

The Gambia Government Social Networking Coordination-Preparedness and Response to COVID-19

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Abstract

The 95th National Situation Report revealed that The Gambia has 61 confirmed cases, 27 recoveries, and 3 died as of July 5, 2020. Cases are mostly imported with few local transfers. COVID-19 has now gone beyond health crisis which required a holistic coordination approach to curb the virus lessons learned from countries. The fight is an all-inclusive networking approach to curb the spread. The research objective is to map out government social networking and teamwork preparedness and responding to COVID-19. The methodology of the research is a qualitative approach through online literature reviewing newspapers, reports, and articles. The secondary source of data was also harvested from the Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020. This mapping aims to identify and know partnership collaboration and interaction as a team working towards the objectives and goal for preparedness and response to prevent repetition of efforts. Social Networking Analysis (SNA) becomes a tool for social network limelight showing the connection for coordination, interaction, communication on common interests, shared values, financial exchanges, and standard operating procedures against the implementation of COVID-19 programs. There will be the maximisation of duplication of resources and efforts and informed decisions on who is doing what, where, when, and how.

Keywords: COVID-19, Preparedness, Response, Coordination, Government.

Introduction

The Gambia is found on coast of West Africa between latitude 13° and 14°N, longitude 15° west. The land area of 11, 000km² and encircled by the Republic of Senegal from the Atlantic Ocean, West Africa. The climate is semi-arid, five months rainy season June to October and seven months dry season November to May with annual rainfall between 850mm and 1000mm (NDMA and Partners, 2011). The Gambia Bureau of Statistics, the population of The Gambia, is approximately 2 million people (GBoS, 2013).

Globally, over 7 million coronavirus cases and over four hundred thousand deaths as of June 13, 2020, according to world meters. This has led the numerous states of emergency declarations by the government of The Gambia on travel restriction, social distancing, border closure, and non-essential services to 'flattening the curve' to ease the workload on health sector and workers (Brugnara & Marx, 2020). Coronavirus is a zoonotic (Ministry of Health, 2020) disease transfers from human-to-human, and the first outbreak was in Wuhan City, China December 2019 (Sanneh, 2020). The virus threatens world health (Aylward (WHO) & Liang, 2020) and WHO declaration on COVID-19 a pandemic.

Since then, the 'honeymoon' period has ended for The Gambia. On March 17, 2020, the Ministry of Health confirmed the country's first case. From that to date, the 95th national situation report confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus as of July 5, 2020, under the period of review, 61 confirmed cases, 27 recoveries, and 3 died (Epidemiology and Disease Control Unit, 2020). Therefore, Countries have different preparedness and response strategies tackling the health and economic crisis of COVID-19. Hence, no uniform preparedness and response. Admittedly, risk spread transversely. The Gambia mainstreamed with health, and economic imbalance exacerbated the lives and livelihoods of its citizens (Shearing, 2020) and will create a vacuum in the sustainable Development Agenda 2030 (Djalante et al, 2020). The government has used its networks to prepare and respond to COVID 19 with the requirement of disaster risk governance Sendai Framework 2015-2030 (UNDRR, 2015) to strengthen and manage all disasters. No one can do it alone. Therefore, the fight is everyone's business for a healthy environment and a healthy nation.

This paper will give a snapshot of The Gambia government coordination preparedness and response to COVID-19 in collaboration with the partner's respective interventions from a qualitative online literature reviewing of newspapers, reports, and articles. With an additional review of The Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020 and COVID-19 outbreak situational reports and Social Network Analysis (SNA) tool SocNetv 2.5. The objective is to map out government social networking and teamwork preparedness and responding to COVID-19. The Gambia has poor health facilities like any other developing countries in African. Upscaling the facilities, the government had to knock doors of partners for early action to intersect the impact beforehand which led to the reactivation of the 2014 Ebola Response Plan as a strategy used to fight the pandemic in The Gambia.

The Ebola which challenged African countries 2014 has similar protocols, symptoms, scopes, and operations mode to coronavirus which gave an advantage to The Gambia and partners in their efforts to the preparedness and response to COVID-19. The Ebola plan was very effective during the time in building the resilience-the health security of the country from the Ebola virus no case reported. Both plans were aligned to the National Disaster Risk Management Plan of the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) and Health Sector Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan related to all Hazards (HSEPRP) 2017-2019 (Ministry of Health, 2020). The Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020, concentrated on the following-detection and response, entry point's surveillance, risk communication, laboratory collaboration with national and international partners, collecting samples, coordination, investigation and contact tracing (Ministry of Health, 2020) towards the implementation. Partners have contributed in all angles collaborating with the government on how to build the resilience of the country by reducing duplications of efforts and resources towards common objectives and goals.

