

# Ann Kite Yo Pale

LET THEM  
SPEAK

Best Practice and Lessons Learned in  
Communication with Disaster Affected  
Communities: *Haiti 2010*



BY IMOGEN WALL WITH YVES GERALD CHÉRY





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### Cover photo:

A man listens to a radio at a refugee camp in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010. AP PHOTO/JAE C. HONG

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# Executive summary

## Ann Kite Yo Pale: Let Them Speak

**T**HE 7.0 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE that struck the south of Haiti on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010 triggered the largest humanitarian response since the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004.

Hundreds of international agencies launched emergency responses, and local organisations, the Haitian diaspora, the private sector and many thousands of individuals also poured energy, money and time into finding ways to help.

The earthquake was unfortunately not the only serious emergency to strike Haiti in 2010. The outbreak of cholera in the town of St Marc on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2010 brought a new, highly infectious and deadly disease to a country with weak sanitation and health systems, and no knowledge or understanding of this illness. The response of communication actors from the first hours was essential to the survival of potentially thousands of people, whose ability to recognise symptoms and take prompt action was literally the difference between life and death.

This paper attempts to capture some of the communication work implemented by a whole range of partners, and to identify what was delivered from the perspectives of those affected by these two major but very different emergencies. The purpose of this exercise is to inform the continuing response in Haiti and to provide practical case studies and analysis of best practice models that may be useful elsewhere.

While much was done in Haiti, more remains to be done in this sector, both in Haiti and at global level. It is ironic that a disaster response conducted in a communication-rich urban environment should be widely criticised from the earliest days for being so disconnected from the local context. The richness and sophistication of some aspects of the local media response is another key observation from Haiti.

This generated models outside the framework of the international humanitarian response, and this study makes a particular effort to learn lessons from local responses.

“We are the eyes and ears of Leogane and provide basic but essential information. We have of course focussed on the earthquake since the 12<sup>th</sup>. We guide the population, tell them where distributions are taking place, what to do in order to get their share of the humanitarian help. We relay the information.”

ELMONT PIERRE, DIRECTOR, COOL FM,  
LEOGANE

### THE DEMAND FOR COMMUNICATION

Both the earthquake and cholera responses make it clear that the demand for information from affected communities is huge, from the very earliest stages of an emergency. From the survivors queuing outside radio stations to the overwhelming response to projects that facilitated communication, it was clear that disaster-affected Haitians regarded information as critical.

“This communication system [the BHN/SAKS Community Address System] is the single most important piece of assistance we have received since the earthquake.”

WILLY PETIT-HOMME, COMMUNITY LEADER, LEOGANE

## COMMUNICATION WORK IS POSSIBLE AND IMPORTANT FROM THE EARLIEST STAGE OF A RESPONSE

The local communication response to the earthquake began within minutes as survivors began using phones to find out if friends and family were alive or dead, to broadcast their location (especially those who were trapped) or to ask for help. Driven by survivor demand, emergency broadcast by local radio, including ad hoc family reunification systems, were running within days. While international agencies were slower to address information needs, the experience of media development organisation Internews and the World Food Programme (WFP) shows not only that effective communication work can be launched within days, but that it can have an impact on the effectiveness of operational delivery.

“Although it is too early to have a proper understanding of the success or otherwise of WFP’s local media campaign in Haiti in the early weeks following the quake, the fact that WFP’s initial scale-up of operations subsequently rolled out smoothly and peacefully, can in some measure at least, be attributed to this work.”

WFP SENIOR STAFF MEMBER

## LISTENING AND COMMUNICATING ARE VITAL

Two of the most important findings of this report are closely connected: the importance of listening for international responders, and the importance of the *process* of communication for disaster survivors. While systems for sharing information, usually characterised by a one-to-many model aimed at distributing information, particularly ‘messages’, are understood and proliferating, models that facilitate genuine dialogue and facilitate listening to the perspectives and concerns of local populations are far rarer yet much more effective on multiple levels (including improving operational design and delivery, relationship building, delivering on accountability and transparency commitments and developing trust). Agencies still see ‘communication’ as primarily the process of delivering or extracting information.

For survivors, by contrast, the process of communication often seems to matter as much as the information itself. The ability to communicate rather than just source information – to ask a question, share a story, discuss an issue – was often brought up by Haitians as vital. This was widely recognised by local radio stations, many of whom ran open mikes for days after the quake, allowing people to come in and talk on air about what happened. It is also clear in projects such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) helpline in Annexe de la Mairie camp in Port au Prince, where callers surveyed by the organisation expressed far higher satisfaction levels with the call service than with the information received about IFRC’s shelter project.

Out of the organisations that addressed this question, those that implemented effective feedback/dialogue models found this a very positive experience. Though concepts of feedback, including tools such as call centres and complaint mechanisms, generate a lot of trepidation, with local and international staff worrying about being overwhelmed with the volume of calls or having to deal with angry people, it was interesting to note that these fears were usually expressed by those who had no direct experience of such systems. Those who overcame concerns found they did not manifest in practice and those who implemented effective dialogue systems almost universally described them as one of the most important aspects of their work.



“When we set up our call centre, some of us were afraid about the response of the population because we knew there was a lot of stress, a lot of anger after the earthquake – how would people use this service? But it turned out less than three calls in 100 were calls from angry people. Most of them you could feel the relief of the person to have access to someone else to talk about their situation.”

KURT JEAN CHARLES,  
FOUNDER OF NOULA

The next step in this process in Haiti is to channel feedback and voices from the field into policy and project development work on an ongoing basis. This is, however, challenging. The largest gap remains the lack of any kind of systemic approach either to sharing information or to listening, gathering feedback or collecting and responding to complaints.

## DEDICATED CAPACITY

There is an important and growing recognition that communication with affected communities is a completely separate area of work – and a different technical skill – compared to conventional external relations or international media liaison. To work operationally, however, organisations need to decide what this work looks like in practice. Different agencies in Haiti tried different approaches with the most successful model in Haiti developed by IFRC. This consisted of a dedicated technical specialist with resources (particularly local capacity), both separated from conventional communication and – crucially – tasked with providing technical support to all other branches of work, including operations, transparency and accountability and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

## THE COORDINATION CHALLENGE

The challenge of coordination at agency level is very different from that facing the humanitarian system. The need for information to be consistent across different outlets and agencies, the question of how to share and collect feedback regarding the response as a whole, and the importance of ensuring that organisations are not duplicating each others' work and are working

together in partnership requires coordination. The increasing number of agencies investing in this work makes this question ever more acute, and raises additional questions about coordination at cluster level, and increasingly at geographical level in the field. The experience in Haiti also highlights important questions, which need further consideration, about the role of the government in communication and coordination.

The solution piloted in Haiti – the coordination and cross-cluster service provided by the deployment and dedicated staffing of the Communications with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Haiti mechanism – delivered far beyond original expectations. By filling in this gap, it highlighted the extent to which there was no provision for coordination of communication work, or for the provision of common services for those working in this sector. In particular, interviewees felt that CDAC Haiti, as a cross-cluster service, had provided a useful and important service. This gap will need to be filled at field level in future responses.

At global level, adding communication (both projects and coordination systems) to the range of work that can be legitimately funded by the humanitarian financing system would do a great deal to open up potential for growth in this sector during the early days of a response. This is in addition to improving standby funding for emergency communication work within individual agencies.

