Countries often develop posters, flyers, leaflets, brochures, booklets, messages for health education sessions, radio broadcast or TV spots, etc. as a means of promoting desired, positive behaviours in the community. In some cases, these activities are part of a communication plan within a comprehensive strategy, while in many others they are isolated actions.

These initiatives are commonly referred to broadly as "Information, education and communication (IEC)" activities.

An operational definition of "IEC" refers to a public health approach aiming at changing or reinforcing health-related behaviours in a target audience, concerning a specific problem and within a pre-defined period of time, through communication methods and principles (definition adapted from "Information, education and communication – Lessons from the past; perspectives for the future").

This definition helps emphasize the need for IEC initiatives to:

have a clear **objective** (the specific behaviour to change or reinforce);

target a specific audience (e.g., mothers of children below five years old);

address a "**specific problem**" (e.g., offering increased fluids and continuing feeding a child with diarrhoea), rather than attempt to change many problems at the same time;

set a **timeframe** within which the results ("change in behaviour") are expected to occur.

The "**problem**" must be well defined, as that is what the IEC intervention aims to address. Thorough understanding of what people do, what prevents them from following the desired practices ("barriers") and what facilitates them ("enabling factors") is essential before designing

a communication intervention.

It is obvious that this requires a detailed **plan**, the implementation of which needs to be monitored closely according to pre-set indicators, and then properly evaluated.

Activities following these principles and meeting the above definition can be considered IEC initiatives, with a higher potential to achieve the stated objective than the others. Thus, for example, the development of a poster without the following elements would not be a structured IEC initiative: audience analysis; testing; a plan with objectives, indicators and targets; a clear target audience; a distribution plan with follow-up; regular feedback through monitoring; and a formal evaluation.

The advantage of a public health manager's thinking in this way is to be outcome-oriented, use resources more efficiently and learn important lessons for the future from this experience.

Information, education and communication – Lessons from the past; perspectives for the future

IEC lessons

Many lessons have been learnt over the years in using IEC (information, education and communication) in public health.

The document "Information, education and communication – Lessons from the past; perspectives for the future" provides a concise, user-friendly summary of many of them in just a few pages. Prepared for the WHO Department for Reproductive Health and Research, most of the lessons described in the paper are relevant and applicable to any IEC intervention.

Taking these lessons into consideration when designing IEC projects provides public health managers with useful background to improve the design of IEC interventions.

Information, education and communication – Lessons from the past; perspectives for the future

Tools

Communication design process



An introduction to the six key steps of the communication design process is presented in the report on an intercountry workshop on the community component of IMCI (Integrated management of child health).

Third intercountry workshop on the IMCI community component

Facts for life



"Facts for life" contains key messages for families to save and improve children's lives. Each message comes with supportive evidence, especially meant for health providers. In addition to messages to prevent child deaths, this useful resource contains messages on injuries, child protection and development.

Radio guide



This radio guide, originally designed for managers of diarrhoeal diseases control (CDD) programmes but of practical value also for other programmes, remains a useful instrument to assist public health programme managers in deciding whether to use radio for their communication strategies, planning for a radio intervention, developing and broadcasting radio

spots, monitoring and evaluating them.

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