The research objective is to map out government social networking and teamwork preparedness and responding to COVID-19.

Literature Review

Preparedness and Response

The government has taken the driver's seat collaborating and consulting partners on the coordination of COVID-19 which initiated set a National Health Emergency Committee tasked to developed Plan of Action that would amplify the national surveillance systems for preparedness and response and a National Coordination Team (Ministry of Health, 2020) which comprised all partners from government, UN system, NGOs, CBOs, International organisations, multi and bilateral organisations and Private sectors to be given weekly briefing on respective interventions and supports. Suspension of non-essential services was the first action followed by banning public congregations, and a general lockdown with travel restriction coupled with WHO advices for the containment of the pandemic. Sallah (2020), the government pronounced on the flexibility to open traffic on state emergency for business on food to be operating during the day within a specific period. To admit the economic and social expenditure, consequences and its importance, the government 'flatten the curve' of contamination and safeguard healthcare systems before inundation with cases (Shepherd & Van der Mark, 2020) with the frequent renewal of the declaration of a state of emergency with supportive initiatives and strategies through partnership collaboration.

Five million (GMD500) Gambian dalasi was allocated by the government to reinforce the government health system efforts in curbing COVID-19. The virus led to physical and mental health stress compounded with panic-buying and stockpiling, which contributed to the socio-economic hassled of the vulnerable. Food distribution towards food security resilience, the government of The Gambia gave food aid support worth over seven hundred and thirty-four million (GMD734,254,864) to support 84% deserving households countrywide which include rice, oil and sugar (Room, 2020) to vulnerable people responding to the humanitarian effort. (UNDP, 2020), the government pardoned 121 prisoners adhering to WHO advise on social distancing and in collaboration and consultation with partners. It also developed The Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020 budgeted US\$8.8 million to tackle the status quo in the Gambia for resource mobilisation tool knowing the very fact that the government cannot do it alone.

UNDP 2020, the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Regional Integration & Employment held a press release informing the populace the government of The Gambia, Endorsement of Essential Commodities Emergency Powers Regulations, 2020 retain prices of essential commodities and banned price rocketing on food commodity prices and possible scarcities equally barring the re-export of commodities and petroleum products.

According to Jeffang, 2020, the government provided two hundred thousand (200,000) assistance to people involved in retail and service sectors. Tax returns for 2019 deferred to support community business effected the first quarter 2020 to the second quarter 2020. Further mentioned, current assessments ongoing to map out possibilities support of government-Small and Medium Scale Enterprises. Transparency and accountability purpose, the government opened the COVID-19 account to manage all financial supports from partners. Also, to speed up well-organised and operative management of funds meant for socio-economic support ebbed with informing the populace on expenditure on all processes from the funds. Two thousand tonnes of fertiliser support to the farmers for the 2020 coming rainy season to strengthen food security efforts in the country.

Literature reviewing online newspapers, reports, and articles. An additional reviewing of The Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020 and COVID-19

outbreak situational reports and Social Network Analysis (SNA) tool SocNetv 2.5. According to the 95th national situational report confirmed cases of the new coronavirus as of July 5, 2020, under the period of review, 61 confirmed cases, 27 recoveries, and 3 died (Epidemiology and Disease Control Unit, 2020). Review and analysis of current responses to COVID-19 in Indonesia: Period of January to March 2020 (Djalante et al, 2020), Analysis of government official twitters during Covid-19 crisis in Indonesia (Salahudin, Sulistyaningsih, Lutfi & Sihidi, 2020), Preventing internal COVID-19 outbreaks within businesses and institutions: The context and content of social networking and analysis is related to the Gambia preparedness and response plan towards COVID-19 whereby the government attempting efforts fighting the pandemic through networking and collaboration based on comparative advantages.

Research Method

This study used literature reviewing approach by collecting data from online newspapers, reports, and articles. An additional reviewing of The Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020 and COVID-19 outbreak situational reports and Social Network Analysis (SNA) tool SocNetv 2.5 gives social contact between Ministry of Health and partners and analyse network structure for coordination. Also, identify partnership coordination, communication and monitoring of the whole operations. Mostly, every node of the network symbolises organisations, people or groups, location labels by the direction of points to know the network dynamics. These days, SNA is in fashion and snowballing in researches especially the health sector to the present trials as strong networking in the “Together We Can” against COVID-19 (Gallardo, de Arroyabe & Arranz, 2020; Xie, Han & Skitmore, 2019; Zhao, 2020) for risk management. Therefore, data elaborated network coordination and communication platform categorising nodes of partner’s connection and interaction among players and reduced duplication of resources and efforts and informed decisions the on operation.



