

Strengthening the Zambian MOH to implement an effective COVID-19 communications strategy via strategic partnerships

Mwansa Njelesani¹, Answell Chipukuma¹; Sarah Hatchard¹, Francis Kasonde¹, Mercy Chisashi¹; Malia Duffy²; Caitlin Madevu-Matson²; Chando Mapoma³; Musonda Musonda³; Sarah Illingworth³

¹JSI/USAID DISCOVER-Health Project, Lusaka, Zambia

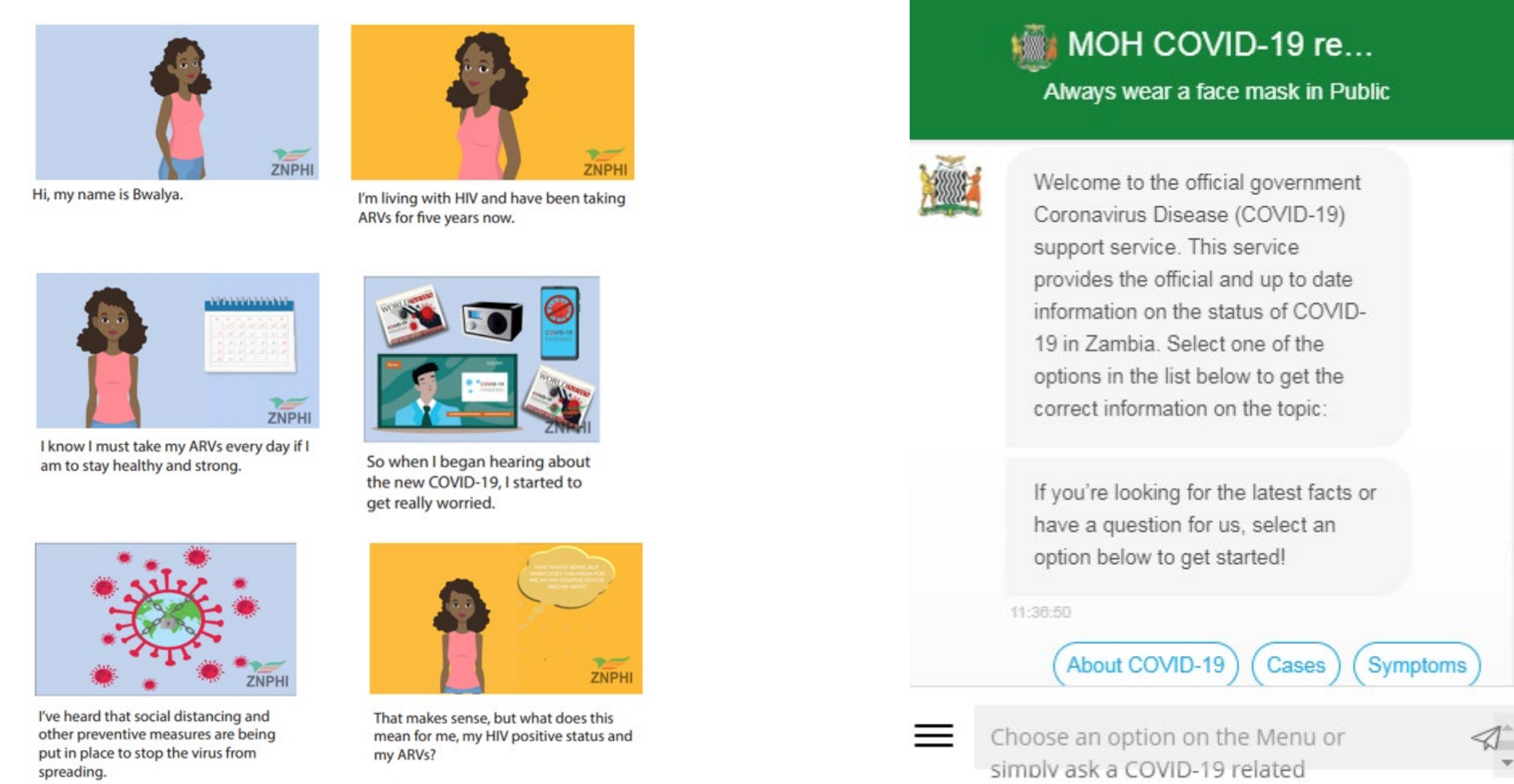
²John Snow Inc. (JSI), Boston, USA

³USAID /Zambia Mission, Lusaka, Zambia

Background

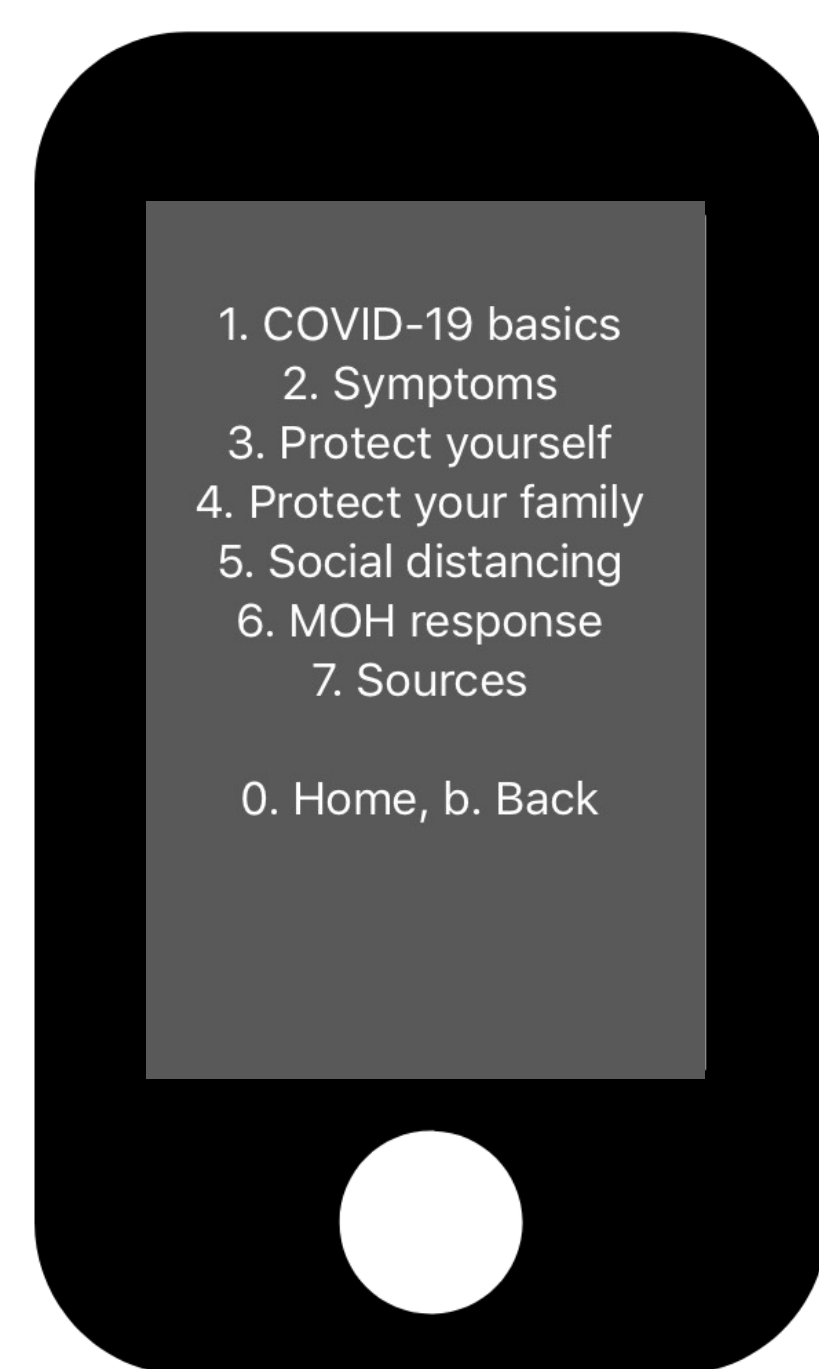
JSI's USAID DISCOVER-Health project was designated by USAID as its lead to support the national COVID-19 communications response in Zambia, through the Zambian Partners Against COVID-19, under Ministry of Health (MOH) and Zambia National Public Health Institute (ZNPHI) leadership.

Project support ensures that MOH & ZNPHI are the first and trusted sources of information for the public, and that scientifically based and timely information is provided.



PLHIV: Animation Storyboard

MOH Chatbot



COVID-19 USSD platform



Chief Kanye in North Western Province

Response

USAID DISCOVER-Health supported MOH/ZNPHI to implement a comprehensive and effective COVID-19 communications strategy, through the following activities:

- Developed a national **Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) plan** and associated TORs.
- Brokered **strategic partnerships** to strengthen MOH/ZNPHI's social media presence – on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp – and other media channels.
 - Local creative agency for TV and Radio PSAs (Media 365)
 - Channel-management agency (Young and Rubicam)
- Supported MOH/ZNPHI to develop **accurate messaging content**.
- Enabled **trusted public communication** via a BOT on the MOH/ZNPHI websites and social media platforms.
- Expanded a project-developed PrEP USSD phone platform to include **freely accessible COVID-19 information**.
- Used human-centred design techniques to **develop user-informed messages and engage communities** via in-person/megaphone, radio, and television announcements and adverts.
 - Included addressing COVID-19 concerns of Zambia's **1.2 million people living with HIV**.
- Trained and **leveraged the influence of 277 Chiefs**, and the trust Zambians have in them, to disseminate correct COVID-19 information across Zambia.
- Supported COVID-19 messaging in **prisons**.
- Supported the revision, printing, translation and distribution of MOH/ZNPHI **IEC print materials**.