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS CLOSELY LINKED TO OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

Another clear lesson from Haiti is the importance of the relationship between communication and operations. Several operations staff commented that it would actually not have been possible to achieve operational success without support from communication, including those involved in camp population registration and assessment of quake-damaged buildings. Also vital to operational success is the role played by face-to-face communicators (community mobilisers), the importance of understanding the different ways in which different models of communication add value, and the need to be familiar with the communication environment in the first place.



Graffiti on a wall of a building after the earthquake.

“I would say that registration [of those in camps] would have been almost impossible without the support of the communications teams.”

CCCM CLUSTER COORDINATOR

## TECHNOLOGY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONISE COMMUNICATION

Large-scale ownership of mobile phones and use of social media in Haiti, as well as the emergence of the volunteer tech community and mobile phone companies as humanitarian actors, all ensure that the country continues to be a watershed response in the use of

technology and communication. However, in-depth understanding of how local communities used these tools was found mainly in responses launched by local organisations. Local media, and a private telecoms company in particular, succeeded in developing multi-platform models meshing mobile phones, SMS, Facebook, Twitter and conventional media such as radio within days of the response. These are showcased in Chapter 6. When it comes to communication and disaster response, technological communications expertise is to be found among affected communities and local actors. International players have much to learn from local actors, and systematic ways to identify and connect with local expertise and to build partnerships are needed.



## THE DIFFICULTY OF KNOWING THE IMPACT

One of the biggest gaps in the communication response in Haiti was the lack of capture and M&E. While this may be understandable given the multiple emergencies faced in 2010, it has been a challenge. Not only is it hard to evaluate the meaningful impact of many projects but they are also unable to evolve as they should through a learning process. This is a particular problem involving models new to the humanitarian response such as SMS, mobile phones and web platforms for which no M&E models have yet been developed. Discussions with operational staff in particular indicate that current methods of analysing the impact of communication work may be inadequate, as they do not capture how such work positively impacts operational delivery and the importance of the communication process (especially in psychosocial terms) to disaster survivors.

One of the most important success stories in Haiti was the production of consistent research into the communication environment, primarily by Internews, who for the first time invested in a research unit as part of their early emergency response. Their data, which was also made available systematically to humanitarians for the first time through CDAC Haiti, helped agencies to improve their programming and provided data that could be used by agency staff to sell communication projects to donors.

## USING THE HAITI EXPERIENCE

This research also addresses the response to very specific situations in a very specific country. It seeks only to capture and present what worked within Haiti, and is rooted in a clear understanding that both the earthquake and cholera were highly unusual events prompting unusual responses. It is hoped that future responses will be able to draw on some of the ideas, models and approaches piloted in Haiti. While this research does identify some major gaps and challenges, it is also clear that this sector is growing exponentially as is the understanding of how communication can contribute in practical operational terms to the quality, success, intelligence and appropriateness of humanitarian response. This is one of the most important and encouraging findings of this report.

## Main findings

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE: CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

These chapters look at the use and effectiveness of communication in the early days and weeks of a disaster response. Chapter 1 covers the emergency response to the earthquake; Chapter 2 looks at the subsequent cholera emergency that began in October 2010.

- ▶ **Communication can make a profound difference to operational effectiveness.** Operational staff interviewed for this research who had worked alongside professional communication support in Haiti were overwhelmingly positive about the impact on their work. They saw the benefits of communication primarily as improving trust, helping to mitigate conflict, developing relationships and gaining insight into community perceptions and issues.
- ▶ **Provision of support to the communications sector as part of the emergency response is essential.** Local media and other partners, including mobile phone companies, need to be supported in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. In Haiti, practical humanitarian support such as fuel for radio station generators and restoration of Internet access (this is increasingly prioritised by local journalists), as well as food and shelter for reporters, would have made a considerable difference. Specialist media development organisations need reliable standby funding and the ability to access emergency funding mechanisms. Restoration of the mobile phone network in particular should be regarded as a lifesaving humanitarian priority. Partnerships ahead of time would facilitate this.
- ▶ **The local communication response in Haiti was both rich and innovative.** Within hours of the earthquake, local radio began using broadcast to share information and experiences, identify needs, find assistance, reunite families and help people survive. In some cases they set up stations in the street or in vans, operating almost entirely without support from the international response. Local communicators, including those working in the tech sector, proved particularly adept at using SMS, the Internet (including social media),



and mobile phone platforms to share and collect information, far more so than humanitarian actors.

## COMMUNICATION AT ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL: CHAPTER 3

This chapter focuses on communication work by organisations that do not specialise in this area, several of whom developed projects and units, building communication work into technical projects and working on practical application of communication principles to humanitarian operations. This chapter also looks at camp-based communication – a particularly important model in the Haiti context.

- ▶ **The most effective organisational model for implementing effective communication in Haiti was a standalone unit.** This was led by a technical communication specialist, provided with a budget and tasked with providing technical support to the whole organisation, particularly operations. Operations staff working in agencies where they had direct technical support in communication from specialist staff were very positive, frequently saying that project delivery would have been impossible without the support of their communication colleagues. Organisations that viewed communication as primarily a function of accountability tended to be more limited in their perspective, less inclined to hire dedicated communication personnel, develop standalone communication projects or provide technical support to other parts of the organisation.
- ▶ **A multi-channel approach to communication was the most successful.** It is striking that the most successful communication work in Haiti – from the nationwide cholera response to camp-based models such as those developed by IFRC and the Jenkins/Penn Haiti Relief Organisation (JPHRO) – all used multiple channels to share information and listen in different but reinforcing and complementary ways. The best approaches recognised the profound differences, benefits and limitations of different communication channels and used them to their best advantage.

## COMMUNICATION AT SYSTEM LEVEL: CHAPTER 4

This chapter looks at the question of how communication with affected communities should be organised and managed at the level of the humanitarian system rather than individual agencies.

- ▶ **As the communication sector expands, the need for coordination is growing.** Haiti piloted some important models with regard to addressing this question, among them the first field deployment of the CDAC network. The Shelter Cluster hired a dedicated communication delegate for the first time, and some organisations began addressing the question of coordinating localised information in places where multiple agencies were providing services. The importance and operational benefit of having dedicated communication coordination capacity was articulated by a very wide range of actors, including local government bodies, the Humanitarian Coordinator, cluster leads and those working within the sector, particularly during the cholera emergency.
- ▶ **Project models that enhance access to information about a response exist and can be nurtured.** Internews, for example, launched a daily radio show providing information about the humanitarian situation as a whole that is still produced and broadcast daily on over 30 radio stations. *Enformasyon Nou Dwe Konnen* (ENDK) or 'News You Can Use' built on models developed elsewhere, but in Haiti benefited from a much closer working relationship with the international community. However, much more can be done to improve access to humanitarian information.
- ▶ **The donor role is key.** Donors in Haiti interviewed for this research actually demonstrated a greater understanding of and interest in the communication sector than was commonly assumed by aid agencies. That the humanitarian system does not recognise the importance of communication was a serious hindrance, however, particularly in terms of funding.

## STANDALONE COMMUNICATION PROJECTS: CHAPTER 5

The projects covered in this chapter focus exclusively on information sharing and communication as the project output. They include those launched to provide support to local media as well as communication initiatives developed by international organisations to improve communication with affected communities generally.

