

# Coronavirus Communications: Key Principles & Guidance for Governments

## Executive summary

The coronavirus pandemic is placing significant pressure on governments around the world, as they work to protect their populations and shore up public health infrastructure. In addition to the operational challenges posed by the crisis, it is also raising the stakes for government communications. Critical public health messages must be disseminated in a way that ensures a consistent and authoritative source of reliable, factual information and which promotes behavior change without creating mass panic.

This document is intended to assist public sector leaders at the municipal, state and federal levels in countries across Africa as they develop and implement their coronavirus communications strategies. These recommendations are provided as a courtesy resource. Governments should do their due diligence to ensure their communications comply with the best available scientific guidance and all applicable laws, regulations and policies.

The document addresses six key areas:

### 1. Understanding your audiences and the communications channels they use

In order to ensure that you reach key audiences with essential public health information, it is crucial that you reach them on the channels they already use in their day-to-day lives. In this section, we explore how to map out your audiences and the channels that reach them, highlighting helpful tools and resources.

### 2. Recommended tactics

While every country's strategy will differ, we have outlined some recommended tactics to help you communicate effectively and organize your team for success.

### 3. Crisis communications principles

We outline several tried and tested crisis communications principles, based on our team's collective experience working with government leaders in crisis situations as well as our analysis of effective communications during this pandemic.

### 4. Developing effective communications materials

Convincing people to change their day-to-day behaviors in the face of an invisible threat is a difficult task. We detail some key principles to follow when developing your coronavirus communications materials and provide some of the best examples we have found from across the continent and around the world.



## 5. Combating fake news

From rumors to conspiracy theories and “deep fakes”, there is a dizzying array of fake news about coronavirus spreading around the world, much of it in private messaging apps. We outline some of the tactics that can be used to combat this threat to public health.

## 6. Getting professional communications support

If you find that you need additional professional communications support to help your team through this challenging time, we have provided a list of some communications firms you may wish to consider.

We hope that you find this document helpful. If you have any questions, we can make our team available to speak with you and provide additional information or guidance specific to your situation.

## 1. Understanding your audiences and the communications channels they use

When considering which communications channels to use, first think about who you want to reach. Which platforms do they use? When and how do they use them?

While it’s important that some communications reach as wide an audience as possible (e.g. all citizens and residents), others should be specifically tailored to key audience segments (e.g. the elderly) based on guidance that is specific to their needs and risks. Understanding which platform(s) to leverage to reach these audiences is crucial. While your communications team may have views about which channels are most effective, it is important that your strategy is backed by data. If you don’t already have this data at hand, it can be sourced from recent public opinion research or from the communications platforms themselves.

For example, using the ad platforms for Facebook, Twitter, and other social media channels, you can calculate the number of users based on parameters including location, age, and gender. You can also access statistics for specific social media platforms by country by using [this helpful tool](#), which allows you to drill down by age and gender.

Afrobarometer is a helpful source of information about communications habits at the continental level, and you can also drill down to the [country level](#) in certain countries. While every country differs, the following statistics at the continental level may be helpful in determining the appropriate communications channels for specific demographic groups.

	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+
Own a mobile phone	78.10%	79.90%	79.80%	78.40%	72.60%
Have a mobile phone with internet access	61.60%	54.20%	41.60%	34.30%	22.80%
Use their mobile phone daily	75.70%	78.00%	76.60%	73.10%	64.90%
Use the internet daily or a few times a week	44.30%	37.50%	26.00%	19.40%	11.00%
Use the radio as a news source daily or a few times a week	60.90%	64.50%	66.80%	68.10%	67.90%
Use TV as a news source daily or a few times a week	49.30%	49.70%	47.80%	48.90%	45.40%

Use social media as a news source daily or a few times a week	50.00%	33.60%	22.30%	16.00%	7.60%
Use the internet as a news source daily or a few times a week	37.20%	32.30%	21.80%	17.30%	8.50%
Use newspapers as a news source daily or a few times a week	16.10%	18.40%	17.60%	15.90%	14.80%

Source: Afrobarometer

As you can see, mobile phones are the channel that can reach a majority of people in every age group, highlighting their importance for conveying crucial public health information. However, it is important to note variations in mobile internet access across age groups. This highlights the need to provide multiple methods for getting further information -- e.g. replying via a (free) text message or clicking on a link to a mobile-optimized webpage.

You can also see the high usage of radio across demographic groups, though it is important to note that these groups may consume different types of radio programs. So, it will be important to convey important public health messages across a range of radio stations and programs. Your communications teams may have already mapped out these programs and the audiences that they reach. If not, the stations themselves may be able to provide you with this, as they often compile this information for potential advertisers.

Finally, you will note the wide variation in social media usage across demographic groups. While this channel is very effective for reaching younger, urban demographic groups, it is much less effective at reaching older, rural populations. That said, messages spread on social media can encourage users to share information with older relatives using other platforms. This kind of intergenerational communication can be powerful, though it is worth noting the cultural barriers that may prevent younger family members from convincing older relatives to change their behaviors.