Chiefs and Chieftainesses following COVID-19 Sensitization session

For questions or more information, email: mwansa_njelesani@zm.jsi.com

Results

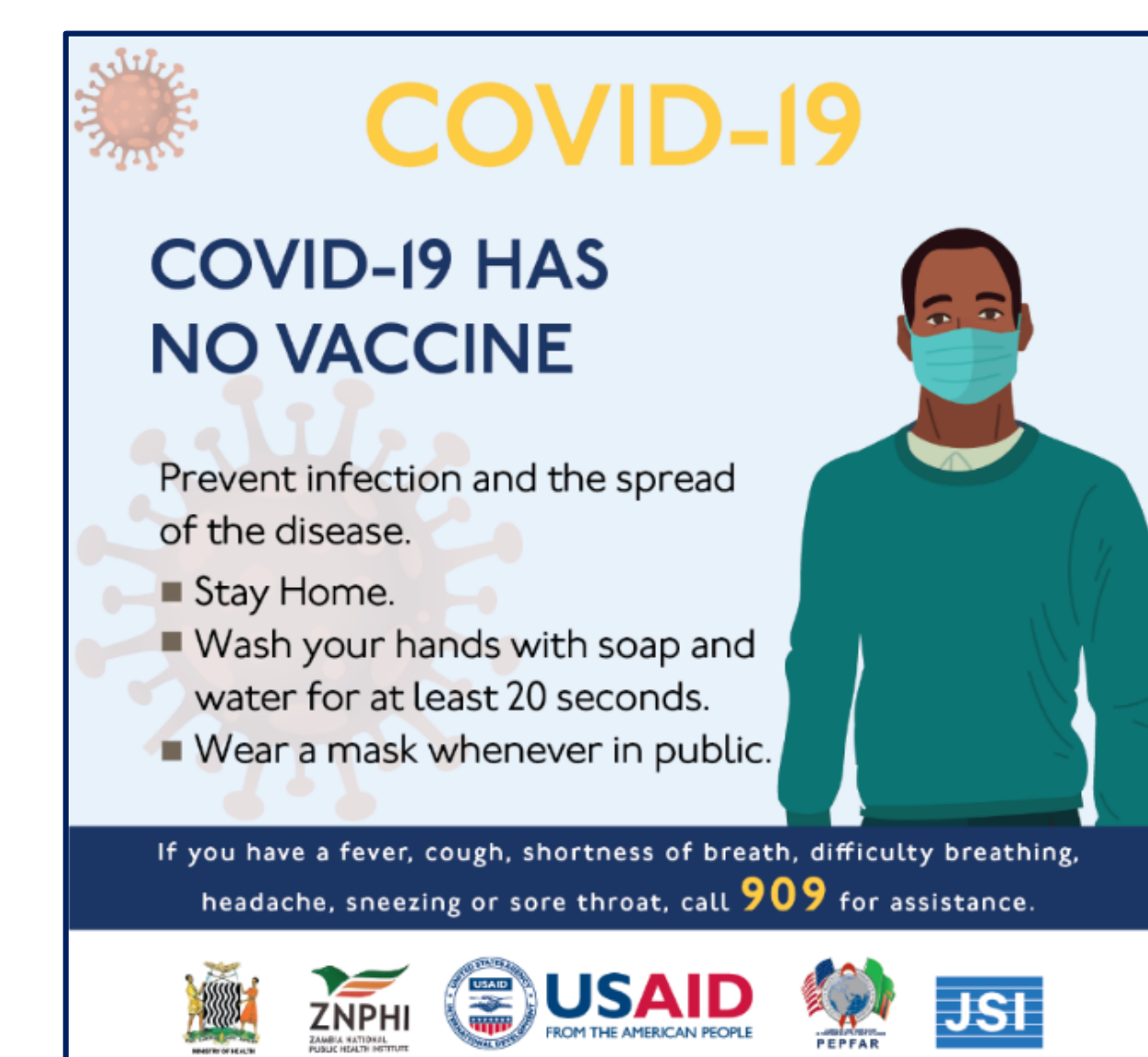
Early in the COVID-19 emergency, in the face of relentless misinformation, MOH/ZNPHI needed to project authority as the most credible source of COVID-19 information in Zambia. USAID DISCOVER-Health worked in the background to support well-managed strategic partnerships between MOH/ZNPHI and civic leaders, donors, UN agencies, the private sector, other implementing partners, and beneficiary communities, and to support effective multi-channel/media implementation.

Since 23rd March 2020, there have been:

- 720,000 MOH BOT interactions
- 11,200 USSD-code interactions
- 346,838 impressions on ZNPHI Facebook page (1-14 June 2020)
- ZNPHI Twitter page rated as the no.1 source of COVID-19 information in Zambia
- Wide dissemination of COVID-19 information and messages by the trained 277 Chiefs through local radio, to over 10 million Zambian rural-dwellers.

Conclusion

Coordinated partnerships have ensured a trusted, comprehensive, and targeted COVID-19 communications strategy that effectively reaches different population segments across Zambia, and should be maintained and leveraged for other health programs.



ZNPHI social media graphics



TV PSA