- ▶ **All best practice projects identified by this research involved support from a technical communication specialist.**
- ▶ **The best communication strategies, whether highly localised or nationwide, were those that meshed a number of different communication channels.**
- ▶ **Research and understanding of the communication environment was essential.** While it was clear from the start that radio was by far the most significant mass medium, with over 250 stations nationwide, television is also now appearing in surveys<sup>1</sup> as more significant than assumed. Also, low literacy did not mean that print work was automatically without value. The best projects were those that worked closely with their audiences and explored multiple ways of using available media.
- ▶ **Face-to-face communication was particularly important, both for localised communication work and national campaigns such as the response to cholera.** Organisations that invested in community mobilisers found their work to be extremely valuable in maintaining community relationships, sharing information not easily conveyed through mass media and collecting information from the field. Haitians in turn appreciated the ability to engage in conversations, to ask questions relevant to their circumstances.
- ▶ **Localised information is also important for communities.** Participants in focus groups conducted for the infoaid project commented that while they appreciated generalised information, what they most wanted was to know what was going on in their area, and what plans were being developed for their future. More localised information work, in particular with local radio, is needed within Haiti, and this is also a lesson for future responses.

## COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY: CHAPTER 6

Haiti was a landmark response when it came to humanitarian understanding of the importance of communication technology in disaster response. This chapter looks in particular at the local technological response and provides lessons for international responders. It also analyses survivors' perspectives on technology, the private telecoms sector's perspective on working with NGOs and models pioneered by international organisations in the context of communication with affected communities.

- ▶ **The influence and importance of modern technology is profound and has the potential to revolutionise the way aid agencies and affected communities communicate with each other.** In particular, this is making it possible for survivors to connect directly to responders for the first time, facilitating the involvement of diasporas as both affected communities and important actors in a response. Communications technology, however, is at present used as a catch-all basket term ('social media' and 'new media' are also used) for what are in practice a range of very different models and tools. The more the nuances and patterns of use of different tools are understood, the better the chance of working with them successfully.
- ▶ **Those who made best use of such systems, however, were local responders and specialists, not international aid agencies.** In Haiti as elsewhere, innovation in use of technology is being driven primarily by local populations and by the private sector. Some of the most effective communication models developed after the earthquake came from local journalists and tech experts. The Haiti experience also illustrates that use of technology by survivors is profoundly shaped by cultural and social mores, not just access to services (such as Internet access), literacy or financial status.
- ▶ **Many exciting and groundbreaking projects were launched in Haiti.** However, several experienced aid workers commented that the use of technology should not come at the expense of face-to-face communication, which remains vital for building and maintaining relationships and partnerships.
- ▶ **There is almost complete lack of methodology around monitoring and evaluating projects using communication technology, in particular capturing the end user experience.** Data around the value

<sup>1</sup> J, Mandel and Lafont, F. 'Audience Research In A Time Of Cholera: Focus Group and Survey On Haiti's Frontline', Internews, July 2011.

and impact of SMS, for example, is unclear and in some cases contradictory. This matters because this sector is still in an early stage of evolution, and effective capture and analysis of projects in countries like Haiti, where so much has been piloted, is important for the development of the sector and for advocacy. The fact that many organisations have experimented with this work in Haiti means there is great potential for this response to pilot and lead on development of M&E and capture models.

## MONITORING, EVALUATION, CAPTURE AND RESEARCH: CHAPTER 7

This chapter looks at the process of monitoring and evaluating communication projects, the importance and function of research and the question of documenting projects. Research work in Haiti was strong, but M&E in communication projects was weak almost across the board.

- ▶ **The availability of quality research into the communication environment in Haiti made a significant difference to the ability of all actors to develop and deliver good communication projects.**
- ▶ **The operational perspective of the impact and value added of communication work was often profoundly different compared to the models applied by communication professionals.** In addition, few projects had ways of capturing the value of the process of communication to affected communities, focussing instead on transfer and absorption of information or 'messages'. There is great potential here for development of more holistic ways of capturing the impact of communication work.
- ▶ **M&E and capture exercises were often regarded as low priority, formulated in terms of baseline and endline models and were seen as requiring additional capacity and resources.** In practice, models that were fully integrated into the project and generated constant data were more effective and useful as the data they generated could also be fed directly back into operations and project development.

# Methodology and terminology

## METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to identify best practice models in communication with affected populations as implemented by humanitarians working in Haiti in 2010. The study does not aim to be a comprehensive overview of all communication projects launched in Haiti since January 2010. The objective is rather to identify, present and analyse some projects that had proven effective, particularly those which had employed innovative techniques or models or which were new to the organisations in question. A key problem in carrying out the research was the overall lack of capture and M&E that has been conducted to date. In determining 'effectiveness', therefore, the researchers drew on what material was available. They used observation in the field, conducted focus groups, and gauged perceptions of agency staff, and where possible, of survivors, as to the value of communication work.

Particular efforts were made to identify and capture activities that occurred outside the sphere of the international humanitarian response, including initiatives launched independently by local media, technology actors and local authorities. From among these, the objective was to identify the most successful solutions and models and provide some insight into why they may have been effective, and what ideas they may be able to provide for future responses. The research covers communication as part of the response to both the earthquake and cholera emergencies, and to a lesser extent the hurricane.

This study was researched through a process of in-depth interviews with a wide range of actors involved with the multiple emergency responses launched in Haiti in 2010 (including survivors), a series of site/field visits to ongoing projects, a review of all existing literature and a series of focus groups in Haiti commissioned by infoasaid. The approach was almost entirely qualitative and focussed as much as possible on the experiences of Haitians, including local authorities, media, civil society partners and aid agency beneficiaries. Fieldwork was carried out between February and May 2011 with subsequent peer review of chapters and case studies taking place between May and July 2011.

Most interviews were conducted informally and consisted of an initial preliminary discussion followed where necessary by follow-up

**infoaid is a DfID funded project** that is being implemented by two media development organisations, the BBC World Trust and Internews. It seeks to enhance humanitarian responses by maximising the amount of accurate and timely information available to both humanitarian responders and affected populations through improved information exchange in the critical first few days and weeks of emergencies. Infoasaid's objectives are to strengthen the capacity and preparedness of aid agencies to respond to the information and communication needs of affected populations. It also provides rapid responses to select emergencies in partnership with aid agencies to inform and support their two-way communication with affected populations.

interviews to look in-depth at a particular project. Most interviews were taped to ensure accuracy, although interviewees were all given the option of not being recorded (only one made this request) and most spoke on the understanding that they would not be quoted by name. For most case studies several staff members were interviewed, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of local staff. Conversations with disaster survivors were held, wherever possible, without the presence of anyone from any of the organisations working in their communities.

The focus group discussions were conducted by a local Haitian group on behalf of infoasaid, and consisted of 15 groups held in rural and urban areas, specifically Port au Prince, Leogane and St Marc. The rural groups were split between earthquake and non-earthquake affected areas. Comments cited in this paper from Haitian sources are, unless otherwise sourced, taken from these discussions.

Among other important data sources for this study were the audience research reports produced fortnightly by Internews, which analysed information needs and access, initially in earthquake-affected areas but subsequently in other parts of Haiti.

## TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this study the term 'communication' relates, unless otherwise specified, to communication between providers and communities affected by disasters in Haiti in 2010. This is regarded as distinct from communication with international media, external relations and public information.