## 2. Recommended tactics

While each country's approach should vary based on the specific information consumption habits of their target audiences, the recommendations outlined below should apply in most contexts. These tactics have been grouped according to the objectives they help to achieve.

### Objective 1: Ensure a consistent and authoritative source of reliable, factual information

#### **Carry out a daily press briefing, held at the same time every day**

One tactic that works very well and has been adopted by governments around the world is to hold a daily press briefing at the same time every day. Keep the format consistent, beginning with the facts (number of cases and deaths), conveying empathy for those affected, and then introducing any new measures.

Maintain as much consistency as possible in terms of the spokespeople at the briefing, so that people get to know and trust them. You can then bring in additional experts as needed based on the subject matter.

Ensure that print, TV, and radio journalists are consistently present at the briefing to reach as wide an audience as possible and ensure that you send a recap to any major outlets not present. Livestream the briefing on all government-owned channels (website, Facebook page, national radio and TV broadcasters) and forge agreements with major media outlets to carry it live as well.

**Carry out separate, segmented briefings for different audiences and authorities**

In addition to the daily press briefing, which is aimed at a mass audience, it is also important to have separate briefings for key audiences such as health workers, teachers' associations/unions, and others that are at the front lines of your response.

Work with the relevant ministries to establish a plan and schedule for these briefings and ensure that key stakeholders are made aware. In the absence of regular and reliable information, rumors and confusion can quickly take hold.

**Leverage SMS frequently**

As noted above, SMS can be a particularly powerful tool for reaching a large part of the population. If you already have the ability to distribute messages to all phones in the country, leverage that regularly to inform people of new guidelines or remind them of existing guidelines at periodic intervals.

Where you have access to date of birth, tailor these messages to specific age groups to maximize impact and ensure that they are getting the most relevant guidance.

If you do not have the ability to reach all mobile phones in the country, forge partnerships with mobile providers as soon as possible and provide them with content to disseminate.

It may also be worth considering pre-recorded audio messages/robocalls, particularly in low literacy areas.

**Objective 2: Target the right audiences with the right messages**

**Carry out audience mapping**

As noted above, it is crucial that you are reaching the right audiences with the right messages, using the channels that are part of their day-to-day lives.

Going through the process of mapping out your key audiences (e.g. by gender and age) along with the messages they need to receive and the channels that you can use to reach them can be an incredibly helpful first step. You can then develop specific plans to reach these key audiences with consistent, clear messages.

### **Objective 3: Ensure that people know where to go for accurate information**

#### **Establish a single source of truth**

Establish a single source of truth that everyone across the government, the media, and the public can refer to. For example, establish a webpage or microsite with the most up-to-date facts and guidance, where you also post daily briefings that are issued at the same time every day.

Timestamp updates to ensure that people know they are reading the most current information. Ensure that all government ministries refer back to this single source of truth in their communications, rather than setting up duplicate pages on multiple websites, which can quickly become out of date.

#### **Monitor for and squash misinformation:**

Misinformation and rumors can spread like wildfire. Set up monitoring protocols for social media, establish a process for government employees to flag inaccurate information and give them the resources and materials they need to push back. (e.g. replying directly on WhatsApp groups with graphics or links to the correct information) Further detail is provided about this in the section on fake news.

#### **Issue social media guidelines:**

Issue clear social media guidelines for all government employees, ensuring that they know where to find credible information about the government's response to the pandemic and emphasizing that they have a personal duty to avoid sharing inaccurate information on their own accounts.

By virtue of being government employees, what they say on social media carries weight, and it is important that they understand their responsibility to share credible, factual information.

### **Objective 4: Organize for success**

#### **Create a cross-ministerial communications taskforce**

If you have set up a cross-ministerial coronavirus taskforce, it may be worth creating a communications sub-committee that is specifically tasked with coordinating communications related to the response. This sub-committee should ensure that information flows to every government ministry's communications team and then more widely to internal audiences within those ministries.

#### **Create a communications grid**

Use a communications "grid" or "matrix" to coordinate all messaging, events, and announcements across government ministries. Deputize one person (with a back-up in case they become ill) to manage this document, and ensure all updates are channeled through them.

### **Build redundancy**

Prepare for the very real prospect that communications staff and spokespeople become ill themselves. Avoid a single point of failure by appointing a “back up” for each role and ensure that documents, email accounts (e.g. your main press account), and communications platforms (e.g. Facebook pages, websites) are accessible.

## **Objective 5: Reach wider audiences by engaging partners and allies outside government**

### **Leverage influencers effectively**

Influencers such as musicians, actors, and religious leaders can be very effective at reaching audiences who otherwise may tune out government communications. Consider engaging these influencers but be very specific about what you want them to say and how they are going to say it. Their social media posts can go viral quickly, so it’s crucial that they are conveying accurate information based on the latest public health guidance.

