Integrating digital social listening and on-the-ground community feedback for COVID 19 Vaccines: the South African RCCE TWG experience
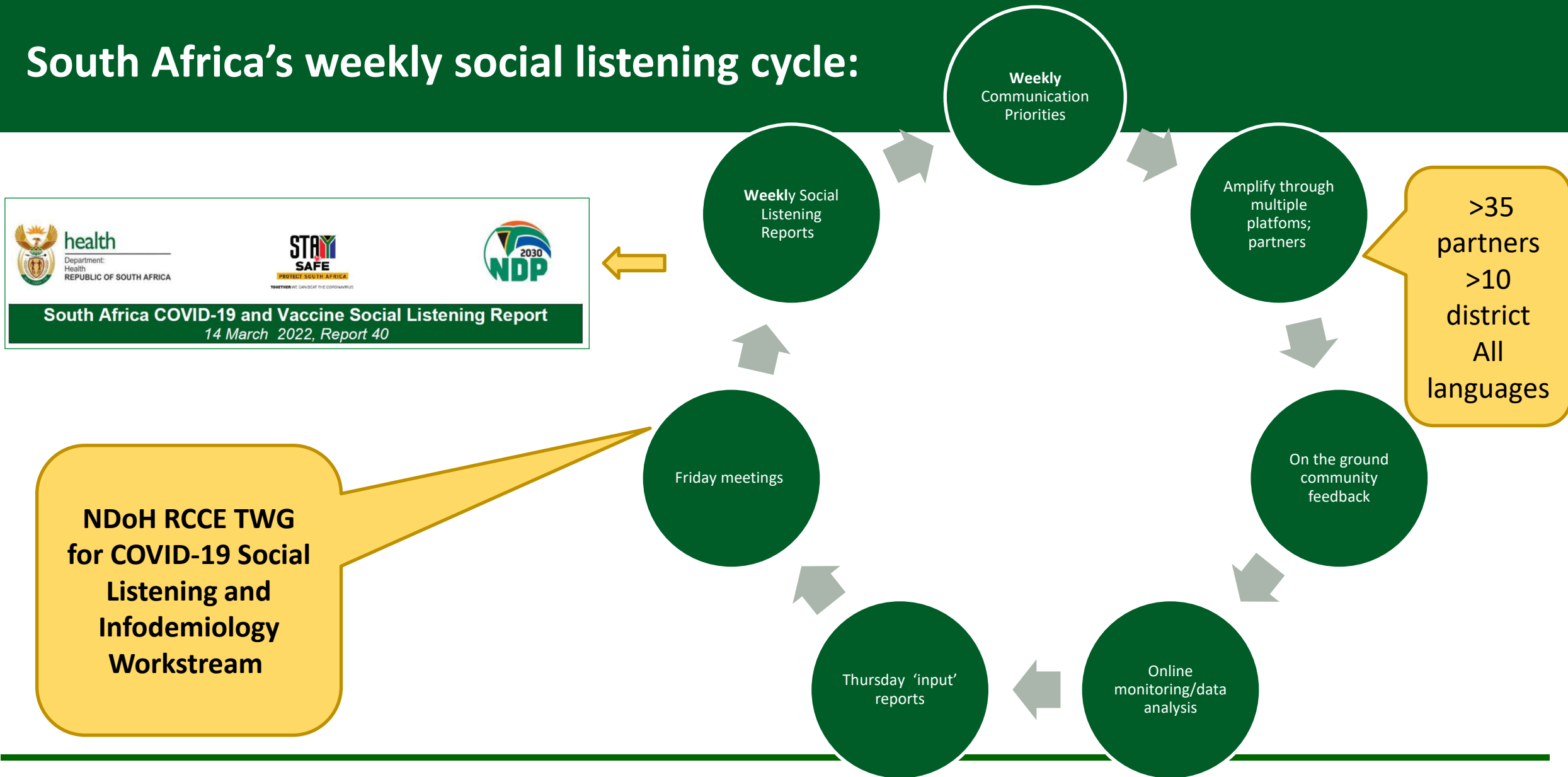
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South Africa's weekly social listening cycle:

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report
14 March 2022, Report 40

Weekly Communication Priorities

Amplify through multiple platfoms; partners

>35 partners
>10 district
All languages

On the ground community feedback

Online monitoring/data analysis

Thursday 'input' reports

Friday meetings

Weekly Social Listening Reports

NDoH RCCE TWG for COVID-19 Social Listening and Infodemiology Workstream

South Africa's weekly social listening cycle:
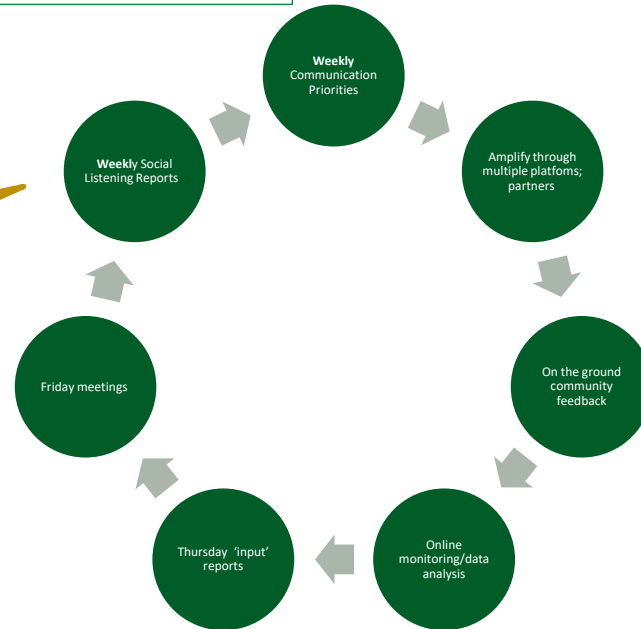
Government, Universities, Research Institutions, Call Center, Business, WhatsApp line Doctors, Practitioners, District Communicators, NGOs, International bodies

… all working to a common goal.