As far as possible, this paper also avoids use of the concept of the 'beneficiary', on the basis that this term frames disaster survivors primarily as



**Yves Gerald Chéry of infoasaid discusses a cholera flier with a woman in the market .**

recipients of assistances or sources of data, rather than proactive agents and architects of their own recovery. It is also generally used to designate one specific group in disaster response – those who have been physically or materially impacted – and thus is hard to use to encompass other groups essential to effective communication such as the diaspora, or Haitians potentially affected by a disaster such as cholera. More importantly, given that communication with affected communities is about equal dialogue and empowerment, the extent to which local actors are essential to effective communication and the leadership provided by local specialists in communication, the concept of 'beneficiary' was felt to be both limiting and at odds with the philosophy behind this area of work. The terms 'survivor', and 'affected community' have been preferred wherever possible.



# Chapter 1

## Responding to the earthquake

**A**T 4.53PM LOCAL TIME on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010, the highly urbanised area of southern Haiti that includes Leogane, Jacmel, Petit Goave and the capital, Port au Prince, was struck by a shallow 7.0 earthquake lasting approximately 35 seconds. The international response that this disaster triggered, among the largest and most complex of a generation, represented the largest scale deployment of humanitarian management structures, particularly the cluster system, and the largest surge of private financial support for an emergency since 2004.

This chapter will analyse the most important

elements of communication work in the early days and weeks of the response to the earthquake, drawing on interviews with actors at the time and where possible on surviving reports and data (of which there is very little). It will look particularly at local media initiatives and their perspective, the operational impact of communication work, and the response of specialist media NGOs and international aid agencies. It will identify innovations and developments, and provide recommendations on building a more comprehensive communication response ahead of the next disaster.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Dedicated capacity to handle communication, including local language skills, is essential from the earliest days of the response.**
- ▶ **Effective communication can make a dramatic difference to operational delivery of aid, as well as fulfilling survivor demand for information.**
- ▶ **A communications response in an emergency should focus on restoring existing systems.**
- ▶ **Media development organisations need to improve their emergency preparedness and should be supported by the humanitarian system, including donors, to do this.**
- ▶ **Two-way communication systems, which promote dialogue as well as disseminate information, are both viable and operationally important in disaster response.**
- ▶ **Feedback systems need to be designed to make sure the data they capture can be fed back into policy and decision-making levels of a response, as well as to operational staff.**
- ▶ **Providing channels for people to talk about their experiences is an important psychosocial exercise in and of itself.**
- ▶ **Face-to-face interaction is a profoundly effective form of communication, which also has an important psychosocial effect on survivors.**
- ▶ **Management of information and communication is key. As investment in this sector grows, coordination is going to become ever more important.**
- ▶ **Communication needs to be a standard aspect of humanitarian response from a funding perspective, particularly in pooled funds such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Emergency Response Relief Fund (ERRF) where it is currently hardly ever mentioned.**

## Information and communication after the earthquake

### DESPERATE TO KNOW

The demand for information and the need of survivors to communicate was overwhelming from the first hours after the disaster. It manifested in various different ways, from hundreds of people arriving at local radio stations looking for assistance with family reunification to those trapped under the rubble using mobile phones to call for help. Most of this early traffic happened outside the international aid framework, as people used tools and systems they already knew: friends, family, local community leaders and radio stations, who quickly organised themselves into information hubs for whole communities.

Anecdotally, use of communications technology was also prioritised. Mobile phone charging became a viable business for anyone with an electricity connection while the phone company Digicel, opened a free charging service as part of its response<sup>1</sup> (at one point the going rate for 15 minutes of charge time was 40 gourde, roughly one dollar – equivalent to a day's income for many Haitians). The instant popularity of the Internews emergency humanitarian radio show, ENDK, which began broadcasting daily eight days after the quake and was played by some stations up to six times a day (the show is still carried for free by more than 30 stations), the overwhelming demand at radio distributions, and the huge response to feedback systems, all clearly spoke to a desperate need to know what was going on, where aid was available and how to access assistance.

### DESTROYED IN A TIME OF GREATEST NEED

As in other emergencies, this demand for information and the need to communicate came at exactly the point the communications infrastructure was itself seriously damaged by the earthquake. At least 31 local journalists died and many others were injured.<sup>2</sup> Several radio stations collapsed completely, while those whose staff and buildings survived lost income and were unable

to pay salaries, primarily because their advertising base collapsed. *Le Nouvelliste*, Haiti's primary daily newspaper, lost its printing press and began publishing online. Digicel and Voila, the two major phone companies, also suffered from the deaths of personnel and damage to towers and other infrastructure.

“Our revenue from commercials has been reduced to one third of what it was before the earthquake. It goes without saying that we are no longer able to pay the same number of journalists and no longer able to be on air to the same extent as we were before.”

HÉROLD JEAN-FRANÇOIS,  
DIRECTOR OF RADIO IBO<sup>3</sup>

Haiti's few landlines appear to have been less affected. Internet connections in some parts of the affected area also appear to have survived better than mobile phone networks – anecdotally, some people managed to make contact with those outside the country on Skype and social media in the earliest hours, although based on the records of systems such as Twitter this only applied to a few.

### HOW THE LOCAL MEDIA RESPONDED

Despite the devastation and their own personal suffering, many local journalists and radio stations in particular went to extraordinary lengths to stay on air, and to use the radio medium as a way to help people. Stations that suffered minimal destruction, such as Radio 1 and Signal FM, began special broadcasts within 24 hours of the earthquake. Stations that were badly hit, such as Radio Caraïbes whose building collapsed, salvaged what equipment they could and constructed makeshift studios in public spaces or in the street: Caraïbes FM was back on air three days later. In Petit Goave, where all stations were badly damaged, journalists saved what equipment they could and used it to build a composite station in the back of a truck and worked together to get a shared broadcast on air with no support from international responders.

Responding to demand from listeners, many stations began functioning almost immediately as information hubs. Radio 1, which broadcasts nationwide and has

<sup>1</sup> Large, T. 'Cell Phones and Radios Help Save Lives After Haiti Quake', *Reuters*, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>2</sup> IMS media impact and needs assessment

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in 'Radio Stations Struggle To Stay On Air', IMS website, March 31<sup>st</sup> 2010.

## SIGNAL FM AND EMERGENCY MEDIA

For survivors of the earthquake, local radio stations became essential to survival in the days after the quake. For many, they were the only way to find out what was going on. They were also a source of entertainment, solace and community feeling – a reminder that survivors were not alone.

Signal FM is one of the most important news radio stations in Port au Prince, and was also one of the few unscathed by the earthquake (all its staff also survived). Within a few hours of the quake, four staff members had arrived and began to broadcast what they had seen.

The station quickly found itself turned into a spontaneous information exchange centre, with queues of listeners wanting to broadcast requests for help, names of the missing or to just tell their stories. Signal FM found ways to tell people how to handle the catastrophe. Doctors, engineers, seismologists and clergymen went on air. They told people what to do with dead bodies, where it was safe to sleep, where they could locate medicine and food, which hospitals were open, and also read lists of those confirmed dead or alive. They also relayed confirmed reports of people trapped but alive. “We were like a phone for the country,” says station CEO, Mario Viau.

One woman, Elcie Dyess, came to Signal FM on the third day after the quake to appeal for help in finding her husband, Jean Francois, who had been at work at a nearby bank at the time of the quake. Listeners heard her appeal, went to the bank that had collapsed, and dug him out alive.<sup>1</sup>

Signal FM also played an important role internationally. Their online broadcasts were listened to by many Haitians overseas; foreign embassies gave Signal FM information on how their citizens in Haiti should contact them; and many diaspora radio stations in the US, Canada and France rebroadcast Signal FM’s broadcasts.<sup>2</sup> Haitian stations abroad also requested time on Signal FM to broadcast requests for information from diaspora Haitians looking for relatives in the affected area.

