

RUMOR BULLETIN #2

RUMOR TRACKING UPDATE FOR HUMANITARIANS
NOVEMBER 1-12, 2020



Internews

The Rooted in Trust project at Internews, funded by USAID, aims to respond to the “infodemic” (disinformation, fake news, rumors, and excess information) that exacerbates discrimination and affects access to basic services and assistance for vulnerable communities in Nariño. It is particularly focused on the migrant and LGBTQI+ population in Ipiales and Tumaco, Colombia.

This periodic collection of the rumors that circulate throughout the department of Nariño aims to provide humanitarian and public health organizations suggestions for integrating community perspectives and concerns into their communication activities.

In the beginning of the pandemic, Nariño had 148 beds in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Today, that number has increased to 311, a 110% increase in the occupancy of the ICU, according to the reports from the Departmental Institute of Health in Nariño (IDSN). In June, for the first time in history, the local hospital of Tumaco received 15 beds for the ICU. The challenges persist, however, since the port does not yet have specialized personnel to operate the new equipment.



Source:
<https://www.las2orillas.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/salud.jpg>

HOW WE DO IT

The Venga le Cuenta Rumor Bulletin is the product of the collection of rumors detected by the Colombian team as part of the Rooted in Trust project. In the period of October 15-30th of this year, the team collected 35 rumors from social media sources commonly used in Nariño (15 from Facebook, 4 WhatsApp, 11 Twitter y 5 from other social media). The rumors discussed here were selected through a risk analysis that brings to the forefront the disinformation with the highest risk and potential impact on the communities of Ipiales and Tumaco, which are the target communities of the Rooted in Trust Colombia project.

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY SAY?

“The relatives of one person reported dead from COVID-19 were curious, so they opened the body bag and saw that the body was alive and under a strong sedative. COVID-19 Cartel... this is Colombia...”



Male

Facebook comment, Oct. 2020

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- The rumors about corruption in the pandemic create distrust in the providers of health services and can cause people to abstain from using the services available when they are sick, potentially putting their lives at risk.
- The lack of trust in authorities can cause stigmatization and discrimination towards medical personnel and patients with COVID-19, violation of patient confidentiality as well the obstruction of ambulance routes and medical supplies.
- The lack of trust in medical personnel and rumors about their involvement in corruption can result in acts of violence. In 2020, 38% of attacks against the Medical Mission have been directly related to the pandemic.

FACTS

- Authorities have created criteria and measures for medical institutions to follow when managing patients with COVID-19 as well as protocols for managing the deceased, which specifically order the cremation of cadavers suspected or proven to have had COVID-19. These protocols ensure that there is no additional spread of the virus even after the person has died.
- Currently, the Colombian Office of the Attorney General has opened 837 investigations of corruption in the contracts created in the framework of the pandemic against 417 mayors, 26 governors and 32 municipal councils. In Nariño, authorities report 43 disciplinary files for alleged irregularities related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In June, the Minister of Health, Fernando Ruíz, reported the existence of a “COVID-19 Cartel” that keeps patients in the ICU to charge more money for each person occupying beds and using a ventilator.

Source: Ministry of Health, Attorney General of Colombia

HOW CAN HUMANITARIAN ACTORS HELP?

- Strengthening communication processes with communities (RCCE) and providing them with relevant information in a transparent and timely manner is a key factor in creating trust in populations that have suffered from corruption, as it helps them build their own criteria when facing rumors and misinformation.
- Increasing accountability to aid recipients can empower beneficiaries to speak out against corruption, even though local power structures and inhibitions may make it difficult.
- Ensure the provision of confidential and appropriate mechanisms of reporting issues and implement channels to facilitate reports of corruption from staff and communities.

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY SAY?

"THE COVID-19 PARTY IS OVER AND NOW WE HAVE A SCARY REALITY...Each time the message about COVID-19 becomes clearer, now we understand that it was more of a political show on a massive scale than a deadly pandemic like the media made us think at the beginning."

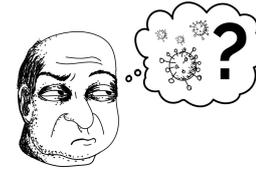
THE COVID-19 PARTY HAS ENDED

The end of lockdown in Nariño has sparked more rumors about the "conspiracy theory" that returning to regulated economic activities proves that the pandemic was always a farse.

Male, Nariño

Facebook Comment, October 2020

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



- The economic revival conveys a false sense of security and leads to fewer people following the physical distancing guidelines. This may increase the number of infections and exacerbate the situation, as experts have warned of the possibility of a second nationwide outbreak of the virus.
- The economic uncertainty makes people look for other economic opportunities, exposing themselves to COVID-19. This reality heightens the vulnerability of migrants.
- Colombia is going through a crisis of trust in its institutions. The pandemic has highlighted the structural causes of this feeling and hindered collective actions to minimize the crisis generated by COVID-19.
- This rumor has an element of distrust in the authorities. As a response to the Ebola pandemic, parts of the population that did not trust the government took fewer precautions to prevent the spread of the virus.

FACTS

- According to a survey by Pulso Social from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the economic situation in 74.3% of homes in Pasto has declined in the past 7 months. The growing economic crisis has necessitated the reopening of the country, but in no way does it indicate that the pandemic does not exist.
- Tumaco has a population of 222,000 inhabitants and around 88% of them work in informal businesses. 90% of those businesses report that COVID-19 has negatively affected their enterprise.
- The Solidarity Income Program implemented by the National Government as a response to COVID-19 (160 thousand pesos per family) does not impact the country's ability to overcome poverty in the long-term.
- On March 12th, the government declared an economic and social State of Emergency with the aim of implementing measures to cope with the crisis resulting from COVID-19.



Source: <https://eltiempo.com/cultural/gente/casos-de-colombianos-que-niegan-que-el-coronavirus-existe-509066>

Sources: President of the Republic,

Department of National Planning, House of Commerce in Tumaco, National Federation of Businesses

HOW CAN HUMANITARIAN ACTORS HELP?

- The work between media and humanitarian actors requires further strengthening and coordination. Effects of deepening the relationship between both are: building trust in key actors in the territory, accessing reliable information, and becoming a channel for community concerns.
- Create effective channels for community feedback and their concerns about and mistrust in institutions. Provide information to strengthen institutional capacities to respond to corruption.
- Share assistance routes for economic emergencies and offer early recovery programs with an emphasis on programs that specifically cater to migrant population.
- Provide greater visibility to biosafety and self-care protocols for the phase of economic reactivation. The infection rate decreased from 2.5 at the beginning of the pandemic to 1.04 in August, which is an indicator of the importance face masks and social distancing have in public transportation and at the workplace.



Any suggestions or information that might support or help government authorities and humanitarian agencies to manage disinformation are welcome.

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