

UNIT 6: DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS

This Unit highlights the importance of ensuring that communication response activities are accompanied by **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART)** communication objectives that are measured by appropriate SMART indicators.

Indicators are succinct measures that aim to describe how the program is performing. As such, they allow programmers to assess what is working and what needs to be improved. Importantly, communication objectives and indicators should be part of an M&E plan that supports the communication response.

Having completed this unit, you will have the following tools to assist you in establishing SMART communication objectives with appropriate indicators. These will support the development of your M&E plan.

- [Worksheet 6.1: Defining SMART Objectives](#)
- [Worksheet 6.2: Developing SMART Indicators](#)

What are Communication Objectives and Indicators?

Communication objectives are the desired results of an SBCC intervention, and are generally related to changes in the audiences' knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, skills or behaviors. Communication objectives are used to guide the development and direction of an SBCC intervention. The objectives should contribute to achieving the goal of bringing the emergency under control.

Indicators reflect how the SBCC interventions will be measured, and include variables that mark the change or progress toward achieving the objectives. For example, indicators can be used to measure factors such as the reach and quality of the intervention, and any influences on behavior such as knowledge, beliefs, feelings or practices. Indicators can therefore provide valuable information as to how the SBCC response is progressing, and they can highlight areas for improvement or change that need to be made to obtain the desired results. In an emergency, attention should be given to establishing indicators that can be collected easily.

Key Steps for Developing Communication Objectives and Indicators

1. Identify SMART Communication Objectives
2. Establish Appropriate SMART Indicators
3. Establish a Reference Point
4. Set Targets
5. Determine the Frequency of Data Collection and Sharing
6. Link Objectives and Indicators to the M&E Plan

Identify SMART Communication Objectives

Should an emergency occur, countries will need to develop a set of communication objectives. If countries have explored qualitative and quantitative studies about household behaviors, cultural and social norms that govern behaviors, traditional beliefs, health seeking practices, knowledge about key health information and media habits in advance, and expanded that information base with data about the emergency, then developing these objectives will be fairly straightforward. As indicated previously, communication objectives concisely describe desired changes in the audiences as a result of seeing, hearing, participating in or having heard about a specific SBCC intervention. Behavioral factors that influence these changes include (but are not limited to) knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, feelings or practices. Communication objectives should be developed according to the audiences' communication needs linked to the emergency and should address the factors most likely to contain the outbreak as determined by the program objectives. **Unit 2: Rapid Needs Assessment, Unit 4: Audience Analysis and Segmentation and Unit 5: Audience Profiling** can help you develop appropriate, evidence-based communication objectives.

Communication objectives need to be SMART. The acronym SMART, described below, is used to highlight some important criteria that help focus the objective and monitor progress.

Specific: The objective should clearly define the expected outcome and should answer questions such as who is involved what will be achieved and where. A specific objective will help define activities.

Measurable: The objective should include an indicator of progress and should answer questions such as how often or how much. This will determine whether the objective is achieved.

Attainable: The expected change defined in the objective should be realistic within the given timeframe and with the available resources.

Relevant: The objective should contribute to achieving the overall program goal. This will support developing activities that are important to the program.

Time-bound: The objective should include a timeframe for achieving the desired change.

An easy way of developing measurable communication objectives is to ask the following three questions:

- What do you want your audience to do?
- When do you want your audience to do it?
- What is the benefit to the audience if they do what you want them to do?

Examples of SMART objectives are listed in **Table 8** below, together with the behavioral factor each aims to influence. The third column of the table provides sample indicators to measure progress towards achieving the objective (discussed later in this Unit).