Throughout this time, the only formal assistance Signal FM received was a government delivery of fuel for generators when the station ran out. As with many stations, Signal FM was at times dependent on donations and support from ordinary Haitians in order to stay on air. Listeners brought food and water to the journalists to help them continue working.

Since the earthquake, Signal FM has become the go-to station for Haitians during emergencies.

1 Wilkinson, T. ‘Signal FM Provides Lifeline in Haiti’, LA Times, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2010.

2 Ibid.

an international phone line, was the focus for anyone wanting to connect with loved ones outside Port au Prince and in the diaspora. Many survivors had no specific message but just wanted to talk about what had happened to them. Even radio stations that were not badly damaged set up microphones in the street for those who were too scared to go into buildings because of the aftershocks. Several Haitian journalists were keen to stress the psychosocial importance of communication, both in interviews for this research and elsewhere.

“The population needs therapy, and we must learn to laugh again.”

PATRICK MOUSSIGNAC,  
RADIO CARAIBES STATION DIRECTOR<sup>4</sup>

From the earliest days there was also a spontaneous effort, led by the big broadcasters in Port au Prince, to work together. Members of the media associations met to debate their response. All were struggling to handle

reporting; moving around the city was hard, and few had fuel for transport. Many journalists were also looking after their families, and were spending days in long queues for assistance.

The role of local media (and the work of the Volunteer and Technology Communities) also highlighted the emergence of the diaspora as a key information player in the response. As information seekers, Haitians abroad were desperately looking for news of loved ones and trying to find ways to provide assistance. They were able to support the response directly by providing local knowledge, translation support and technical expertise. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Haitians living in other countries were important information gatekeepers: English speaking, with access to the Internet (and thus the web platforms of international agencies), and able to search proactively for information.

The important role the diaspora played in other aspects of the Haiti response (advocacy and fundraising for emergency assistance, pressure on international political figures, and direct financial support to survivors through remittances) is not dissimilar to diaspora responses elsewhere, notably in Burma after Hurricane Nargis. This suggests that considering the

4 Chery, J.R. ‘Haiti’s Radio Tele Caraibes Lost Its Offices, Not Its Mission’, blog for The Committee for the Protection of Journalists, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2010.

needs and capacities of diasporas in future responses could bear considerable fruit for those working on communication.

Almost all local media operations reported running their emergency broadcasting services with little or no assistance from anyone other than the community. This was partly because few specialist media NGOs are at present well prepared to handle emergencies. Measures such as standby funding, stockpiled basic equipment, agreements with humanitarian responders to ensure journalists can access supplies such as food and tents, and cash grants for fuel and other essential supplies in-country, would make a dramatic difference.

The Haiti experience also underlined the importance of fixing existing communications networks as quickly as possible. Much has been made, for example, of the fact that survivors in Haiti could SMS and call from under the rubble. With an overloaded Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) system, this information was mostly important to local friends and family who identified and dug out many survivors. By the same token, the most effective communication work in the crucial few days after the quake was carried out by local media: journalists embedded with civil society networks, who knew and were trusted by their audience and were profoundly committed to serving their listeners. Mapping, engaging with and supporting such efforts must be a priority in future disasters.

## HOW LOCAL TELECOMS COMPANIES RESPONDED

In the early days after the earthquake, Voila (who was operational within two days of the earthquake) and Digicel responded positively to multiple requests from NGOs to send out information via SMS to their subscriber base in the earthquake-affected area. The information from NGOs, however, quickly – and unintentionally – became perceived as ‘spamming’ by subscribers.<sup>5</sup> There was little consistency in content and technical glitches led to an overloaded system, delivery of the same SMS multiple times and long delays in message transmission.

For commercial as well as humanitarian reasons, both companies ceased working with free-for-all systems within weeks to protect their customer base. Ironically, the commercial imperative had the side effect of reinforcing coordination mechanisms. Digicel’s insistence that they would not work on the cholera response with organisations and content not fully

sanctioned by the Ministry of Public Health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the Red Cross was based on the need to protect their reputation and ensure that their customers associated Digicel with reliable information, as well as the need to limit partnerships for the sake of their own internal capacity. Telecoms companies in Haiti also appear to have been much more sensitive to end user needs than the NGO sector. As David Sharpe, Head of Products at Digicel, puts it, “We listen to our end stakeholders – the customer.”

The response to the earthquake also precipitated the arrival of a number of new international actors from the technology community. Ushahidi, Crisismappers, Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) and a number of others all launched efforts to provide assistance, several of them explicitly in the context of improving two-way communication between international responders and survivors. The efficacy of such systems has been widely debated elsewhere and this paper does not propose to go over the same ground.<sup>6</sup>

## HOW SPECIALIST MEDIA ORGANISATIONS RESPONDED

Media organisations already present in Haiti were also badly hit by the disaster but when they recovered, their response was one of the swiftest ever launched.<sup>7</sup> Using existing funding, Internews were able to scale up in days and launch the ENDK radio show. Organisations like International Media Support (IMS), AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), Internews and Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) collaborated to produce emergency assessments of impact on local media. They launched their own responses, which included provision of a centre for media associations and an equipped media centre, as well as trauma counselling and support for staff.

Initial assessments of journalists killed, injured and traumatised were made by the Association of Haitian Journalists (AJH) supported by IMS, who also worked with AJH and the Ministry of Culture and Communication to ensure that journalists received basic humanitarian assistance such as tents. Some support was given to replace equipment, but much of it came late and some never at all.

<sup>5</sup> Telecoms companies in Haiti indicated that non-humanitarian groups also broke into and abused this system.

<sup>6</sup> See Kocmich, N, Mock, N, Morrow, N, Papendieck, A. ‘Independent Evaluation of the Ushahidi Haiti Project’, Port au Prince, April 2011, Development Information Systems International for Digicel and Chan, J and Crowley, J. *Disaster Relief 2.0: the future of information sharing in emergencies*, among others.

<sup>7</sup> For more detailed analysis see ‘Media, Information Systems and Communities: Lessons from Haiti’ – published by the Knight Foundation, January 2011.



## THE STORY OF MR RICE

In a disaster as complex as the Haiti earthquake emergency, organising large-scale food distributions to more than a million survivors was a huge challenge and initial distributions were chaotic. Recipients believed each distribution was their only opportunity to get food, and there was no system to make sure the more vulnerable got assistance. To improve distributions, WFP introduced a voucher system for recipients, and hired a local spokesperson, Fedrique Pierre, to launch a *Kreyol* public information campaign.

Fedrique was tasked to explain how the WFP operation worked to the local media. Through CDAC Haiti, WFP connected with ENDK, MINUSTAH FM and local radio stations. In his first month, he gave more than 150 interviews, and quickly became so popular as an interviewee that he was nicknamed 'Mr Rice'

by local media. "What really worked is that we had Fedrique on the radio show every day. He was hammering audiences with key messages and things like explaining how the food coupon system was supposed to work," says Jacobo Quintanilla, Internews humanitarian coordinator at the time.