Figure 1. Government & Partners in the preparedness and response to COVID-19 source (Epidemiology and Disease Control Unit, 2020)

Results and Discussions

Since the declaration by WHO on COVID-19 pandemic, The Gambia government strategies how to response to global outbreak strengthening collaboration and partnership with different institutions ranging from national and international for support to curb the ‘invisible enemy’ coronavirus. The Ministry of Health (MoH) as the leading institution liaised immediately with partners on the way forward to contain the spread in the country. Press release held January 27, 2020, informing the populace about the pandemic and its precautions as to WHO standard case definition protocols and advices for adaption which was later shared with regional

health offices to start-up immediate preparedness and response by strengthening surveillance at entry points of the country such as airport, river, and road (WHO, 2020). Besides, the government of The Gambia through the Ministry of Health with national and international partners developed tools and protocols on the following: case definition, case detection, and management, sample collection and transportation to designated laboratories (WHO, 2020).

With immediate effect, the Ministry of Health called for stakeholders meeting on February 3, 2020, to reactive multi-sectoral National Health Emergency Steering Committee and the 2014 Ebola Response Plan to kick start risk communication and community engagement through local media and toll-free line (1025) which was used during the Ebola crisis rejuvenated to provide adequate updates to the populace as situations unfolding on COVID-19 at the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) as government’s preparedness and response coupled with television platform daily briefings (WHO, 2020).

Operations were facilitated by the Social Network Analysis (SNA) tool which was unknowingly used to investigate how critical social structures networks in The Gambia towards COVID-19 management. The tool help to assess and monitor how organisations, stakeholders and partners collaborate and interact as a team towards the same objectives and goal to strengthen preparedness and response capacity of The Gambia. The 2014 Ebola Response Plan was used as a guide and strategy to bring partners for the implementation and development of The Gambia National COVID-19 Response Plan 2020. The research used the SNA tool SocNetv 2.5 as the platform showing the connection of coordination, interaction, and communication channels on common interests, shared values, financial exchanges, standard operating procedures, and implementation of COVID-19 programs. The tool informed authorities on who is doing what, where, when, and how during their coordination meeting and sharing of weekly situation report.

Table 1. Government & Partners matrix

No	Partners	No	Partners
1	Medical Research Council	16	FAO
2	The Gambia Red Cross Society	17	UNDP
3	National Disaster Management Agency	18	ECOWAS
4	Jack Ma Foundation	19	Chinese Embassy, The Gambia
5	World Bank	20	DRAMAN
6	Resolve	21	Action Against Hunger
7	World Food Programme	22	Paradise Foundation
8	The Gambia Youth Council	23	NEA
9	UNFPA	24	GCAA
10	UNICEF	25	TAF
11	The Global Fund	26	TIKA
12	Child Fund	27	EU
13	IOM	28	Tony Blair Institution for Global Change
14	GCCI	29	UNAIDS
15	Africell	30	Ministry of Health
		31	WHO

Table 1 showing number and list of partners in the preparedness and response to COVID-19.

Table 2. Column delimiter in Edgelist

31	30	4	30	18	1	30	25	1
31	1	2	30	19	1	30	26	1
30	30	4	30	27	1	30	28	1
30	31	1	30	14	1	30	15	1
30	3	1	30	13	1	30	12	1
30	1	2	30	8	1	30	4	1
30	2	1	30	23	1	30	6	1
30	17	1	30	20	1	30	21	1
30	10	1	30	5	1	30	22	1
30	9	1	30	11	1	3	30	4
30	7	1	30	16	1	1	30	4

The above table is the delimiter edge list of government and partners and connection to each other.

