



ECOSOC HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS SEGMENT 2020

Saving lives, building trust, and informing humanitarian action:

How good practice and lessons learned from community engagement can help beat COVID-19

Date and Time

Wednesday 10 June 2020

08:00-09:30am (EST) / 12:00-13:30 (GMT) / 14:00-15:30 (CEST)

Sponsors and Organizers

Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in collaboration with CARE, Oxfam, IFRC, UNICEF, WHO.

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year's HAS theme: *"Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations: taking action for people-centred solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting international humanitarian law and promoting the humanitarian principles"*.

Background and objectives

Over the past decade, emergencies from epidemics and natural disasters to wars and complex, protracted crises have underscored the need for community engagement to be integrated into responses. It is now widely acknowledged that for humanitarian responses to be effective and have long-term positive impacts, humanitarian organisations need to work collectively to ensure a community-centred approach at all levels of a response. The COVID-19 pandemic has further made clear the need for such meaningful engagement.

Bringing together health and humanitarian perspectives, this event will showcase good practice and lessons learned from community engagement efforts in a range of contexts. Through case studies, panellists will identify opportunities to ensure that the COVID-19 response engages with communities and is accountable to them. They will discuss current challenges and opportunities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as proposing innovative ways to address the current crisis. The discussion will particularly highlight the gendered nature of public health emergencies, drawing on women's experience at the country level to demonstrate why full, equal and meaningful engagement with women and girls must be included from the outset in all aspects of the response.

This event will be an opportunity to concretely explore how assistance can be made more effective, particularly in the context of COVID-19, as well as bringing the focus back to the most important actors in any humanitarian response: the people that we serve. If the overall response is not adapted to reflect the changing concerns, questions and suggestions of communities, humanitarian organizations will not remain relevant or trusted and the crisis response will most likely fail.

Discussion points

- **Building trust is paramount:** How can we engage communities and build relationships (or strengthen existing relationships) so communities will trust us to respond effectively in a crisis often characterised by mass panic and misinformation?
- **Working with local leaders:** An effective pandemic response may require people to change deeply held cultural values with information that may not be clear to them. How can community and religious leaders help spread positive messages and reinforce key health behaviours?
- **Helping communities track the disease:** How can we link existing community health practitioners and regular health seeking behaviour to epidemic responses? How can we best harness community-based surveillance and detection of disease to enable a timely response?
- **Assessing gender early and often:** What are some of the lessons learned from crises where we have built a gendered response in from the beginning, and made use of tools like the Gender with Age Marker to ensure that programming keeps gender considerations at the core?
- **Supporting and engaging local partners early:** How can humanitarian actors best support local partners to ensure that they have plans in place for Do No Harm, protecting their staff and responding to crisis?
- **Communicating early and often about the response, and considering alternate communications measures:** What is some of the best practice around building contingency plans for how people can communicate, provide feedback and support activities at a distance?

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages

- The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated unprecedented challenges in providing accurate information, and ensuring the trust of communities. To build such trust effectively, humanitarians need to understand and act on local knowledge and community feedback, enabling collaboration and avoiding duplication. For humanitarian responses to be effective and have long-term positive impacts, humanitarian organizations need to work collectively to ensure a community-centred approach at all levels of a response
- A robust gender and epidemiological analysis at the outset of the response will help to identify which groups are most at risk and why. Targeted outreach to ensure women and girls and women-led organisations are full and equal participants in community engagement efforts are critical to the overall success of the response.
- Innovative approaches and tools are available to improve how we seek to engage communities in meaningful ways in the COVID-19 response, including the UNICEF/WHO/IFRC Risk Communication Community Engagement Tracker, Oxfam's Community Perception Tracker, and CARE's Community Score Card.

Format

1. Welcome: Ambassador Brian Flynn, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations
2. Opening remarks: Dr. Emanuele Coppabianco, Director for Health & Care, IFRC
3. Panelist presentations
4. Interactive discussion with the panelists
5. Closing statements from panelists
6. Closing remarks from the Chair

Chair and moderator

Ambassador Brian Flynn, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN

Panel composition

Ø Ms. Claudine Tsongo, Coordonnatrice de la Dynamique des Femmes Juristes (DFJ), DR Congo

Ø Ms. Patience Mgoli Mwale, Learning and Advocacy Manager, CARE Malawi

Ø Ms. Eva Niederberger, Head of Public Health Promotion, Oxfam

Ø Ms. Merixtell Relano, Deputy Emergency Director, UNICEF

Background Material

[CARE's Community Score Card](#) on reproductive health outcomes in Malawi: a two page summary

[From Ebola & Cholera to COVID-19](#): CARE outlines key lessons learned from treating severe epidemics in recent years and why community engagement is critical to effective COVID-19 responses

[Resources for Community Engagement during COVID-19](#): This set of three resources from Oxfam captures good practice for community engagement during epidemics in a guidance note, a helpful checklist, and a tip sheet for community engagement

[Oxfam's WASH Innovations](#), including the 'Community Perception Tracker', which uses mobile technology to systematically collect and analyse information around people's perceptions, fears and beliefs.

[Guide to Community Engagement in WASH: A practitioner's guide, based on lessons from Ebola](#): A compilation of best practices and key lessons learned from Oxfam.

[COVID-19 Global Response Risk and Communication Engagement Strategy](#) (RCCE) and [RCCE Action Plan Guidance COVID-19 Preparedness and Response](#) by IFRC, UNICEF, WHO.

Connection details to register for the event

Link to register (the link for the side event will be shared with you ahead of 10 June):

<https://ifrc.webex.com/ifrc/j.php?RGID=r571ce73984ca7381bcc1a26ad59d2a5f>

Contact

For more information on the event, please contact Alexandra Sicotte Levesque, IFRC (Alexandra.SICOTTELEVESQUE@ifrc.org) or Sally Chin, Oxfam (sally.chin@oxfam.org).

To send questions for the panelists ahead of the event, please contact Hannah Cooper at Oxfam (hannah.cooper@oxfam.org)

For technical assistance during the event, please contact Carla Hoyer, IFRC (cea.geneva@ifrc.org)