

TOOL 10

MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT TOOL AND LIBRARY

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ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF MESSAGING

The three essential elements of effective one-way messaging for behavior change are:

1. **Keep it simple:** Simplicity of messages is critical – too much text or images can be overwhelming and the message will be lost.
2. **Communicate a benefit:** The message needs to communicate a benefit for long-term change. In emergency situations such as cholera outbreaks, it is acceptable to include more dire warnings like ‘cholera can kill’ or ‘your water is contaminated with cholera’. But these dire warnings do not provide a long-lasting effect. Once the threat passes, the old behaviours will continue. To ensure that you meet short-term and long-term health goals, ensure that a benefit is always indicated.
3. **Provide a call to action:** Providing a call to action tells community members what they can do to achieve the benefit. This could be ‘wash your hands’, or ‘boil your water’, or get immunized’.

CONTEXTUALISING A MESSAGE

Before disseminating a message, it is essential to understand the context you are working in. By contextualising each message, it helps to avoid any potential harm that can be created by sending out the wrong information. Consider:

1. **Language:** Use the language of the affected population and use words that the affected population understands, keep the language positive, avoid scaremongering and remember to use simple, every day words and keep the message concise.
2. **Existing knowledge:** Knowing the level of education and knowledge of the people affected will help you in choosing and adapting the appropriate message. You may need to combine awareness raising messages alongside self-care or service so that communities are given enough information to make informed choices.
3. **Cultural beliefs and practices:** Knowing and understanding the cultural beliefs and practices of the community is very important. Some of these beliefs may act as barriers to what you are trying to achieve.
4. **Feasibility:** Messages need to be providing information that people find useful and/or can act upon. There is no point crafting a message that tells people to do something when the situation on the ground makes it impossible for them to follow that advice.
5. **Explain why:** Always explain why you are advocating for a certain behavior, if people understand why it is important to do something they are more likely to do it – for example if people understand that washing their hands before eating stops germs getting from their hands onto their food and into their mouths they will more likely remember than if they just know they should wash their hands before eating, but they don’t know why this is important.



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Pilot-testing messages with communities can ensure that messages are understandable, acceptable, relevant, and persuasive. It will also help prevent the dissemination of either meaningless or potentially harmful information. If it is not possible to test messages with communities because of time constraints, they should be checked by local staff and volunteers who know the community well enough to advise if the messages are appropriate and clear.

THE MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC

The message development rubric below can help you assess your message across five key criteria; Simplicity, Communication of a benefit, Call to action, Context appropriate, and Appropriate to method. To use the rubric, assess your message against each of the five criteria and award it a score between 3 (excellent) and 1 (poor). The descriptions in the rubric help you decide how well your message meets each criterion. Once all criteria have been scored, they individual scores are added together and the message is awarded an overall score out of 15. An acceptable message should not score below 11. If the score is below 11, the message needs to be reviewed starting with the criteria where it received lowest scores.

Criteria	3	2	1	Score
Simplicity	Use of images is relevant and engaging. Design/Wording is not too busy.	Use of images is somewhat relevant and possibly engaging. Design/Wording is somewhat busy or distracting.	Use of images is not relevant to message and/or distracting. Design/Wording is too busy and/or distracting.	_____
Communication of a benefit	The positive aspect of following the guidance is obvious.	The positive aspect of following the given guidance is not immediately obvious.	The positive aspect of following the given guidance is absent, misleading or unclear.	_____
Call to action	The message clearly gives guidance on what to do to achieve the benefit.	The message gives some guidance on what to do but it may not be clear or is confusing.	There is no clear message or guidance on what to do to achieve the benefit.	_____
Context appropriate	The message is appropriate for the target audience taking into account cultural and religious context. Is provided in the local language used by the target audience.	The message is somewhat appropriate for the target audience taking into account the limited aspects of cultural and religious context. Is provided in the local language used by the target audience but the wording or use of language is confusing.	The message is not appropriate for the target audience and does not consider cultural and religious context. Is not provided in the local language used by the target audience.	_____
Appropriate to	The method used to	The method used to	The method used to	



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method	communicate the message is appropriate for the target audience. The images and or wording of the message is appropriately used for the tool selected	communicate the message is somewhat appropriate for the target audience. The images and or wording of the message may be confusing or somewhat inappropriate for the tool selected	communicate the message is inappropriate for the target audience. Images and or wording of the message is confusing, inaccurate, and/or inappropriate for the tool selected.	_____
Scoring: Add the scores given for each criterion to achieve a total score. Out of a total of 15 points, an acceptable message should not score below 11.			TOTAL SCORE:	_____ _____

MESSAGE LIBRARY

To access pre-written messages check the following links:

- A wide range of SMS messages on health, hygiene, DRR and early warning: <https://fedteam.ifrc.org/global/collaboration/disasters/bc/SMSmessages>
- The IFRC public awareness and public education: key messages document: https://fednet.ifrc.org/PageFiles/97208/Key%20messages%20for%20Public%20awareness%20guide-EN_LR.pdf
- The IFRC health and care pages on Fednet have a huge range of tools, including messages, covering emergency health, epidemics and communicable diseases, blood donation, CBHFA, first aid, HIV, maternal, newborn and child health, non-communicable diseases, psychosocial support and water and sanitation: <https://fednet.ifrc.org/en/resources/health/>
- The Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) network’s message library covers a wide range of topics and provides off the shelf messages: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/message-library/>

DEVELOPING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE MESSAGES – AN EXAMPLE

Let’s use an example of a district in southern Africa with high HIV prevalence. The programme team assesses the communities and the social-cultural context and learns it is a male-dominated society and strictly religious. After talking with the men of the community, the team learns they refuse to wear condoms, giving the following reasons:

- It is inappropriate to talk about condoms



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- Condoms mean that you have HIV or you think your partner is diseased
- Condoms are only needed when you have sex with someone you don't know
- Condoms are a forbidden form of contraceptive in their religion.

This means a simple message like 'Stay safe, use a condom' would not work in these communities. Following a discussion, the team decides on the following behaviour change methods to address the barriers to condom use identified by the men.

Reasons behind unsafe behaviour	Proposed CEA activity
It is inappropriate to talk about condoms.	<p>Conduct role-plays at community meetings to help people feel more comfortable talking about condoms.</p> <p>Conduct awareness campaigns to sensitise community about safe sex practices – even within marriage.</p>
Condoms mean that you have HIV or you think your partner has the disease	<p>Have discussions at community meetings about how HIV is transmitted, focusing on the fact you can't tell someone has HIV by looking at them.</p> <p>Invite people living with HIV to talk to the community about how they were infected.</p> <p>Conduct role-plays to practice how to have conversations with a partner about safe sex.</p>
Condoms are only needed when you have sex with someone you don't know	<p>Have discussions in radio shows about how HIV is transmitted.</p> <p>Conduct media campaign to relate how HIV is transmitted.</p> <p>Set up a hotline for people to ask taboo questions about HIV transmission or initiate a questions and answers session on social media.</p>
Condoms are a forbidden form of contraceptive in their religion.	<p>Meet with religious leaders to ask how the National Society can work with leaders to help slow the HIV transmission rate in their community.</p> <p>Share behaviour change messages with religious leaders so that they can share and discuss with their followers.</p>