The importance of information was also demonstrated by the number of calls and texts Fedrique would receive every time he spoke on radio. In the absence of a formal feedback system, he began sharing his personal phone number and text messages and calls poured in. During one show alone, he received 127 SMSs. "People were saying I am in Delmas, we need food etc. To keep track I needed to classify them, but I didn't have a Blackberry at the time so I invented an ad hoc spreadsheet system on my computer and started recording the SMSs. I classified them by zone. It was very time consuming. I was getting SMSs all the time, calls at

2am – I would always answer."

Marcus Prior, the WFP Head of Communications, made sure that this ad hoc feedback fed into the operational and decision-making process, enabling WFP to respond quickly to any problems. This paid off when WFP was able to redesign the food vouchers after it was discovered that they were being faked and traded on the black market. The agency also shifted its messaging to inform people that vouchers were free and faking them was illegal.

As an ad hoc emergency response project, no formal M&E was carried out on this work. Fedrique Pierre judges his work a success based on the demand for interviews from local radio stations, and the calls and SMSs of thanks he got from food recipients. While acknowledging that causal proof is absent, Marcus Prior believes that the communication work was vital in stabilising the food situation in Port au Prince in particular.

## HOW INTERNATIONAL AID AGENCIES RESPONDED

Humanitarian agencies overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster – and for many the impact on their own staff and offices – mostly did not prioritise communication with affected communities. Surprisingly few of those with a long-term presence had local *Kreyol* speaking spokespeople, and almost all focussed on managing international media relations.

The result of this was also a marginalisation of the local media. As UN agencies and others established operations at the airport, so press conferences were held at the UN base outside the centre of town, a facility that local journalists had difficulty accessing for months after the earthquake. Press releases, situation reports and press conferences were all in English with few organisations providing French translations. Given the lack of dedicated local communication staff, few organisations were prepared to spend any time going to local radio studios and giving interviews or explaining their work.

Those that did, however, found that communicating did not just help fill the information vacuum among

the affected population, it delivered considerable operational benefits. After the first food distributions proved chaotic, WFP decided that one of the best ways to improve their system was to make sure people understood how it worked (see case study above).

Another organisation that reaped considerable rewards for prioritising local communication was the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The agency sourced a Haitian American spokesperson with fluent *Kreyol* as a matter of urgency. Explicitly tasked with supporting local communication, in addition to handling international media, he worked with the gender-based violence team to record and broadcast a series of public service announcements (PSAs) with advice for victims. Based on anecdotal feedback, UNFPA say the response to the PSAs helped convince the *Police Nationale d'Haiti* to step up their patrols in the camps.

“The best thing I felt I did during the emergency phase was participate in the constant delivery of humanitarian aid and information and the constant assessment and refining of the delivery methods and the quality of the information and aid.”

DIMITRY LEGER, UNFPA SPOKESPERSON

## ENGAGING WITH HUMANITARIANS

Aside from projects such as ENDK, local media reported that they found it difficult and frustrating to engage with humanitarian organisations. From problems getting through security at the UN base to attend press conferences to language barriers, they often found humanitarian organisations hard to access when they needed information.

Later on and especially during the cholera emergency, local radio in particular was sometimes unappreciative of organisations that expected them to provide airtime for free. Having said that, two key humanitarian radio shows – ENDK and the IOM project *Chimen Lakay* (*Kreyol* for ‘The Way Home’) – are currently broadcast for free by partner stations. Aid responders have very varied opinions of paying for airtime, but radio stations were very clear that international organisations needed to understand that they are commercial entities for whom air and production time are commodities.

Journalists would have welcomed further engagement with humanitarian agencies. However, the lack of strategic working relationships between aid agencies and local media is evident, even over a year after the quake, especially for those promoting dialogue and discussion rather than just disseminating information.

“The humanitarians have put a lot of effort into communicating with beneficiaries, with the use of SMS and commercials. These are good strategies but they neglected partnerships with local journalists, who are still one of the best communication channels.”

JACQUES DESROSIER,  
GENERAL SECRETARY, AJH

## Cross-cutting and system-level communication models

### FEEDBACK AND TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

One of the most notable communication phenomena of the Haiti response was the dramatically increased ability of survivors to interact with aid agencies compared to past response. The high levels of mobile phone ownership and use (80–90 percent) among survivors was a key factor, as was the clear desire of populations to engage with aid agencies.<sup>8</sup> For example, when Internews established an SMS contact number for listeners to their ENDK radio show they received 800 messages in 24 hours. Community mobilisers also reported that survivors expected them to share phone numbers, and then expected to be able to call when they had questions.

Of the agencies interviewed for this paper, few established feedback systems within the earliest phase of the response (with the exception of Internews). Oxfam and World Vision International (WVI) were among the first, establishing feedback and community-based systems as part of their transparency and accountability work about a month after the disaster. Internews developed an SMS-based system with a

<sup>8</sup> This figure varied according to different studies conducted at different points during the post-earthquake period. Internews research conducted in February 2011 as part of their regular surveying of those in earthquake-affected areas found ownership levels at 85 percent for those in camps and 90 percent for those outside.

## ENDK AND THE FEEDBACK SYSTEM

Very early on in the project the Internews team working on ENDK realised that some kind of system for audience feedback and to enable listeners to ask questions was essential, especially in an environment where travelling to affected areas near the office was so difficult. Journalists going to the camps for ENDK were finding that survivors were desperate to ask questions about assistance, questions to which the journalists had no answers. The team decided to set up a phone number that listeners could SMS (there wasn't sufficient capacity to handle calls). The system initially ran off a simple handset that was programmed only to accept incoming calls, and a local SIM card.

Interestingly, even experienced humanitarian communication professionals were cautious about establishing such a system. "My first concern is that it would collapse, it wouldn't be able to handle the volume, and the second was that we wouldn't be able to address any of the issues

because we had no way to do it. And initially it did overwhelm our capacity and expectations – but it felt great. We knew people were really listening out there and they really wanted to participate," said Jacobo Quintanilla, Internews humanitarian coordinator at the time.

In the first 24 hours the ENDK hotline received more than 800 SMS messages. It was clear that a more systematic approach was necessary. "We said OK, now what are we doing with this information?" said an Internews staff member. "Let's find some common lines and common questions and that's when we created the mailbox. SMSs now come directly into a software system on a computer and are automatically logged and fed into a searchable database."

The concept behind the mailbox was to enable the team to select a minimum of three questions each day that represented concerns of listeners, so journalists could follow up with relevant humanitarian or government bodies and broadcast the answers. It was hugely popular. It soon became clear that management of the system was a full-time job, especially as

human analysis was still needed to make overall assessments and value judgements. It is now the responsibility of one full-time staff member.

The data collected from this system now feeds into ENDK's overall research arm as part of the methodology for mapping ongoing audience information needs and concerns and informs ENDK's programming. As this data comes from a self-selecting group (those who choose to spend money on the SMS) it is not a representative audience sample so the research team is cautious about how they use the data. It has however proved to be extremely useful in guiding and making editorial decisions, especially in the early days when ENDK had nothing else. The analysis has also been more widely shared in the humanitarian community.

"The mailbox is now the most popular item in our broadcasts. Even now, over a year later, we receive over 150 text messages and emails a day. People everywhere, even Haitians living abroad, they write to us on email or send us SMSs to ask questions about a whole range of topics," says the current ENDK editor.

single mobile phone number that channelled incoming messages through a software programme, which then captured and catalogued them. They then hired a local staff member to monitor and analyse the content. WVI established a feedback system based on community discussions (for more on this see Chapter 3). Oxfam and CARE also established helplines for survivors, both staffed by a single national staff member.