Table 8: SMART Communication Objectives with Behavioral Factors and Sample Indicators

Communication Objective	Behavioral Factors Being Addressed	Example Indicators
Within the next three months, all households in Community X will know the importance of washing hands with soap to stop the spread of cholera.	Knowledge	Percentage of households that know about the importance of washing their hands with soap
Within the next six months, handwashing with soap among households in Community X will have increased from 55% to 95%.	Behavior	Percentage of households washing their hands with soap
Within the next six months, all CHWs in Community X will counsel household members on the importance of handwashing with soap to prevent cholera.	Service provision	Number of CHWs trained to counsel household members to practice handwashing in Community X

To establish SMART objectives, keep the following in mind:

- Prioritize behaviors that will have the greatest impact in meeting emergency control and prevention objectives.
- Use only one action verb in each objective. Using several verbs implies that several activities and/or behaviors are being measured.
- Be specific about the target population and the behavior or issue being addressed by the objective.

- Consider that, during an emergency, the availability of products and services necessary to practice the behaviors promoted by the objectives may be affected.
- Remember that it may be necessary to develop different objectives for each phase of the emergency. Some objectives will therefore have a short timeframe, while others may have a longer one.

Exercise: Assessing Your Communication Objectives

Once you have developed communication objectives, you can use **Worksheet 6.1** to assess whether they are SMART and to identify how to improve them.

WORKSHEET 6.1: DEFINING SMART OBJECTIVES

Purpose: This worksheet will help you assess whether the communication objectives you have developed are SMART.

Directions: Write each communication objective you have developed and verify it is SMART using the check list. Use the checklist to identify the areas of the communication objective which need to be improved in order for it to be SMART

Please note that this worksheet is followed by a completed example that you can use as reference if necessary.

Program Goal: _____

Communication Objective 1: _____

Review the above communication objective against the criteria below:

Criteria for Assessing the Objective	Yes	No
Is the communication objective SMART?		
Is the objective Specific ? (Is the target population, geographic location and the activity required of them clear?)		
Is the objective Measurable (Is the amount of expected change defined?)		
Is the objective Attainable ? (Can it be achieved within the timeframe stated and with the resources available?)		
Is the objective Relevant ? (Does it contribute to the overall program goal?)		
Is the objective Time-bound ? (Is the timeframe for achieving the objective stated?)		
Does the objective relate to a single result?		
Is the objective clearly written? (Are the desired action and outcome clear?)		

If you have answered “No” to any of the above question on the checklist, you should redefine the objective to ensure it fits all the above criteria.

Improved Communication Objective: _____

Establish Appropriate SMART Indicators

Once SMART communication objectives have been established, it is important to track their progress by identifying related indicators. Specifically, indicators contain succinct measures with numerical value so trends can be identified and comparisons can be made. Commonly, indicators are expressed in percentages, rates or ratios.

A program can use many indicators to assess different types and levels of change that result from the intervention. Generally speaking, indicators are used to measure different areas of program implementation and come in three types:

- **Input indicators:** These indicators are related to resources, contributions and investments that go into a program.
- **Output indicators:** This term refers to activities, services, events and product that reach the priority and influencing audiences.
- **Outcomes:** This term refers to changes in the priority and influencing audiences.

Input and output indicators provide information about the scope and quality of activities being implemented. They belong to the category of process indicators and used to monitor program implementation.

Outcome indicators measure changes towards progress of results. They belong to the category of performance indicators and are used to evaluate the outcome, effects and impact of an intervention. **Table 9** below summarizes the different types and categories of indicators.

Table 9: Program Indicators by Category and Type Including Examples

Indicator Category	Indicator Type	Examples
Process Indicators (Monitoring Indicators)	Input indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of CHWs in the program• Funding for activities• Equipment
	Output indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of trainings conducted• Number of leaflets distributed• Percentage of audience segment reached by radio spots• Number of individuals counseled
Outcome Indicators (Evaluation Indicators)	Outcome indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of knowledge increase among target audience• Percentage of target audience practicing the desired behavior

Like with communication objectives, indicators also need to be SMART. **Worksheet 6.2** provides some guidance on how to develop SMART indicators.

WORKSHEET 6.2: DEVELOPING SMART INDICATORS

What is the communication objective that needs to be measured?	
What is the input/output/outcome being measured?	
What is the proposed indicator?	