### **Enlist corporate support**

Business leaders in many countries are eager to provide support to coronavirus response efforts. It can be very helpful to engage them if you are clear about what they can and should do. Some options include:

- Ask owners of radio and TV stations to donate time for public health announcements.
- Ask owners of large buildings in high traffic areas to put up banners with public health messages.
- Ask large employers to send communications to their staff and place messages on their intranets.
- Engage the chamber of commerce or other business organizations to distribute information to their members.
- Mobilize mobile companies to allow their customers free access to specific websites with COVID information without them having to use their data.
- Ask highly-trafficked local websites to add banners to the top of their websites, linking to COVID information.

## **3. Crisis communications principles**

In developing your overarching communications approach, it is important to keep in mind the following six characteristics of good crisis communications:

### **1. Credible:**

It may sound obvious but ensuring that government-issued communications only draw from credible sources is crucial during this time. Rumors can spread quickly, even within public sector channels, and it’s critical to vet all information against a credible source (such as the WHO) before disseminating it.

When carrying out briefings, lead with the facts (number of cases, number of deaths, key actions the government is taking). In the absence of this information coming from the government, others will fill in the gaps and are likely to get it wrong.

The importance of getting the facts right cannot be overemphasized. Not doing so can not only damage the government's credibility but also cost lives. This must be understood by all government employees - not just spokespeople - as it also applies to what they put out on their personal social media accounts.

## **2. Honest:**

Particularly in a situation as quickly evolving as the coronavirus pandemic, it's crucial that you are honest about what you know, and what you don't.

It can be tempting to over-reassure and tell people that everything will be ok, which can lead to behaviors that can end up worsening the crisis. On the opposite end of the spectrum, it can be easy to spark alarm and prompt panic behaviors or even violence if the danger is overplayed.

To strike a balance, be honest about the scale of the challenge ahead, be clear about exactly what the government is doing to address it and tell the public what they should be doing to play their part. Giving people constructive ways to channel their energy, building confidence in the government's ability to tackle the challenge, and creating a sense of collective responsibility and hope are crucial for maintaining calm.

We have included some examples of effective communications in subsequent sections, which achieve this balance.

## **3. Consistent:**

All government ministries and departments need to be conveying consistent information. While each ministry will have its own specific angle and audiences, it's crucial that the communications being issued do not conflict.

If you do change guidance, make sure that you brief all relevant spokespeople and government agencies in advance. For example, if you are changing the reasons that people are permitted to leave their homes, ensure that the police are well aware and have disseminated the information to frontline officers. (This has been a source of confusion and backlash in some countries.)

## **4. Frequent:**

In the absence of information from government, fear and misinformation can spread rapidly. As highlighted above, governments should carry out daily public briefings and more frequent communications across other channels such as radio and social media. (See communications channels section below.)

Studies have shown that people need to hear a message at least seven times before it sinks in. When you start to get sick of your own message, others are only just starting to understand it. Keep it up!

#### **5. Empathetic:**

For many, this will be a very frightening time. And as the crisis goes on, more and more people will be personally touched by the pandemic. Ensure that your communications keep this in mind and that your tone reflects the fact that protecting lives is your top priority.

Particularly when reporting the number of cases and deaths, ensure that you are doing so respectfully, expressing sadness at the loss of life, and acknowledging the impact on the families of the deceased and seriously ill.

#### **6. Calm:**

You will be asked difficult questions -- from the media and from your constituents. You will also be sleep deprived and dealing with immense amounts of stress on both a professional and personal level. Practice keeping calm while being asked difficult questions. Take a breath (literally) before you respond.

In many cases, the messenger is just as important as the message. Choose your spokespeople wisely and ensure that you pick people with both the right knowledge and style for the circumstances. This may necessitate having more than one person speak during briefings. Ensure that each person understands their role, and tailor your preparation methods to set them up for success. (e.g. Some people perform best while reading prepared remarks, whereas others are better working from talking points and replying to quick-fire questions.)

Finally, it is important to remember that these days all communication is global. Audiences within your country may be looking to other countries' responses and comparing your efforts with theirs. Appearing either too negligent or too heavy-handed in comparison to your peers can be equally problematic. It's important that you clearly explain why you are taking the measure you are, and why they are right for your specific context. Accurate and reliable public health data will be crucial for making this case.

#### **Examples of effective communications**

Leaders around the world have shown how applying these principles can help change public behavior while maintaining calm. We have included some examples of effective briefings and video messages in case they are helpful points of reference.

##### **1. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO:**

While this message is primarily aimed at government officials, it is a very good example of how the human impact of the virus can be conveyed without being alarmist or prompting panic.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnTfvrhJs88&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnTfvrhJs88&feature=emb_logo)

**2. Nana Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana:**

This is a good example of rallying people together across political parties, particularly in the midst of an election season. It also clearly conveys that the human impact needs to take precedence over the economic impact, and that the government has a plan to rebuild the economy.

