



Integrating MHPSS in Epidemic Response: A Case of Zambia Red Cross Society

Addressing Mental Health Needs During Public Health Crises

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Integration of MHPSS in the National Society (NS)

The COVID-19 had a big impact, transforming organizations like the Zambia Red Cross Society (ZRCS)

The crisis revealed mental health gaps, prompting a fundamental change for the National Society as volunteers identified psychosocial issues during RCCE. It highlighted the need for MHPSS leading to ZRCS to formally integrate and strengthen it as a core component of its disaster response strategies.

Behind my Mask



Why Integrate MHPSS as a core component for the NS?

- **Addresses emotional and mental well-being:** Helps individuals cope with trauma, stress, and anxiety.
- **Promotes resilience:** Supports recovery and strengthens community capacity to withstand future crises.
- **Reduces stigma:** Encourages open discussions about mental health and combats discrimination.
- **Holistic recovery:** Complements physical health, nutrition, and shelter interventions for complete support.
- **Improves overall outcomes:** Enhances long-term recovery and community stability.

Strategic Approach to MHPSS Integration

- Employed a dedicated MHPSS focal point person
- Senior Management Buy-In thereby ensuring that MHPSS is included as a critical component in the response which speaks to internal coordination.
- In all epidemic or project proposals, MHPSS is included in all budgets .
- **Multi-sectoral Response with Key Partners-Collaborators:** Zambia National Public Health Institute (ZNPHI), UNICEF, IFRC, Psychiatry Hospital - Chainama Hills hospital, Touch of friends, etc
- **Holistic Strategy:** Embedding MHPSS alongside WASH, Health Promotion, and Risk Communication, Mental health symposiums

Key Elements of ZRCS's MHPSS Strategy



1. Integration of MHPSS into Emergency Responses

- Recognizing mental health as a core component of health responses, the NS developed and has continued to scale up MHPSS interventions alongside physical health initiatives.
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) was introduced to provide immediate support during distress (Example 1,680 HHs visited during Covid 19 in 2021)



2. Capacity Building

- **Training Focus:** PFA, community engagement, and psychosocial support for volunteers, health professionals, and community leaders
- Trainings for staff and volunteers in MHPSS methodologies enabled them to address community needs effectively.
- Partnerships with health ministries helped standardize psychosocial interventions.

Goal: Sustainable MHPSS support beyond immediate crises



3. Community Engagement and Outreach

- By integrating MHPSS into Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), the NS has been able to address misinformation and stigma, promoting resilience and emotional well-being.
- Feedback mechanisms ensured community voices were heard and acted upon, all this has been through Community mobilization efforts, information desks, and anti-stigma campaigns

Goal: Sustainable MHPSS support beyond immediate crises



REDCROSS

Cross Sectoral Integration

MHPSS has been embedded within other response areas like :

- Cholera (WASH)
- COVID-19
- Anthrax
- Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
- OVC
- RP3-Epidemic Preparedness Project
- Restoring Family Links (RFL)-Refugee camps

- Ensuring a holistic approach to health and well-being.

MHPSS Interventions in Crisis Response

Cholera Response:

- Volunteers trained to provide **Psychological First Aid (PFA)** in treatment centers and psychosocial support tents.

COVID-19 Response:

- PFA training for volunteers in high-transmission areas.
- Anti-stigma campaigns to reduce community ostracism and support affected individuals.

GBV Support: Staff and volunteers trained in the **LIVES Approach** for trauma-informed, survivor-centered care.

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Project:

- 10 teachers trained in PFA to support OVCs effectively.

Anthrax Response:

- Volunteers trained to deliver PSS to affected individuals and families.

Staff Well-being:

- Regular self-care activities implemented for staff and field teams.



Self Care activities



Cont:MHPSS Interventions in Crisis Response

Epidemic Preparedness (RP3):

- Volunteers trained in PFA to provide ongoing PSS support during epidemic responses, ensuring continuity of care.

Drought Response

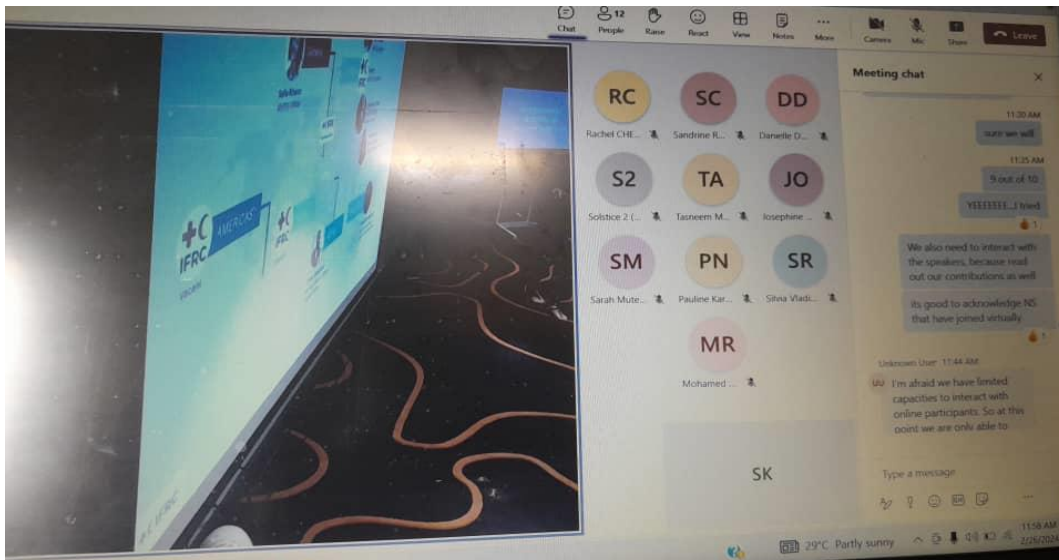
- Volunteers trained to provide immediate emotional support to individuals and families in distress.
- Psychosocial support offered to families affected by food insecurity and displacement.

Sustainability and Global Networks



Africa RCRC MHPSS (EN)

- Participation in global clusters; Monthly meetings with Southern African Red Cross Societies (**Africa RCRC MHPSS Cluster**), which facilitates knowledge sharing and technical support, ensuring that the NS remains aligned with best practices.



Challenges in Integrating MHPSS:

- **Limited Resources:** Insufficient funding to establish a dedicated budget for MHPSS interventions.
- **Coordination and Collaboration Gaps:**
 - Poor coordination between partners and stakeholders.
 - Fragmented implementation leading to duplication or unmet needs.

Conclusion

- **Holistic Approach to Crisis Response**
 - **ZRCS's Integration of MHPSS:** Supports not only physical health but also emotional resilience
 - **Outcome:** Empowered communities better equipped for future challenges

Pictures of Psychosocial Support activities





PSS for Children during Covid 19



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RED DUAL CAMERA

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Staff Lunch Time Mental Health Talk





Thank you!

