Countering Dangerous Misinformation Using ICTs

By Christine Mutisya
Introduction

Misinformation can be defined as rumours (organic) or deliberate disinformation (inorganic)

The cause of rumours

Uncertainty

+  

Fear

=  

Rumours

THE SENTINEL PROJECT
Misinformation thrives where conventional media are lacking

- Only traditional forms of communication may be available
- Information vacuums encourage misinformation
- Need to identify areas with worst information gaps
• Various reasons why misinformation is propagated:

**Offensive**
Used to increase surveillance on opposing community or as a harassing technique

**Defensive**
Used to trigger response from concerned authorities if communities feel not enough action is taken or lack of attention

• The rise of ICTs has made the spread of misinformation be much quicker
• Misinformation is a severe problem that poses challenges to peace, security, economic development, governance, and public health all around the world
Misinformation management is an essential part of any response effort

Ebola crisis: Confusion as patients vanish in Liberia
© 17 August 2014 | Africa

Ebola outbreak: Guinea health team killed
© 19 September 2014 | Africa
Misinformation is a detriment to humanitarian efforts or development progress.

The migrants aren’t refugees because they have nice clothes.

Europe: Anti-refugee sentiment at dangerous new levels

Refugees rush back to Greek camp amid rumours of open border.

Photo courtesy of Aljazeera
Misinformation stalls peace processes

“Someone has given the Orma 3,000 AK-47s to destroy the Pokomo and drive them off the land.”

Impending fight between locals and non-locals in Zamzam area due to land related issues

A Pokomo health worker has tried to inject Orma children with poison instead of vaccine.”

One person disappeared and was killed by the Orma people.
Choosing the right technology to handle misinformation

To be effective in misinformation management these are some of the questions you need to ask:

- Who is your target group?
- How does your target receive information?
- What are the people using to spread misinformation?
- Which ICT is commonly used in the area?
- What mechanism are already in place that fights misinformation?
- What are the cultural values of the target group?
Survey Results – Technology Usage

82% own a mobile phone

80% of mobile phone owners live in multi-phone households

2.25 phones per multi-phone household

45% are internet enabled

31% use the internet

28% use Facebook
Survey results – Information flow and socio-cultural insights

- Women were 14% less likely to own a mobile phone.

- Radio is the most trusted source of information followed by government officials.

- Misinformation spreads at the community level.

- 60% of respondents had heard information that they felt was not completely true only 49% attempted to verify its authenticity.

- Illiteracy levels high.
Survey Results: Information flows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own Village</th>
<th>Neighbouring Village</th>
<th>County Level</th>
<th>Country Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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• There was a significant lack of quick and reliable access to information on the local specifically neighbouring villages and county levels.
Mobile technology represents the best tools for managing misinformation

- Rapid global growth in usage
- Highly accessible
- Enables multiple forms of communication
- Two-way communication is especially important
Principles of Misinformation Management
Responsive

Look at the aim and decide if you will be reactive or proactive. Provide information based on what subscribers request; react to community needs instead of broadcasting a one-way information flow.

Targeted

Who is your target?

Send countermessaging back to specific locations or groups that have reported rumours; this minimizes unintentional spread while also ensuring responsiveness.
Timely
Prioritize and verify rumours as quickly as possible since misinformation can travel quickly, especially with the aid of information and communications technologies.

Sensitive
Account for local dynamics, engage relevant stakeholders, and use appropriate communication channels, especially during verification and countermessaging.
Effective misinformation management is targeted and responsive to beneficiary needs

- Traditional one-way broadcast of information is insufficient
- Tell people what they are asking to know as soon as possible
- Responsiveness encourages trust, which then increases engagement
- Provides instant awareness of changing information landscape
- Enables highly localized and targeted counter messaging
LESSONS LEARNT
Use appropriate induction processes

Misinformation management systems cannot be imposed from above. Instead, they must be implemented by entering into communities using culturally relevant introduction processes followed by cooperative efforts.

Used the social structures set up already such as entering communities through chiefs and other existing structures.
Use existing communication practices

Misinformation management efforts should not try to replace existing communication practices in a new environment but rather adapt to the variety of high tech and low tech methods already used in the area.

Use of SMS and voice

Una Hakika did not neglect human aspects therefore has community ambassadors in every village.
Establishing and maintaining trust is one of the most important but also most difficult components of a misinformation management project. A project that is not transparent, honest, and fair will immediately lose the majority of its value to the community and the pursuit of peace.

Una Hakika communicates true accurate information

Continuous interaction with communities

Ensure non biased engagement with the different ethnic groups in the region
Inclusivity

Women, youth, and marginalized communities gain the most from a system which can circumvent many of the social, cultural, and structural barriers that prevent them from accessing reliable information.

1,200% improvement in women reporting good access to information.
Benefits
• **Short Term**

Rumour containment via counter messaging

• **Long Term**

Behavioural changes
Short-term misinformation response is a treatment but behavioural change is a cure

• Fill the information gap by providing information as it is requested

• Filling that gap reduces the immediate power of rumours

• When the service disappears then the effect may follow

• Locally-appropriate sustainability mechanisms ensure lasting change
More about misinformation management can be found at:

Report: Una Hakika Phase 1 Results

https://thesentinelproject.org/2015/12/21/report-una-hakika-phase-1-results/
Thank You