<https://twitter.com/NAkufoAddo/status/1245240979826905094>

**3. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda:**

This is a good example of leveraging the national broadcaster to convey key messages across a variety of channels and communicating with people in accessible languages.

<https://twitter.com/rbarwanda/status/1243636009058947072>

**4. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany:**

This is a good example of how important it is to acknowledge the difficulties that lockdowns / social distancing measures place on people, thanking them for their efforts, and conveying the important impact that they have.

[https://twitter.com/dw\\_politics/status/1245406609108619266](https://twitter.com/dw_politics/status/1245406609108619266)

**5. Jacinda Arden, Prime Minister of New Zealand:**

This is a great example of using signage to convey key messages during press conferences and running an effective briefing.

<https://www.facebook.com/RadioNewZealand/videos/2561206527467406/>

**6. Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway:**

This is an excellent example of tailoring communications to specific audiences. In this case, the Prime Minister is speaking directly to children, helping to address some of their fears.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51962307>

## **4. Developing effective communications materials**

Changing behavior is hard. People have long-established routines that they are reluctant to change. And without clear, actionable information, it can be difficult to understand what they can do to protect themselves and others.

Below we have outlined some key characteristics of effective communications materials, which can serve as a good starting point:

**1. Accurate:**

As highlighted above, it's crucial that all communications materials put out by the government are accurate and reflect the latest public health guidance from credible institutions such as the WHO.

There are many examples of inaccurate information being spread online - even from other governments. Vet all communications carefully to ensure accuracy and think twice before sharing something that has gone "viral" online. Just because it is popular doesn't mean that it is accurate.

## **2. Simple:**

People have limited attention spans. Keeping it simple and sticking to lists of three or five actions can make it much more likely that people will digest the information you are trying to convey and change their behaviors accordingly.

Use references that everyone can immediately understand and relate to. For example, many communications around handwashing have encouraged people to sing the chorus of popular local songs in order to ensure that they wash their hands for 20 seconds. These simple mental tricks can help people remember what to do.

Avoid “jargon” or technical terms that are open to misinterpretation. For example, the phrase “social distancing” has caused considerable confusion and can be difficult to [translate into other languages](#). Convey information in language that is accessible, precise, and easily understood.

## **3. Tailored:**

While some communications will be appropriate for all audiences, it is also important that you develop tailored communications for specific audience segments.

For example, guidance about protective measures may be different for the elderly and those with underlying health conditions than for healthy adults. Similarly, how you convey guidelines about social distancing may be very different for people in rural areas than for those in urban areas. Consider these distinctions and tailor your communications materials (and the channels you use to disseminate them) accordingly.

Pay particular attention to the use of local languages, where appropriate. Develop materials in multiple languages and make them accessible online for others to share.

## **4. Actionable:**

Frame your materials and the language that you use in them in an action-oriented way. Make it clear that this isn’t simply for information, and that you are asking people to take very specific actions.

Make it clear that these actions are for their own benefit and the benefit of their families and communities.

## **5. Visual:**

Include clear and compelling visuals in all communications. Make sure that these are culturally and contextually relevant so that audiences can relate to them. While there are some high-quality communications materials being produced by international organizations, recognize that you may need to adapt them in order to make them appropriate for your audiences.

Clear and compelling visuals are particularly important for audiences with limited literacy. They should be able to view the material and still understand the key points even without being able to read all of it.

In radio communications where visuals can't be used, try to describe the actions that you want people to take as clearly as possible. For example, don't simply tell people to wash their hands, explain to them how they should do it.

Finally, while you may have limited time, test key communications materials when possible before disseminating them. You can convene quick, informal focus groups with target audiences to check whether your desired messages are coming across. It's easy to forget that others may not have the same base level of knowledge and understanding as those who are close to the crisis. So, it is important to "sense check".

## Examples of Effective Communications Materials<sup>1</sup>

### 1. General Audience

South African National Department of Health -  
infographic explaining how to avoid catching  
coronavirus

<https://www.facebook.com/HealthZA/photos/pb.147721238610751.-2207520000../3071405606242285/?type=3&th eater>

Strengths:

- Information categorized in 4 key steps
- Clear visuals
- Phone number listed for more information

Potential improvements:

- There is a small error here where they say "bacteria" rather than "the virus"
- It lists a runny nose as a symptom where WHO and others have focused on fever and cough



<sup>1</sup> All examples are © the authors/institutions/governments and their consent may be required for reproduction of same. Big Win Philanthropy is not responsible for the content of any selected examples.