Is the indicator:	Yes	No
Specific? (Is it clear what the indicator is setting out to measure, and among which audience?)		
Measurable? (Does data exist to measure the indicator and can it be accessed?)		
Attainable? (Can data to populate the indicator be collected, even during the emergency?)		
Relevant? (Does it contribute to the overall program goal?)		
Time-bound? (Is the timeframe for stated?)		

If you have answered “No” to any of the above question on the checklist, you should redefine the indicator to ensure it fits all the above criteria.

Improved indicator: _____

Establish a Reference Point

For indicators to show any change or progress towards the communication objectives, a reference point needs to be established. A reference point acts as a measure of comparison, a starting point or baseline, which allows a programmer to determine the amount of progress that is being made. The reference point is usually defined before or at the very beginning of an intervention. However, during an emergency, time pressures may not allow for in-depth baseline data collection. In such cases, reference points can be established once the communication response has started.

Table 10 below describes the different stages at which reference points can be determined and highlights specific considerations for gathering baseline data during each stage of the emergency.

Table 10: Stages at Which Reference Points Can Be Determined and Specific Considerations

Stage at Which Reference Points Can Be Established	Description	Considerations for an Emergency Setting
Prior to the communication response	Reference points are established just before the communication response begins. This is generally referred to as a baseline.	In an emergency, obtaining baseline data in advance should be part of the preparedness strategy. Obtain information from existing secondary sources such as KAP surveys or epidemiological statistics in order to establish a reference point should an outbreak occur. Review this data regularly to ensure it is up to date.
Once the communication response has begun	At this stage, scanning for any existing data relating to program indicators and targeting the intended audiences can help provide a reference point. Examples of such data sources include DHS, health statistics and UNICEF MICS.	If no comparable data exist, use the program indicators to start measuring the current state at the onset of the program and use that as the reference point.
When the communication response is over	Although not ideal, a reference point can also be established at the end of the intervention through a control group. This involves collecting data on program indicators among a sample group that was not exposed to the intervention and with similar characteristics to those targeted.	In emergency settings, this may not be a feasible option because the fear and risks that are associated with an outbreak are likely to warrant interventions that cover areas and populations beyond those directly affected by the emergency.

Set Targets

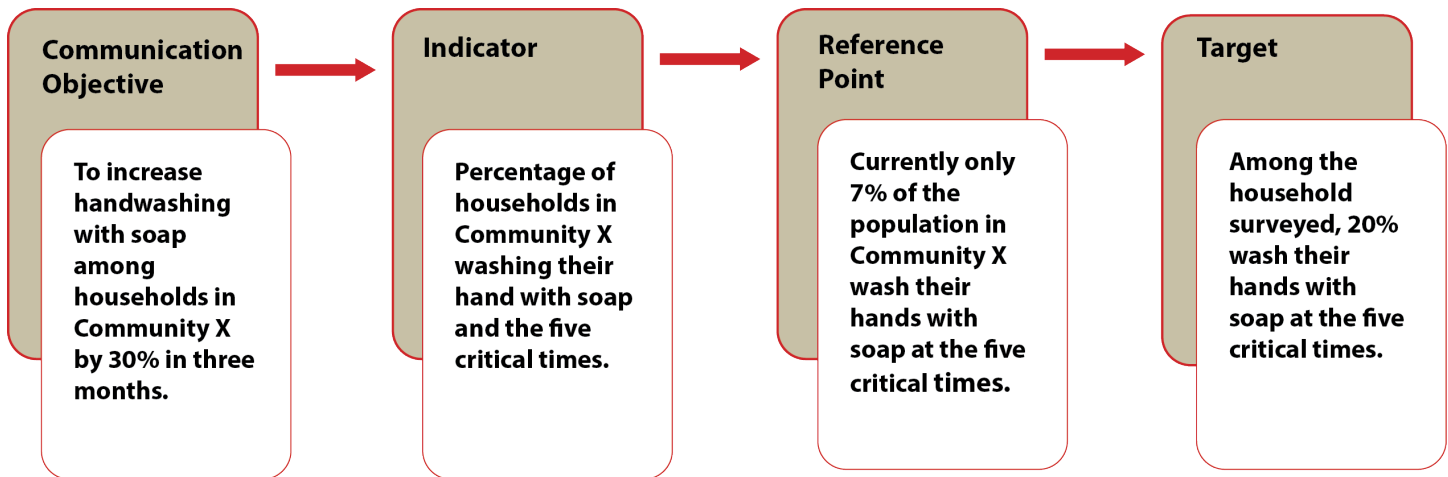
Based on the reference point and the communication objectives, targets can be established to determine whether the communication response is progressing as planned. Targets define the amount of change that should be seen in the program indicators to reflect progress towards the communication objective and the overall program goal of bringing the emergency under control.

