Rumours

Why they matter and how to work with them in humanitarian response

CDAC NETWORK

Having fled your home because of intense fighting, you've been on the move for days. In the camp you and your family have finally reached there is talk of yet another attack. People have read on Facebook that insurgents are less than a mile from the camp and are heading this way. All around you people are packing up their meagre belongings to flee again. You must decide what to do.

This was the reality in Iraq in late 2014, when rumours of attacks would empty camps overnight. People were forced to make their decisions based on unverified information and fled, despite this potentially placing them in even greater danger. Humanitarian organisation doing distributions would arrive at camps to find them empty.

Rumours can be a matter of life or death. They can create suffering or anger and provoke detrimental behaviour or violent reactions. And yet rumours are often dismissed by humanitarian actors or they simply remain unaware of them and their potential risks until they have to deal with the consequences.

Being more attuned to listening for rumours and embedding a few straightforward steps into your work is a powerful way to start addressing the ones with the worst potential consequences. A cycle of conversation and **listening** to identify rumours, **verifying** the facts behind them and **engaging** communities with new narratives can create a way of working to counter rumours. Approaching this in coordination with other actors and drawing on the expertise of partners will enhance the process.

Our humanitarian mandate demands that we pay attention to rumours and that we act on those that threaten lives and create suffering. Our commitments to accountability demand that we listen to rumours about our programmes and staff, and do what we can to make improvements.

It is not a question of *whether* there will be rumours when people are faced with crisis: there always are. The question is rather: *how* will we engage and work with them?

Find out more in the new guide developed by CDAC Network

Rumour has it: A practice guide to working with rumours.

Available at www.cdacnetwork.org

#RumourGuide @CDACN @AcademyHum