South African National Department of Health - simple animated video explaining coronavirus facts and advising appropriate actions to take to stop the spread

<https://twitter.com/DrZweliMkhize/status/1242415506818244608?s=20>

Strengths:

- Clearly explains how the virus is spread and how to prevent catching it

Potential improvements:

- The handwashing animation could be improved to show proper technique
- Would remove the mention of runny nose as a symptom



WHO Cote D'Ivoire - simple video showing how to wash your hands properly, with voiceover in French

<https://twitter.com/OmsCotedivoire/status/1243272487301001222?s=20>

Strengths:

- Properly demonstrates handwashing technique with voiceover to explain each step
- Letting hands air dry is something that everyone can do



## 2. Children

Oxfam Middle East and North Africa - a catchy handwashing dance video

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=207482263802974>

Strengths:

- Makes handwashing look fun
- Demonstrates proper technique

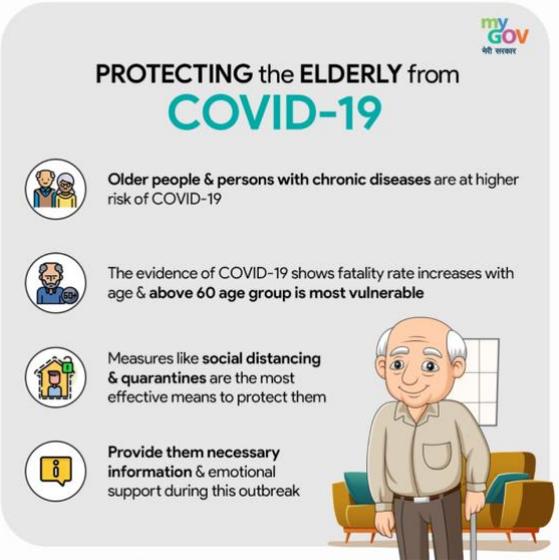
Potential improvements:

- In some places, the children are standing closer together than advised; if recreated we would ensure everyone stays 2m apart



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We would demonstrate proper handwashing in contexts without running water as well</li> </ul>	
<p>Children’s Commissioner, UK - a children’s guide to coronavirus</p> <p><a href="https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/cco-childrens-guide-to-coronavirus.pdf">https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/cco-childrens-guide-to-coronavirus.pdf</a></p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explains the virus in a way children can understand, without making it look “cute” as some other materials have done</li> <li>● Acknowledges fears and concerns</li> </ul> <p>Potential improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More illustrations could be used throughout</li> <li>● It could be shortened</li> </ul>	

### 3. Elderly

<p>Government of India - infographic with information for the elderly</p> <p><a href="https://twitter.com/mygovindia/status/1241435491481747456?s=20">https://twitter.com/mygovindia/status/1241435491481747456?s=20</a></p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Specifically addresses the needs of the elderly</li> </ul> <p>Potential improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Simplifying the language in point 3 to explain what social distancing and quarantining actually mean, as they can be open to confusion</li> </ul>	
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#### 4. Businesses

Nigeria Center for Disease Control - Guidance for Employers and Businesses in Nigeria

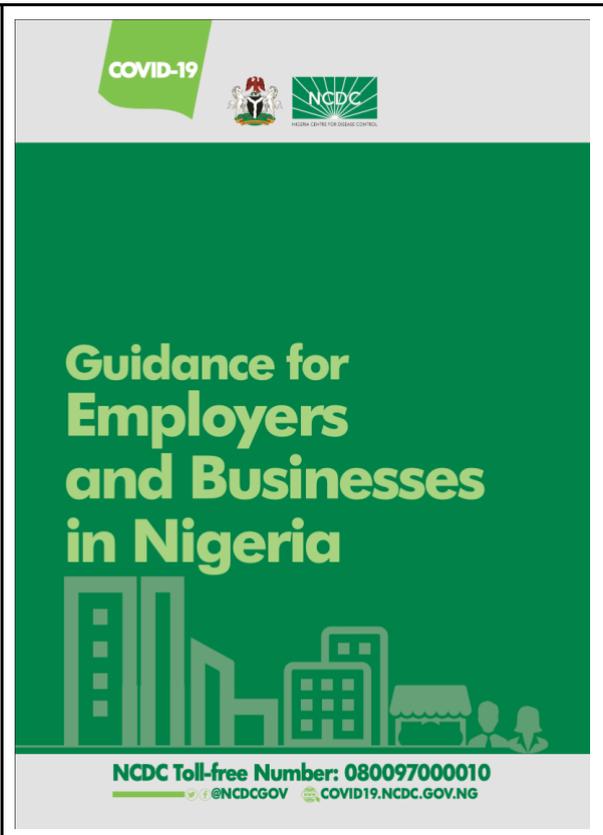
<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/resource/guideline/GuideforBusinesses.pdf>

Strengths:

- Clearly explains the steps businesses should take to protect their employees and customers

Potential improvements:

- Some of the technical language could be simplified



## 5. People living in informal settlements or those without access to running water

IBP South Africa and partners - Handwashing guidance for people living in informal settlements

<https://twitter.com/OpenBudgets/status/1241381909441150981?s=20>

Strengths:

- Specifically addresses the day to day realities of those living in informal settlements

