropriate actions. Additionally, tools like IEC registers are used to track the implementation of various strategies and interventions. Once these interventions are implemented, event-based reports document significant incidents, providing detailed information for analysis and response planning. For example, MoFL employs strategies for community listening, where camp officers actively engage with local communities to gather feedback on issues such as disease outbreaks or misinformation. These officers report their findings to the District Veterinary Officer (DVO), who then escalates the information to the Provincial Veterinary Officer (PVO). The PVO synthesizes the data and forwards it to the Chief Veterinary Officer or Naleic for immediate action. This hierarchical reporting system ensures that urgent feedback is swiftly identified, accurately communicated and effectively addressed at the highest levels of the ministry.

“We use paper and electronic questionnaires to collect firsthand information about the outbreak. The responses are then analyzed to distinguish between factual reports and misinformation. Feedback report forms are then used to gather feedback from the community and health workers. This approach provides experts with valuable insights into the public’s perceptions and concerns, which are then cross-referenced with verified data to ensure accuracy...” **A participant from Ministry of Health.**

“Currently the DHIS2 at MoFL is in its pilot stage for MoFL, DHIS2 (District Health Information System 2) is one of the tools that is used to gather and analyze data in real-time, helping to identify trends and verify the authenticity of reported cases...” **A participant from Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock**

Organizational Information Analysis

The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock using the One Health approach collaborate to analyze rumors and misinformation. During outbreaks, the ministry uses its community structure to gather and analyze daily feedback from the community, and determine what needs to be done, while in non-outbreak times, this occurs weekly to understand the rumors and misinformation to be addressed. They engage subject technical experts depending on the type of rumor or misinformation. The health promotion unit then develops key messages to disseminate to communities. This structured approach ensures that timely and accurate information is shared, effectively managing public perception and response. However, this collaboration faces challenges such as coordinating across different ministries, ensuring timely

communication, and aligning on the interpretation of data and the development of key messages.

[Protocols for handling urgent feedback and communication during outbreaks](#)

The MoFL collaborates with relevant ministries and organizations to handle urgent feedback on animal health through a structured communication approach.

MoH engages experts daily to swiftly respond to and address rumors and misinformation. Depending on the nature of the rumor or misinformation, these experts provide timely insights and guidance. The Health Promotion Unit then quickly develops key messages based on this expert input to disseminate accurate information to communities. This process ensures that urgent feedback is promptly addressed, and that clear, accurate communication is maintained, effectively managing public concerns.

[Decision-making process for addressing rumors and misinformation](#)

Participants were asked about the strategies used for addressing rumors and misinformation. The survey revealed the different strategies used by different ministries. For the Ministry of Health, addressing all rumors and misinformation is of utmost importance. The technical team at MoH prioritizes issues based on their public health impact, focusing on misinformation about vaccines, disease outbreaks, and health guidelines to ensure the public receives accurate information crucial for their health and safety. The relevant department at MoH proactively prevents potential harm by ensuring the public has access to reliable information, which is then disseminated to the public.

Conversely, key OH ministries such as the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock adopt a strategic approach to tackling rumors and misinformation. The MoFL prioritizes addressing rumors that could negatively impact their response plans, such as those disrupting disease control measures. Using these strategies, the focus is on addressing misinformation that is likely to incite public panic, such as false reports of anthrax outbreaks, which could lead to widespread fear and chaos. Additionally, the MoFL strategies targets rumors that could contribute to the spread of diseases, ensuring that false information does not hinder their efforts to control and prevent outbreaks. Any rumors related to public health are swiftly addressed to maintain public safety and trust. This comprehensive decision-making process ensures that the ministry effectively manages misinformation, safeguarding both public health and their response strategies.

[Community feedback mechanisms for emerging information](#)

Participants were asked about community feedback mechanisms for emerging information in animal health. The survey revealed that radio and community engagement activities are key methods for disseminating important messages and receiving simultaneous feedback. Veterinarian officers from MoFL and Environmental Health Technologists (EHT) and Public Health officers from MoH directly interact with community members, providing a platform to discuss new information, identify concerns, and address questions.

“Additionally, press briefings, live radio and TV phone-in programs, social media, mass media pages, and routine information dissemination programs are utilized to address rumors and misinformation effectively.....” **A participant from the Ministry of Health**

Collaboration and Data Access for Rumor Analysis

The survey highlighted various strategies for collaboration in data and rumor analysis, tailored to the specific nature of the problem. The Ministry of Health partners with Non-Governmental Organizations, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations to address rumors and misinformation. These groups often have strong, established connections within communities, making them trusted sources of information. By leveraging these networks, the MoH can disseminate accurate information and counteract false narratives effectively.

