Systematizing risk communication for public health in Viet Nam

**Background**

- Risk communication is one of the core capacities for managing disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies, which WHO Member States are required to develop under the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005). In the Western Pacific Region, the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (APSED III) has been guiding Member States in enhancing their IHR (2005) core capacities.
- In Viet Nam, the National Plan for Implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) in Viet Nam (IHR Master Plan) was developed in 2018 to strengthen multisectoral coordination as the country continues to enhance its preparedness for public health emergencies. The plan highlights the country’s priority activities under six components, including under risk communication. However, although the IHR Master Plan provides a strategic direction to risk communication work, the contents are general in nature and do not present a systems approach to strengthen the said focus area.
- The Master plan for health risk communication, 2020–2025, vision to 2030 – with development process starting in 2018 – has marked Viet Nam’s switch to a systems approach when handling risk communication, previously carried out on an ad hoc basis.
- Following months of development and consultation process, the Master Plan is expected to establish risk communication as a system within the country’s public health emergency management system. Its contribution will go beyond health security and emergencies, especially with its coverage of noncommunicable diseases.

**Main challenge**

Department of Communication of the Ministry of Health is mainly responsible for the development and monitoring the implementation of the Master Plan. However, other departments and agencies within the Ministry will be responsible for developing and implementing the Action Plan.

**The way forward**

In preparation for the national rollout of the Master Plan next year, capacity is being developed to ensure that implementers – that is, health care workers – are well-equipped to carry out the relevant activities. In this regard, training is being standardized at all levels (national, provincial, district, and commune) in line with the requirements of the Master Plan.

Moreover, activities, at least for the next two years, have already been planned with the World Health Organization (WHO) Representative Office in Viet Nam in support of the Master plan for health risk communication, 2020–2025, vision to 2030 implementation. These include conduct of a series of trainings on risk communication using standardized module at national and provincial levels; harnessing innovative technology to enhance dynamic listening and rumor management in the context of disease outbreaks and emergencies, and integrating the mechanism to risk assessment system; development of risk communication toolkits for four priority risks under the Master Plan; simulation exercise to test risk communication operational mechanisms; and development of generic risk communication toolkits for public messaging, including pre- and post-test.

**Content**

- The Master Plan focuses on the country’s four priority areas, namely:
  - Communicable diseases
  - Emerging infectious diseases
  - Food safety
  - Noncommunicable diseases

- The Master Plan will be addressing these public health threats by meeting its general objective, as well as its nine specific objectives under three categories:
  - Advocacy communication and mobilization
  - Behavior change communication
  - Improvement of information network and capacity

**Policy advocacy communication**

- Enhance advocacy communication to IHR’s committees and government leaders at all levels to achieve commitment, support and consensus in developing, completing, and implementing the IHR (2005) core capacities, including risk communication, and enhance implementation and evaluation of health risks.

**Community mobilization**

- Enhance community networks to develop and strengthen the leadership and capacity of community in communicating and enhancing the protection and control of health risks.

**Sustainability of resources**

- Strengthen the capacity building of the health communication network.

**International cooperation**

- Strengthen the capacity building of the health communication network.

**Behavior change communication**

- Raise awareness on health risks and enhance coordination of actions to change behavior.
  - Risk communication leaders at all levels to:
    - Develop health communication and advocacy strategies or services.
    - Mobilize and support to communicate health risks.
  - Reach specific audiences with the following aims:
    - Enhance the level of awareness on health risks and promote the implementation of disease prevention and control programs.
    - Improve the communication of health risks within the population and enhance healthy behavior to improve health and prevent noncommunicable diseases.

- Enhance risk communication, including building of communication tools and platforms and the exchange of knowledge and information on health risks.

**Improvement of information network and capacity**

- Strengthen the communication network.

**Background Content**

- To facilitate the implementation of the Master Plan and meet its objectives, investment in the following will be ensured:
  - Policy advocacy communication
  - Community mobilization
  - Sustainability of resources
  - International cooperation

**Behavior change communication**

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