Potential improvements:

- Specific graphics could be included for each of the six recommendations

**DO YOU USE SHARED TAPS AND TOILETS IN AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT?**

**TO AVOID GETTING THE CORONAVIRUS:**

1. Don't touch the tap, toilet or door handle with your bare hands.
2. Hold the tap, door handle or toilet lid with newspaper.
3. You can also use your foot or shoulder to open the toilet door and lift the lid.
4. Stand at least 6 steps away from other people when you queue for a toilet or tap.
5. After using the toilet or tap – do not touch your face, eyes, nose or mouth until you wash your hands with soap and water.
6. Clean the toilet or tap with 1 litre of water mixed with 4 teaspoons of Jik™/bleach. (but keep this bleach mixture away from children.)

**WASH FOR 20 SECONDS**

#SOCIALAUDITS4SERVICES

afesis-corplan | plan act | IBP SOUTH AFRICA | SA sdi Alliance | SOCIAL JUSTICE SOLUTIONS

First Lady, Namibia - a video showing how to wash your hands properly even if you don't have access to running water

[https://twitter.com/FLON\\_Namibia/status/1243563611949236224?s=20](https://twitter.com/FLON_Namibia/status/1243563611949236224?s=20)

Strengths:

- Addresses how to safely wash your hands without having access to running water

Potential improvements:

- Could be shortened to 1 minute or less

**First Lady, Namibia** @FLON\_Namibia · Mar 27

#BeSafe

In response to the @WHO #SafeHandsChallenge 🙌, as nominated by @FirstLadyRwanda, @njamasisi and @FirstLadyNiger, we collaborated with youth living in informal settlements who insisted we reflect the safe hands challenge in a context that reflects their reality. @OAFLA

2.7K views | 0:08 / 2:20

WHO African Region - a video showing how to construct a safe handwashing station

<https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1243534860867813379>

Strengths:

- Addresses how to safely wash your hands without having access to running water



## 6. Urban audiences who use public transportation

WHO African Region - an infographic for people who use public transportation.

<https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1242420209035730946?s=20>

Strengths:

- Clear visuals and five recommendations that are easy to remember

Potential improvements:

- This graphic says to wash your hands for 40 seconds rather than the usually-cited 20 seconds; we would change this for consistency



WHO African Region - an infographic telling people not to use public transport if they are feeling unwell

<https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1242092032220450816?s=20>

Strengths:

- Single, easily understood message



## 5. Combating fake news

There is clear evidence that fake news about coronavirus is spreading on social media and private messaging apps - and is even being picked up by otherwise reliable and trustworthy organizations.

Misinformation can not only lead to bad public health behaviors with respect to coronavirus, but it can stop people from accessing regular health services out of fear or can cause people to turn against their neighbors. It is crucial to take this threat seriously and to develop a strategy to combat misinformation.

Overall, there are two approaches to combating fake news: take it down or drown it out. To take information down, you need to be able to identify where the news is coming from, stop it from spreading further by encouraging people not to share the posts and take the information down, either legally or technologically. Some countries have introduced laws to penalize people and organizations who are posting misinformation (see Singapore example below). Other governments have partnered with the social media platforms, especially Facebook (which includes WhatsApp and Instagram), to introduce more robust oversight over the content posted, mark false information as fake and take the content off their platforms.

The other approach is to drown out the fake news with engaging content from verified organizations. The WHO has been outstanding in its communications approach. It is active on every channel and has wide followings across different social media platforms. They post content to match the medium and are immediately responsive in shooting down false stories. Some governments have set up departmental teams to identify and take down false information being circulated, while creating their own content.

The biggest challenge in fighting fake news lies in the private messages people send on SMS, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. Independent organizations have set up fact checking operations (e.g. <https://infotagion.com/>) to combat wild rumors and falsehoods. Traditional media can play an important role in this fight but only if they are seen to be trusted sources of information.