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report
14 March 2022, Report 40

NDoH RCCE TWG for COVID-19 Social Listening and Infodemiology Workstream

Weekly Communication Priorities

Weekly Social Listening Reports

Amplify through multiple platfoms; partners

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Methodology: AIRA Infodemic Management Framework

Pool information to …

1. **<u>Identify</u>** information gaps and misinformation.

2. **Simplify** technical knowledge.
3. **Amplify** correct information.
4. **Quantify** the impact of interventions.

How it works …

Includes:

Online Monitoring and Data Analysis

- *UNICEF*: Analyses vaccine-related search, engagement and conversation trends (by volume)

- *Centre for Analytics and Behaviour Change*: Profiles anti-vax segments

- *University of the Free State*: Identifies new/small potentially disruptive narratives and themes

- *Real 411:* Reports disinformation

- *National Department of Health*: Tracks sentiment on government platforms

- *Ad hoc:* e.g. Workstream members 'quiet observers' in anti-vax WhatsApp and Facebook groups

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How it works …

Includes:

- **District Communicators**: Feedback from ongoing community engagements

- **Community Constituency Front**: Feedback from meetings with local leadership – community, faith and traditional

- **SA Red Cross Society**: Feedback captured by volunteers in daily engagements

- **Call Centre:** Feedback on primary questions from the public

- **Ad hoc: vaccine drive mobilisers**, e.g. Zwakala, Children's Radio Foundation (youth vaccine conversations)

On the ground community feedback

Deliberate, clear effort to encourage districts and community groups to join and contribute regularly

Synthesising diverse stakeholder views and inputs

- Tracks sentiment, myths, rumours, concerns, misinformation and disinformation
- Highlights how commonly the same issues emerge, across place and platforms
- Shows key differences

Limitations

Online:

- Volume of engagement doesn't always reflect sentiment/ sentiment trackers not accurate

- Not all "Forwards" matter – people share because it's interesting (videos of spoons sticking to a vaccinated magnetic arm, Justin Bieber), not just because hostile e.g. ACDP neck tumour

Off-line

- Anecdotal, depending on who reports from which district

- Variable sample

On-line – key features (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp)

Anti Vax – Mis/Disinformation	Pro-Vax
Almost all from other countries (particularly US)	Mostly local
Tracks big events - "anxiety points" on national, political or media agenda; driven as a SM strategy	Reports, pictures of SA people successfully having vaccines, memes, dance clips, etc.)

Allows for tailored communication and messaging

BUT … Well-funded disinformation organisations are being set up in SA to push similar messages, e.g., Pandemics – Data and Analytics (PANDA / link to nutraceutical industry)

Exception: Politics

Generates original content, online and off-line

Vaccines seen as:

- Part of President's 'agenda' of control (lockdowns)

- Selling out to Big Pharma

- Gateway to corruption (ANC needs COVID to continue, to increase funding and potential to profit)

e.g., November 2021 local elections: 'COVID Control' Conspiracy discounts vaccine efficacy

- "Turn down" infections in October to make things seem less bad for ANC electioneering

- "Turn up" infections in November (3rd Wave) to punish Gauteng metropoles for voting in opposition

Stokes the mistrust

In Government's ability to:

- Manage the pandemic
- Manage the vaccine roll-out
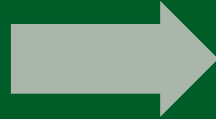- Prevent corruption and profiteering from emergencies e.g. KZN floods

Offline doesn't always echo social media disinformation

April-June 2021
Phase 2 roll out: 60+ years

Limited knowledge

- On-line/off-line concerns converged
- Safety, efficacy, access
- Myths
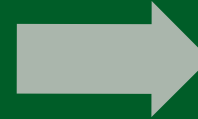 - Cause death, long-term disease
  - Ungodly

September 2021
Broader access (18 up)

Magnets, Bill Gates, death, population control/ population control/ population wipe out/ ungodly

- Legitimate questions/concerns Speed of development,
- Side effects, efficacy
- How to register
- Where to get vaccinated,
- Pregnancy, breastfeeding
- Sexual performance, fertility

December 2021/Jan 2022
Omicron, Boosters

Side effects, death, population control/ population wipe out/ungodly

- Why need boosters if it works?
- Why vaccinate if we can still get COVID?
- Vaccine certificates,
- Vaccines for children
- Where to go, how to register

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But … a problem when it happens

- Crossover – online misinformation influencing offline concerns, e.g.

- Intentional misunderstanding / disinformation around **the Pfizer report** showing 1,200 side effects

- Intensified community concerns and distrust, e.g. Govt keeping Pfizer despite report, shows it doesn't care

Integrated social listening meant partners could immediately intensify tailored communication around vaccine safety and side effects of all formulations across all channels.

Lessons for other emergencies

- UNICEF SACO instituted digital social listening for KZN floods

- Highlighted need to, e.g. :

  - Provide accurate information and address myths around floods

  - Foreground response for children out of school

  - Ensure national RCCE TWG has mandate/capacity to respond to all emergencies

  - Ensure provincial communicators prioritise RCCE in emergencies

  - Strengthen platforms for systematic community engagement, e.g. community radio, U-Report,

Thank You!