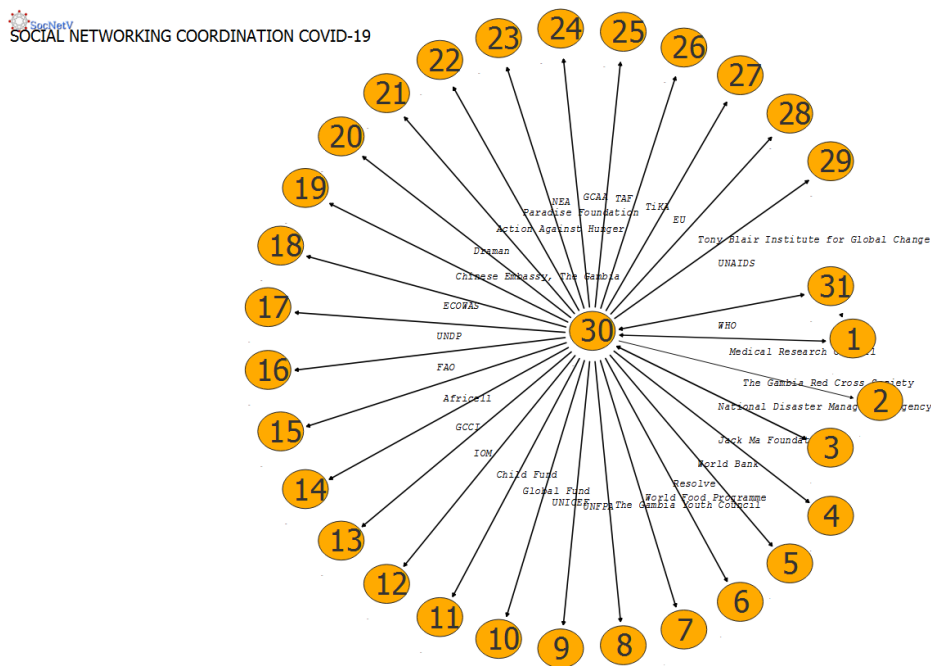


Figure 2. Social Networking Coordination COVID-19

The Social Networking Analysis gives social contact between the Ministry of Health and partners and analyse network structure for coordination. Also, identify government and partnership coordination, communication and monitoring of the whole operation (Salahudin, Sulistyaningsih, Lutfi & Sihidi, 2020). Every node of the network symbolises partner label by the direction of chains to know the network dynamics. The node in the centre (Degree Centrality) the Ministry Health with strong coordination, communication, and monitoring interventions of the COVID-19. From the analysis above, node 31 (WHO), 1 (Medical Research Council) and 3 (National Disaster Management Agency) are the greatest contributed. For instance, WHO is the global coordinator of COVID-19, Medical Research Council handles the testing for the government due to absence of capacity and equipment at the central government and National Disaster Management Agency coordinates the country's

disaster issues. The interaction depends on the level of comparative advantage towards curbing the virus.

SNA gives representation of partner institutions equally edges. This tool analyse network coordination and communication platform categorising nodes of partner's connection and interaction among players. The connection shows the participation and communication process for coordination of the COVID-19 through the Ministry of Health in the Network of Degree of Centrality which is the epicentre for updating and receiving updates and the way forward from partners on operations. This is simultaneous internal information sharing, communication and interaction between government of The Gambia and partner institutions Social Networking Coordination-Preparedness and Response to COVID-19.

The signing of Proclamation and gazette under Section 34(1) (b) of the 1997 Constitution. Amended state emergency rules for flexibility of traffic open for essentials business for food to operate to a certain period during the day. Ten million dollar grant (\$10 million) emergency support from the International Development Association (IDA) through the World Bank to The Gambia combating the pandemic (Sallah, 2020). Over seven million food aid supporting 84% of households and one hundred and twenty-one prisoners pardoned (Room, 2020). Developed National COVID-19 Response Plan budgeted US\$8.8 million to tackle the status quo in the Gambia. Endorsement of the Essential Commodities Emergency Powers Regulations, 2020 retain prices of essential commodities and ban price rocketing on food prices and possible scarcities equally barring the re-export of commodities and petroleum products (UNDP, 2020). Deferment of tax returns for 2019 from the first quarter of 2020 to the second quarter. Provision of two thousand tonnes of fertiliser aid to the farmers for the 2020 coming rainy season to strengthen food security efforts (Jeffang, 2020). Through the Ministry of Health to the government of The Gambia continuous preparedness and response to COVID-19 opened windows for partnership and donation between the African Union, Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, World Food Programme, Ethiopian Airlines and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia donated assorted medical supply (Ministry of Health, 2020).

The UN System in the country joined to give support government in terms of coordination of epidemiological and laboratory surveillance, psychosocial care, recovery efforts on livelihood, logistics and safety, case management, risk communication, and social mobilisation to the ministry of health. Also developed UN COVID-19 Response and Accountability Framework to mobilise resources for the government of The Gambia for recovery and building back better processes. In a similar vein, comprehensive socio-economic impact assessment consultancy works ongoing to informed decision and action (UNDP, 2020).

Conclusions

The SNA analysis government of The Gambia and partner's communication, monitoring, and coordination of COVID-19 programmes. The tool is relevant maximising resources for better inputs and outcomes of results to avoid duplication of efforts among partners informing who is doing what, where, when, and how on COVID-19. This trickle-down to regional offices, the community for collaboration, communication, interaction, and consultation mapped out structure relationship directed and undirected across organisational settings implementing the COVID-19 programmes. Facilitates easy coordination meeting and decision making for preparedness and response coupled with common interests, shared values, financial exchanges, standard operating procedures identifying linkage of directed and undirected interrelationship partnership with different comparative advantages in combating the public health emergency. This has manifested government role and

support to partnership collaboration and coordination efforts under one common platform to "Together We Can" in coordinating COVID-19 in the country.

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