Chapter 6:

Tracking disinformation in ✳ the One Health space

Internews

Internews Health Journalism Network

clara lionel foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation

In the aftermath of a disaster, from earthquakes to hurricanes, survival depends on getting reliable answers to the most important questions. When communities don't have trustworthy sources of information available, rumors and misinformation spread rapidly, not only adding to the stress and anxiety of affected people, but also potentially putting their lives at risk.

Throughout the implementation of the Building Community Resilience project in Barbados and Dominica, Internews has leveraged its **Rumor Tracking** methodology to identify and analyze rumors and trends on key topics related to One Health through social media monitoring and community forums.

What exactly is a rumor?

According to the Oxford dictionary a rumor is 'A currently circulating story or report of uncertain or doubtful truth'. In general, a rumor is a piece of information that includes some kind of misinformation or misconception in it. However, often rumors also contain a grain of truth.

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Internews first developed its Rumor Tracking methodology in 2014 in Liberia, to address the deadly Ebola outbreak. Since then, Internews has refined and adapted this methodology to address misinformation during humanitarian crises around the world.

Some of the most common words, or word combinations, tracked for rumors throughout this project in Barbados and Dominica include **climate change, weather, environment, agriculture, health, health care, invasive species, infectious diseases, and COVID-19 vaccines.**

Rumors Has it: A Practical Guide to Working with Rumors

Working with rumors in its simplest form is about three complementary steps: listening, verifying and engaging. These steps represent a cyclical process of dialogue with the community that builds trust, enhances relationships with the community and improves program impact.

DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH RUMORS

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Misinformation and disinformation are two kinds of rumors

There are two sub-groups of rumors, which are defined by the intent of the people spreading them:

Misinformation is incorrect information spread by people without the intent to deceive, for example through a misunderstanding. **Disinformation** is incorrect information spread by people in order to deceive or manipulate others. An example of this is 'fake news', which is disinformation disguised as news, often spread for political or economic gain.

The **Internews Trust Framework** offers a perspective to gauge the presence of trust and, most importantly, to understand why certain sources of information might be more, or less trusted. This framework consists of four key elements related to trust: Accuracy, Proximity, Agency, and Intention.

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READ ABOUT BUILDING TRUST IN THE ONE HEALTH SPACE

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Insights from Dominica and Barbados

The relatively small information ecosystems of island nations, such as Dominica and Barbados, can amplify and contain rumors at the same time. In other words, rumors tend to be **reactive** and linked to what is happening on the ground. One Health is a broad category. No mis- or disinformation on One Health, does not mean there are no information gaps in this space. Keep on listening!

Lessons learned from the social media listening exercise in Dominica and Barbados:

There continues to be COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

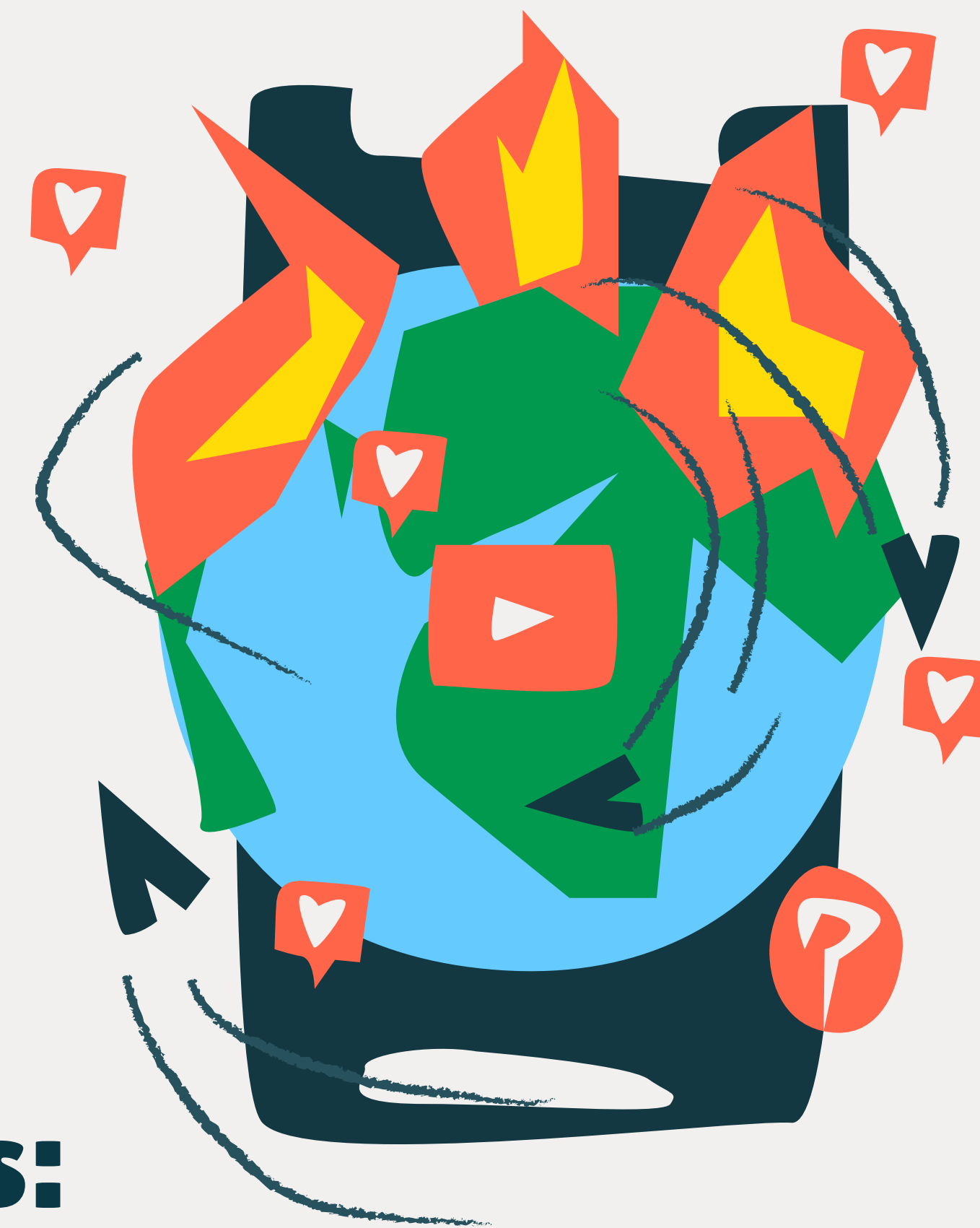There is growing distrust of the health sector and health professionals.

Yes, the weather is changing but, who is behind it?

Distrust towards mainstream media is growing.

No fact-checking entity that independently verifies information.

Key Takeaways:

LISTEN to what communities are talking about; **IDENTIFY** what people's information needs are; and **INVEST** in basic public education around One Health.

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