Interestingly, many agencies that had not set up feedback systems expressed serious reservations about such systems which led them to discount the idea. Many thought that they were expensive and difficult to manage, that agencies would be overwhelmed with calls, that most callers would be angry and frustrated and that it would be impossible to answer the many questions asked, leading to further frustration and anger.

Those who did set up feedback systems, however, found that such phenomena either did not manifest

or were more manageable than expected. While the volume of inquiries was considerable at the start, it was not unmanageable. Noula (see page 66 for case study) reported that of every 100 callers, around three were angry. As Fedrique Pierre noted in his experience with WFP, most were happy to have made contact, appreciative that someone was making the effort to listen to them, and most of the questions they asked were basic and relatively easy to log and answer. All also found that the feedback was invaluable in assisting them to gather real-time information on survivors' needs, concerns and perceptions.

Agencies that did not establish feedback systems, meanwhile, often found that – like Fedrique – their community mobilisers were compensating for this by giving their personal phone numbers to survivors, adding a great deal to their personal stress and generating a de facto system for handling enquiries that

## UNOPS AND EARLY USE OF COMMUNITY MOBILISERS

The UNOPS project to support the Ministry of Public Works in assessing the damage to all buildings in Port au Prince began days after the earthquake, with teams of community mobilisers formed at the start of the initiative. The teams were recruited through advertisements at the university for final year students of appropriate subjects (such as communication, sociology or psychology) and trained and tested before the final selection was made.

Fifty mobilisers were recruited and the first teams began going to communities about a month after the quake. They soon found that people were desperate to connect with humanitarian actors but that there was just no channel for them to do so.

“For most people this was the first time they were getting a rep of government at their door, and these were people who had lost all hope in the government,” said Suranga Mallawa, Programme Manager. “We were getting all these questions on the overall recovery. We had no answers, and there was nowhere people could go for that information.”

Because UNOPS was not expecting to have to deal with such questions, it had no system to capture

the information and share it with other international actors. The team then developed a referral system, and project staff worked to ensure issues raised were taken back to the appropriate cluster and other humanitarian responders better able to meet the needs raised.

“We referred urgent protection cases but other than that it was just overwhelming. We were meeting 2,000 households a day! I began giving briefings at CCCM [Camp Coordination Camp Management] and other cluster meetings, just relaying what we were hearing,” said Mallawa.

Community mobilisers themselves reported that they also found themselves playing a psychosocial role, as many people just wanted someone to talk to and be heard. “We have played a role of psychosocial support for the population that was still traumatised and were afraid to return to their homes,” said one.

Later in the response, the community mobilisation team became a valuable strategic asset to the UNOPS operation, providing support to disaster risk reduction work in camps by explaining and promoting mitigation, practical hurricane and flood prevention measures and early warning systems. They also launched a large-scale cholera information and communication campaign as soon as the epidemic was confirmed.

could not be properly supported, or used to generate vital data for operations and policy making.

The ENDK case study illustrates clearly the multiple uses of a single feedback system, how important such a system can be to the programme’s audience, and how much it can shape the editorial agenda and illuminate issues. In particular, it is worth noting that because the ENDK feedback system was not limited to the provision of international aid, and the system was ‘open’ (people could raise whatever issues they liked) it also provided a channel for questions on other forms of assistance. In particular, the system was instrumental in letting survivors know the importance of replacing personal documents, such as birth certificates, and how to register deaths. These were not captured as important through the usual needs assessments.

A final gap that needs to be filled is the capacity to monitor media in the early days of a response. This point was raised by WFP, who had no capacity to track their own campaigns, and by other CDAC staff members who said they would have found summaries of local news broadcasts extremely helpful. The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) carried out daily media monitoring in French but having this capacity was unusual and the monitoring was never geared towards humanitarian responders. Good media

monitoring would be another very effective way of real time capture of concerns and issues among survivors.

## FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The need to work fast and to reach as many people as possible against the clock often means that communication in emergency response defaults to a question of how to work with media. Investing in dedicated teams, such as community mobilisers, to handle face-to-face interaction is seen as expensive, slow and ineffective.

Aid agencies who did establish teams of community mobilisers or community liaison staff, or who were fortunate enough to have such teams from before the earthquake (such as Concern), however, found that this investment paid off. Firstly, face-to-face exchange is often the only way to share certain kinds of information, such as practical advice on hand washing or demonstrating how to secure a tent. Secondly, it is very much valued by survivors who often want the chance to talk and vent frustrations. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) community





CDAC Haiti meeting, November 2011.

mobilisation team, for example, frequently went to camps to facilitate discussion and explain upcoming initiatives before they were launched as a way of keeping situations calm and community relationships smooth.

For organisations without the capacity to recruit dedicated community mobilisers, it is worth noting that the most common need identified by mobilisers interviewed for this research was for basic training in communication. Organisations could and should provide this to any national project staff member who interacts with communities on a regular basis, especially to new recruits.

## THE ROLE OF CDAC HAITI

The Haiti response saw the first effort to tackle communication at system level in the form of a field-level coordination and support mechanism for communication with communities called CDAC Haiti. It was initiated by the CDAC global network, founded in 2009 by a group of agencies to improve communication with disaster-affected people. CDAC

consists of media development organisations including Internews, the BBC World Service Trust and IMS as well as humanitarian aid agencies such as Save the Children and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Because this was CDAC's first operation, there was no template for what CDAC Haiti should be. CDAC partners on the ground therefore began by attempting to coordinate communication work between those global partners who had deployed – mostly specialist media organisations – and by reaching out to aid agencies. Following a request by OCHA, Internews took the role of lead agency and hosted the initiative.

From the start they pitched CDAC as a cross-cluster service that provided access to newly-established communication channels such as ENDK, Emergency Information Service (EIS), BBC broadcasts and MINUSTAH FM. By March, however, 15–20 agencies were participating regularly and finding the service useful.

CDAC Haiti also took on tasks such as coordinating communication actors by hosting meetings; creating contact lists; producing situation reports on communication activities; supporting applications for funding; coordinating needs assessments of local media; promoting broadcast times and frequencies for

emergency radio programming via SMS; and developing contact lists of local media for use by aid agencies.

Within a few weeks, CDAC built partnerships with key clusters, the Ministry of Culture and Communication and MINUSTAH, and was functioning as an information-sharing focal point for all working in this field, helping to minimise duplication, ensuring information was consistent and accurate, and advocating continuously on behalf of all actors for better communication with earthquake survivors.

“A very useful thing was that CDAC helped boost our relationship with local journalists – they brought national journalists along to the press briefings and that was really helpful. But the most important thing for us was that they were all working together – they were a team...The fact that it was a ready-made coordination mechanism was very useful from our point of view and should be replicated.”

UNDAC COMMUNICATION STAFF, PORT  
AU PRINCE, MARCH 2010

There is also no question, however, that the lack of terms of reference or clarity around the exact role of CDAC Haiti created confusion among some partners and those with whom they sought to interact. Managing the system also placed a considerable burden on Internews as the lead agency.

Despite initial attempts, CDAC was also not successful at connecting with the local communications sector, including telecoms companies. However given the experimental nature of CDAC, the fact that few participants had any prior knowledge of Haiti and the extreme environment in which the response was launched, this is understandable. The Haiti experience does however underscore the need to think about communication and these partnerships as part of emergency response planning and disaster risk reduction work at country level, to ensure the connectivity can happen as soon as possible (for more on CDAC see Chapter 4).