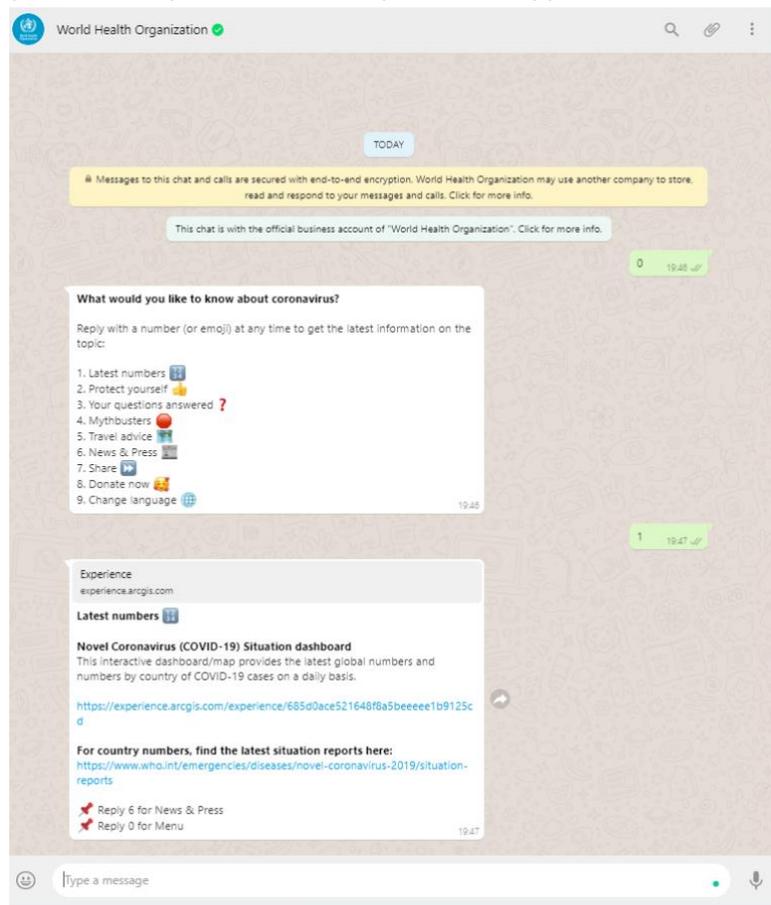
As Sylvie Briand, director of Infectious Hazards Management at WHO's Health Emergencies Program and architect of WHO's strategy to counter the "infodemic" risk told The Lancet in February 2020:

"We know that every outbreak will be accompanied by a kind of tsunami of information, but also within this information you always have misinformation, rumors, etc. We know that even in the Middle Ages there was this phenomenon."

"But the difference now with social media is that this phenomenon is amplified, it goes faster and further, like the viruses that travel with people and go faster and further. So it is a new challenge, and the challenge is the [timing] because you need to be faster if you want to fill the void...What is at stake during an outbreak is making sure people will do the right thing to control the disease or to mitigate its impact. So, it is not only information to make sure people are informed; it is also making sure people are informed to act appropriately."

There are a few good examples of partnerships that could be replicated elsewhere.

1. In India, Facebook has launched a Corona Helpdesk Chatbot on its Messenger platform to provide authentic and accurate information to debunk fake news about coronavirus. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2020/03/30/facebook-launches-chatbot-and-news-hub-india-fight-against-misinformation>
2. The WHO has more than 1.2million followers on TikTok where they live stream videos on coronavirus information. <https://www.tiktok.com/@who?lang=en>. They also have a WhatsApp feature which allows you to get the latest information on your phone and gives you the ability to share it widely on WhatsApp.



3. DFID is supporting the H2H Network, Translators without Borders and Evidence Aid to promote the spread of reliable and evidence-based information in multiple languages across South East Asia and Africa. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-to-tackle-global-spread-of-coronavirus-fake-news>
4. The H2H Network consists of approximately 50 organizations, which provide specialist services to the humanitarian aid sector, including tackling fake news in the wake of disasters and epidemics. <https://www.h2hworks.org/>
5. In Ghana, Africa Check has developed a chatbot for WhatsApp, a text-based dialogue system called "Kweli," which means "truth" in Kisuaheli. Users can send information to the bot to be checked for veracity. <https://africacheck.org/>

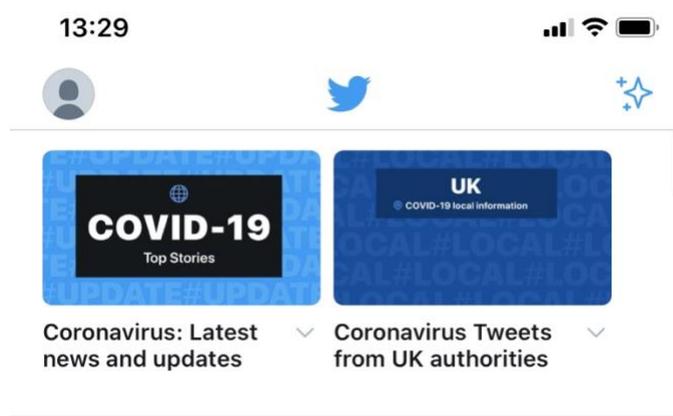
- Singapore has taken it one step further and introduced a controversial “fake news” law to force media outlets and social media users to carry government warnings on their posts and articles saying they contain falsehoods. <https://singaporelegaladvice.com/law-articles/singapore-fake-news-protection-online-falsehoods-manipulation/>

India is using its Epidemics and Diseases Act, 1897 to punish offenders.

- Google has created an SOS Alert on COVID-19 for the six official UN languages, and is also expanding in some other languages, so that people receive WHO information first.



- The UK government has agreed with the social media platforms that they place links to government communications prominently on every page. For example, on the mobile Twitter app in the UK, each page begins with a link to government communications about COVID.