Similarly, the participants from the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock revealed that their ministry collaborates with various ministries and organizations to collect and analyze rumor data efficiently. This collaborative approach ensures that both ministries can address misinformation promptly and maintain public trust. The list of key partners that can be leveraged when it comes to collaboration and data access for rumor analysis includes:

- Ministry of Health, on health-related rumors, ensuring accurate information is disseminated to prevent public health crises.
- Ministry of Agriculture on agricultural rumors, particularly those affecting livestock and crop health.
- Ministry of Local Government using the local structure for community engagement, data collection and dissemination of key One Health messages, ensuring community-specific issues are addressed.
- Media houses such as Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation as a media platform to broadcast accurate information and counteract misinformation.
- Red Cross which provides support in community outreach and education, leveraging its extensive network to spread accurate information.
- Ministry of Transport on logistics and transportation-related rumors, ensuring smooth operations and public safety.
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Challenges in managing rumors and misinformation during an outbreak

In summary, infodemic management in Zambia appears to be a priority for the different ministries and partners, and collaboration occurs between each ministry and certain partners and community structures. Several ministries have processes in place for feedback to be escalated up from communities to the central level, and all of the ministries involved in One Health have some approaches in place to disseminate correct information and engage

communities. However, there are several challenges. One challenge is the lack of integrated [tools and systems](#) for collecting data (concerns, misperceptions, and information gaps) and analyzing it for infodemic insights. Each ministry has their own approach but there is a lack of a centralized system or process. Second, the representatives from the relevant line ministries who are implicated in infodemic management at each level are insufficiently trained. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for infodemic management are not well-defined, and capacity-building activities are not conducted systematically or routinely. Finally, bureaucracy slows down the process of rapidly addressing rumors and misinformation.

- [Recommendations](#)

The following recommendations:

- Establish a One Health Infodemic Management Task Force to jointly address the challenges of rumors and misinformation during public health emergencies.
 - Step 1: Identify focal points from the One Health TWG, information systems, and other partners.
 - Step 2: Draft terms of reference for the task force.
 - Step 3: Convene the task force and review the written strategies and documents related to RCCE and infodemic management.
- Develop a comprehensive training program to equip health workers, community leaders, and relevant stakeholders with the skills needed to manage infodemics.
 - Step 1: Identify a sub-task force to focus on training.
 - Step 2: Review existing trainings such as the WHO infodemic channel and SBC Learning Central.
 - Step 3: Recommend cascaded trainings to individuals implicated in infodemic management at national and sub-national levels.
- Develop and integrate comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks within One Health ACT TWG partner for tracking of misinformation and public sentiment.
- Digitalize data collection and management systems to track rumors and misinformation.
- Establish partnerships with the private sector, such as technology companies and international organizations to provide the necessary technical support and resources for tracking rumors and misinformation.

Building on these recommendations, workshop participants developed an action plan outlining key steps to improve infodemic management in Zambia (see annex).

Annex:

Action Plan

Date: 29th to 31st July 2024

Venue: Urban Bliss, Kabwe

Name of meeting: Rumour and infodemic Management Workshop

Goal:

To mitigate the impact of rumor and misinformation by providing timely, accurate information to the public on zoonotic diseases.

Objective(s):

- Establish an effective infodemic management system by December 2025.
- Develop a robust system to provide the public with timely, reliable, and accurate information by 2027.

No	Actions	Timeline	If done (√)
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established a One Health Infodemic Management Taskforce at the National level	August 2024	
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established a One Health Infodemic Management Task Force at the sub-national levels.	September 2024	
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a communication strategy for the One Health Infodemics Management.	September 2024	
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold OH Infodemic Management Taskforce meetings to validate and disseminate the infodemic management training guides and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).	September to October 2024	
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct infodemic management training for OH ACT TWG at both national and sub-national levels.	August to October 2024	
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold a meeting to raise awareness among policymakers about rumors and infodemic management.	September 2024	
7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold national and subnational meetings to raise awareness among stakeholders on infodemic management.	September 2024	
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule routine meetings to inform technical officers about managing the infodemic.	Monthly/Quarterly	
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold a meeting to raise awareness among community members on infodemic management	Monthly	
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a repository tool for easy information sharing among stakeholders		
11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Train community volunteers on how to report rumors and misinformation		

Questionnaire

Date of interview:

Format (in person/phone):

Organization name:

Name of interviewee:

Role/title in organization:

Interviewer:

#	Topic	Question
		<i>Now I'd like to talk about how your organization collects and analyzes rumors from communities.</i>
1.		In the most recent outbreak (COVID-19, Anthrax, Cholera, Rabies), how did your ministry/department interact with community members and collect suggestions, questions, misinformation, or other perceptions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please specify the methods used (SMS, IVR, paper forms used by volunteers, mobile app, call-in hotline, social media, etc.)
	Response	
2.		During an outbreak, how might the people you work with (department/unit/community) decide if something is true or is misinformation?
	Response	
3.		What tools do the people you work with (department/unit/community) use to collect this information? (a log or feedback report, certain questions or fields in the call log, an app, etc.)
	Response	
4.		What database or software does your ministry use to store the information?
	Response	
5.		Does your ministry have an active social media page? If yes, which unit or department is responsible for managing the social media page?
	Response	
		<i>Now I'd like to talk about how people analyze and use the information you collect.</i>
6.		Is this information analyzed? How often? What roles in the organization are involved in the analysis? What does the analysis process look like?
	Response	
7.		If you received feedback (such as an outbreak situation or a piece of misinformation) that urgently needed to be addressed, how would you identify it? How would you transmit or forward to the appropriate office to address this?
	Response	
8.		In general, how does your ministry decide which rumors/misinformation are addressed and how?
	Response	
9.		Specifically, when you identify a newly emerging question or piece of information, do you give feedback to communities? How do you do that?
	Response	

10. Do you collaborate with other ministries/partners to collect and analyze data? Who has access to the rumor data? (which partners, governments, the communities themselves)?

Response

11. What challenge does your ministry face in managing the infodemic and rumors?

Response

12. Is there anything else you want us to know about how your ministry coordinates, collects, analyzes, responds, and assesses rumor data?

Response

13. Have you received any training in managing infodemic and rumors? If yes, which training?

Response