Key considerations for setting targets:

- **Refer to the reference point.** Set the starting point against which to compare any progress.
- **Be aware of stakeholder expectations.** In emergencies, many important national and international stakeholders are likely to have pressing demands and expectations, which need to be taken into consideration when defining targets.
- **Relevant research findings.** Review literature on similar emergencies and interventions targeting similar problems in the area, if available, to have an understanding of what may be realistic expectations.

Figure 7 below provides a visual example of the link between communication objectives, indicators, the reference point and targets.

Figure 7: Link between Communication Objectives, Indicators, the Reference Point and Targets



Determine the Frequency of Data Collection and Sharing

Once indicators and targets are established, it is important to determine how often the data should be collected. In an emergency, data collection should occur frequently so as to monitor the evolution of the outbreak and how populations respond. It is recommended to review data on a daily or weekly basis.

As the emergency starts to subside, data collection can be less frequent. Data should be collected throughout the emergency response to monitor progress, and at the end of the intervention to evaluate outcomes.

For data collection to help monitor and inform implementation, it needs to be accompanied by data analysis and sharing. This is especially important during an emergency when all partners and stakeholders need to be informed of the evolution of the outbreak.

The two-way communication systems or feedback loops (discussed in **Unit 1: Coordination and Mapping** and in **Unit 3: Community Mobilization**) allow for regular monitoring of activities and information sharing. Information sharing can also occur at regular coordination meetings, through discussions with the response cell, surveillance officers, health workers,



Tips for Data Collection to Monitor Indicators

- Set up communication systems with all stakeholders at the start of the emergency response for regular monitoring of activities and information sharing. Such systems may include coordination meetings, supervision and regular feedback with stakeholders, forms for collecting data, relevant committees and community mobilizers, etc.
- Ensure that all those involved know and understand the importance of providing information and feedback to monitor communication objectives.
- Think of innovative ways of collecting data regularly such as mobile phones and other applications (see **Unit 3: Community Mobilization**).
- Refer to the messages distribution plan developed for mobilizers and spokespeople (see **Unit 3: Community Mobilization**) to verify that messages are being delivered as planned. This includes assessing that correct information is provided through the agreed channels, that radio spots are broadcast at the planned times and in the correct way, and that materials are distributed to the correct people/ organizations as planned.
- Coordinate with the government and other partner organizations for reporting outcomes/results of monitoring activities, and ensuring that data are shared at all levels (community, national, etc.).

For more information, see *How to Develop Monitoring Indicators* on the HC3 Health COMPASS at <http://www.thehealthcompass.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-monitoring-indicators>.

spokespeople and community mobilizers. Importantly, these communication systems need to be decided and agreed upon early in the response, as highlighted in **Units 1 and 3**.

Link Objectives and Indicators to the M&E Plan

Ultimately, the communication objectives and their indicators need to be part of the M&E plan for the communication response. M&E plays a critical role in programming and has four important functions:

1. To support **understanding** of what is working or not working in a program or system
2. To support **monitoring** whether a program or system is performing as planned
3. To highlight areas for **improvement** in a program or system
4. To support **accountability**

M&E provides empirical, culturally relevant and contextual information that supports the above functions, allowing for the evaluation of immediate, intermediate and long-term effects of program activities. The communication objectives and indicators should therefore be part of an M&E plan that supports the communication strategy.