## 6. Getting professional communications support

Below is a list of communications consulting firms that you may wish to contact if you would like additional professional support. Big Win Philanthropy does not endorse any particular communications firm and encourages governments to engage in their own independent review, due diligence and selection processes.

Company	Location	Website	Description	Specialization
Atalanta	London, UK	<a href="https://www.atalanta.co/">https://www.atalanta.co/</a>	<p>Atalanta is a strategic communications and campaign consulting firm based in London. Their team has worked extensively with governments and philanthropic clients in countries across Africa, including: Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Their global experience also includes projects in the United States, Europe, the Middle East and South America. In addition to working with public and social sector leaders across a range of focus areas, they have a particular focus on supporting women in leadership.</p> <p>They support Big Win on communications and helped to draft this document. They are available as a partner or can facilitate introductions to the other agencies listed below, if helpful.</p>	<p>Messaging &amp; communications strategy</p> <p>Digital strategy and execution</p> <p>Behavior change campaigns</p> <p>International media engagement</p> <p>Crisis communications</p> <p>Multimedia production</p>
Baobab Consulting	Consultants are based across Africa	<a href="https://www.baobabconsulting.net/">https://www.baobabconsulting.net/</a>	<p>Baobab Consulting is a social impact consulting firm that offers strategic communications, intercultural programming, strategic advisory, and research capabilities.</p> <p>They have previously worked with the Joyce Banda Foundation, the African Leadership Academy, Olusegun Agagu Foundation, and MPower Financing.</p>	<p>Messaging &amp; communications strategy</p>
Chain Reactions	Lagos, Nigeria	<a href="http://www.chainreactionsng.com/">http://www.chainreactionsng.com/</a>	<p>Their services focus on PR and reputation management, working on campaigns to influence public opinion.</p> <p>They have behavior change experience and are currently involved in a campaign encouraging more women across Africa to have smear tests (<a href="https://smearmywoman.com/">https://smearmywoman.com/</a>).</p>	<p>Behavior change campaigns</p> <p>PR &amp; reputation management</p>

			An affiliate of Edelman, their previous clients include Ovaltine, Dettol, Arla, various Nigerian ministries, Vital Voices, Facebook, GE, and HP.	
Djembe Consultants	Accra, Dubai, Lagos, London, Luanda, New York, Maputo, Rabat, Zürich	<a href="https://djembeconsultants.com/">https://djembeconsultants.com/</a>	<p>Djembe Communications is a marketing and communications company with a focus on Africa. Their work covers four key areas: reputation management, public affairs, digital and social media, and events management.</p> <p>They have previously worked on the Zayed Sustainability Prize, helping create and execute an Africa-wide outreach program that included in-country roadshows, media relations, and stakeholder engagement. They have also worked with Mastercard Foundation, Soronko Academy, and Vlisco.</p>	<p>Messaging and communications strategy</p> <p>Social media strategy</p> <p>Branding and design</p> <p>Media relations</p> <p>Crisis management</p>
Futuresoft	Lagos, Nigeria	<a href="https://futuresoft-ng.com/">https://futuresoft-ng.com/</a>	<p>Based in Nigeria, Futuresoft is a digital consulting firm.</p> <p>They have worked with a range of public and private sector clients.</p>	<p>Multimedia production</p> <p>Digital and social media marketing</p> <p>Website development</p>
Niyel Consulting	Dakar, Senegal	<a href="https://www.niyel.net/">https://www.niyel.net/</a>	<p>Niyel is an advocacy and public affairs firm with experience working on political campaigns and behavior change campaigns. Previous experience includes working on Paolo Gomes' presidential campaign in Guinea Bissau and 33 days - a campaign focusing on encouraging African governments to meet their immunization needs and commitments.</p> <p>Their previous clients include Plan International, Marie Stopes, Trust Africa, Amnesty International, and Action Aid.</p>	Behavior change campaigns

			They have trilingual capabilities (English, French and Portuguese).	
StateCraft Inc.	Lagos, Nigeria	<a href="https://statecraftinc.com/">https://statecraftinc.com/</a>	<p>StateCraft Inc. is a full-service governance consulting firm with expertise in citizen engagement, policy development and implementation, and strategic government relations and communication.</p> <p>StateCraft's clients have included Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and the Nigerian National Social Investment Office.</p>	<p>Messaging and communications strategy</p> <p>Digital strategy and execution</p> <p>Media engagement</p>
Yellow Brick Road	Ikoyi, Nigeria	<a href="http://www.yellowbrickroad.com.ng/">http://www.yellowbrickroad.com.ng/</a>	<p>A digital and creative agency based in Nigeria, Yellow Brick Road focus on digital strategy and implementation. They notably worked with UNICEF on their Every Child in School campaign which motivated young people to call on leaders to provide quality education for all children.</p> <p>They have also worked with clients such as Canon and First Bank Nigeria.</p>	<p>Digital strategy and execution</p> <p>Digital marketing</p> <p>Design</p>