



A COLLECTIVE SERVICE FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WHY DO WE NEED A COLLECTIVE SERVICE?

COVID-19 is more than a health crisis; it is also an information and socio-economic crisis. The pandemic and the associated response are prompting the deepest global recession in nearly a century and pushing an estimated 70-100 million more people into extreme poverty.

As communities around the world grapple with these unprecedented impacts to their health and livelihoods, a broad range of humanitarian and public health partners seek to work together effectively and collaboratively with national governments, partners and affected communities to respond to the crisis.

Biomedical solutions can only go so far without the support and acceptance of people and more broadly the communities in which they live. In the case of COVID-19, where currently the only solutions are social and behavioural, we are seeing an unprecedented need to elevate the role risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) plays in breaking the chains of transmission and mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

Consistent participation and empowerment of affected communities is essential to understand local contexts and ensure an informed, people-centred response. Without community engagement, misinformation, confusion, and mistrust can undermine efforts to ensure an uptake of lifesaving tools, services, and information.

COVID-19 presents the possibility – and underscores the urgency – for change. We have the opportunity to transform how the public health and the humanitarian sectors coordinate, implement, monitor, and resource collaborative approaches to RCCE – to save lives and safeguard the health and safety of the most vulnerable.

THE COLLECTIVE SERVICE

The Collective Service is a collaborative partnership between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organisation (WHO), with support from the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), and key stakeholders from the public health and humanitarian sectors.

The three agencies have a long history of effective collaboration to bolster coordinated community-centred approaches across a broad range of emergencies, contexts, and geographies.

The Collective Service aims to ensure that the strengths of each partner are leveraged to deliver the greatest impact, reduce duplication and increase effectiveness of localized action.

Prior outbreak responses have garnered hard won lessons and spurred demand for expanding and refining collective approaches to community engagement in humanitarian responses. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitates that these efforts be rapidly accelerated to scale in order to urgently respond to unprecedented challenges and growing demand for support. To meet this need, the 'Collective Service' was launched in June 2020, after being endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals in April 2020, and with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Collective Service aims to deliver, for the first time, the structures and mechanisms required for a coordinated community-centred approach that is embedded across public health, humanitarian, and development response efforts. This will ensure expert driven, collaborative, consistent and localised RCCE support reaches governments and partners involved in the national response to COVID-19 and beyond.

Further, the Collective Service aims to bolster the capacity of governments and partners to prioritize, structure and coordinate their work—to ensure the impact of these efforts are systemic and lasting. By enhancing national, regional and global capacity and coordination, and ensuring that community capacities, knowledge, feedback and insights inform decision-making at every step of the response, both the quality and the consistency of RCCE approaches will be improved.

Finally, the Collective Service will be instrumental in analysing, evaluating, and monitoring how information is shared and consumed in order to mitigate the threat and spread of misinformation and disinformation at a global, regional and national level. Motivating community members to participate in sharing trustworthy information, halting rumours, and enhancing knowledge about the disease is crucial to ensure lifesaving solutions reach and are embraced by those most in need.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Collective Service will support the delivery of the *Global Risk Communication and Community Engagement Strategy, the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019nCoV) Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan and the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan*.

To make this possible, the Collective Service will work across four strategic priorities to:



Strengthen common and coordinated RCCE approaches, to maximize the sharing of resources, interagency standards, monitoring frameworks and expertise at global, regional and country levels.



Generate real-time data on community perspectives and use it to influence decisions about COVID-19 responses, policies, and programming, to improve effectiveness and efficiency.



Improve the quality and consistency of community engagement approaches, towards more responsive and flexible actions that fit the diverse needs, views, and capacities of communities; and



Strengthen the capacity of national governments, institutions and organisations and reinforce local solutions through training, mentoring, peer learning and resource sharing with local actors.

COORDINATING A GLOBAL RESPONSE

The Collective Service will support, rather than replace, established coordination mechanisms. It is designed to strengthen ongoing global, regional, and national efforts and ensure support is available to existing mechanisms in regions and countries as they tackle the pandemic, guided by the RCCE Strategy.

Globally, the Collective Service hosts a RCCE coordination forum, operational since February 2020, with support from GOARN. Open to any organisation working on RCCE related to COVID-19, it is the primary coordination platform for activities across the global response and is supported by dedicated sub-groups on specific topics (i.e community engagement in low resource settings; migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups; and analytics for operations). The Collective Service is guided by a Steering Committee at director level with responsibility for strategic decision-making.

Regionally, there are RCCE coordination groups that support national-level coordination mechanisms, which are typically led by the Ministry of Health and co-led by WHO, UNICEF and IFRC. Two pilot Collective Service hubs have been established with dedicated coordination, information management and social sciences capacity in the East and Southern Africa region led by IFRC (based in Kenya) and in the West and Central Africa region led by UNICEF (based in Senegal). The Collective Service is currently seeking additional funding to strengthen similar hubs in regions across the globe.



HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

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