## Recommendations

- ▶ **In humanitarian disasters, restoring communications networks must be a humanitarian priority. This includes helping to re-establish mobile connections and supporting local media to resume services. This should be the priority over developing new channels, especially by organisations with no existing track record in-country and/or those unable to sustain activities beyond a few weeks.**
- ▶ **The humanitarian system and humanitarian agencies need to recognise the importance of communication as a sector and as an essential aspect of successful operational delivery of humanitarian assistance. In practice, this means:**
  - Reforming humanitarian funding criteria to include communication work as a legitimate form of humanitarian assistance (both in terms of standalone projects and as an integrated part of technical operations), particularly CERF and ERFF.
  - Prioritising the provision of information to affected communities at cluster level during a response.
  - Implementing key recommendations below for individual agencies, including providing technical support and resources for communication from the very earliest days of a response.
  - Developing ways of listening to and analysing feedback from survivors
- ▶ **A coordination and support mechanism for communication in a disaster response is essential if agencies are to avoid duplication, provide consistent and accurate information, and ensure that the humanitarian system delivers effective communication with affected communities.**

## FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS

- ▶ **Develop standards.** Media development organisations need to develop a standardised approach to assess the needs and impact of disasters on local media, and an approach to identify existing initiatives and systems and how they can be supported and developed.
- ▶ **Emergency funding.** The communication sector would greatly benefit from standby funding for emergency response, and better access to emergency funding mechanisms such as the CERF. As in all other aspects of disaster response, reliable and consistent availability of funds is essential to launch a swift response.
- ▶ **Support local media.** Emergency response support to media and other local communicators can and should consist of a number of elements:
  - Replacing basic technical equipment and providing technical capacity to repair what is difficult to replace (such as transmitters).
  - Providing basic humanitarian assistance to staff (tents, food, water, psychosocial support). Supporting agencies should work with humanitarian agencies to source such supplies rather than seek to procure or manage them themselves.
  - Access to supplies such as fuel for generators (either through cash grants or closer working relations with the Logistics Cluster).
  - Providing support services to facilitate production, including Internet access, mobile phone credit, support with transport etc.

- ▶ **Get the big picture.** Ensure the full communication landscape is considered when researching or analysing how surviving populations wish to communicate, not just through mass media channels or radio. Fuller consideration also needs to be given to nuance. Print media, for example, was frequently dismissed in Haiti as unimportant because of low literacy rates – but the main newspaper in particular was extremely influential, providing the basis for many radio news bulletins.

## FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

- ▶ **Provide technical support to communication with affected communities from the start of a response.** Ensure this function is separate from public information/external relations work, and recruit local communication staff as a matter of priority and task them specifically with handling in-country communication.
- ▶ **Local language.** Make sure that all communication materials are produced in local languages and available online.
- ▶ **Establish two-way communication mechanisms from the start of a response.** Explore the potential of SMS/web-based platforms to manage this, or look for private sector partners to manage call centres etc.
- ▶ **Plan and budget for communication work as an integral part of project design.**
- ▶ **Invest in community mobilisers and face-to-face communication capacity from the start of a response.**
- ▶ **Include wind-up radios in distributions of non-food items.** Look for models that also incorporate torches, USB portals, phone chargers etc., bearing in mind the particular needs of specific social groups such as women.

# Chapter 2

## Responding to the cholera emergency

**T**HIS CHAPTER WILL LOOK at the communication response to the cholera outbreak in October 2010. Starting with an analysis of key tools, the chapter will then look at how the cholera information campaign played out at field level and outline the lessons learnt for greater impact and for future responses. In particular, it will focus on the importance of listening, of work that exposed the gulf between Haitian and international perceptions of cholera, and the operational impact of effective communication.

As well as describing the cholera response, this chapter will lay out some of the key aspects of the communication work around cholera, identifying strengths and weaknesses in approach. It will also note the value of investment not just in communication capacity but also in research, as a way of capturing perceptions, allowing campaigns to evolve, and of managing impact.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ The existing communication capacity in country, in particular the projects developed post earthquake, was essential in launching a swift information campaign.
- ▶ Cholera may have been a new disease in Haiti, but it was interpreted through a lens of complex narratives including fear of foreigners, denial of the existence of microbes and the political context.
- ▶ Public information and messaging were based on a technical and medical approach to the epidemic, and in many cases failed to address the fears and perceptions of the disease.
- ▶ Face-to-face communication, dialogue and listening were critically important factors in effective public education work around cholera.
- ▶ The most effective assessments of impact were those that were able to quickly capture data and analysis so that organisations could use findings to improve their operations.
- ▶ Effective feedback systems delivered on many levels: ongoing capture and identification of perceptions and shifting concerns, data that could be acted on operationally, and data that could also feed back into M&E.
- ▶ While research on public education campaigns tended to be based on conventional impact evaluation tools, iterative and more open systems would deliver more accurate and complete information that could be acted on.



## Cholera and the humanitarian response

Haiti's cholera outbreak began in the region of St Marc, a small town in Artibonite in late October 2010 and was officially confirmed four days into the epidemic on October 21<sup>st</sup>. By April 2010, a quarter of a million people had developed symptoms, an official figure certain to be lower than the real number due to difficulties of accurate data collection in rural areas.

The outbreak was unexpected as Haiti had no history of cholera and the risk assessments carried out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after the earthquake had identified the chances of a cholera outbreak as low.

From an operational point of view, the communication response to cholera is the story of how so many of the systems and resources set up after the earthquake became critically important. Organisations that had invested in communication work such as IFRC and IOM had capacity and tools at their disposal that could be mobilised within hours and which became central to the response. Several organisations had teams of experienced community mobilisers who were able to begin mass face-to-face cholera prevention work within days.

Radio projects such as ENDK, *Chimen Lakay* and the IFRC broadcasts on Radio 1 were well established, with experienced staff and audiences that trusted them as information sources. The Hygiene Promotion Sub Cluster had been running campaigns for several months, and had tried and tested methods for educating people in basic hygiene. And while Haiti had not experienced a cholera outbreak before, the fact that the disease is well understood, easy to prevent and easy to treat meant key messages could be quickly developed using pre-existing global consensus on how to handle the disease. In addition, the humanitarian response already had a dedicated communication coordination mechanism – CDAC Haiti.

Advocacy for communication work was also made far easier by the fact that cholera is recognised by humanitarians as a public information emergency. The dramatic difference in the speed with which communication projects were developed, resources mobilised and institutional commitment made to communication work compared to the earthquake response was marked.

The strength and commitment of the Ministry of Public Health was also a factor, particularly in ensuring



Cholera campaign and kids. COPYRIGHT WHO

consistency of key messages by establishing a dedicated Committee for Development and Learning Materials, and leveraging many existing relationships with partners.

Nevertheless, the cholera response highlighted how, despite considerable efforts and groundbreaking work within the sector, the public information capacity available to humanitarian response was still inadequate. CDAC Haiti, still an experimental initiative, with only three staff and no formal status yet, was expected to play the role of a full-scale cluster. The Health Cluster had limited capacity and expertise at cluster level.

## Cholera and media technology

The cholera outbreak also came at a time when many of the technological information-sharing innovations established in Haiti after the quake, had become fully-fledged partnerships.

IFRC and IOM began organising information 'blasts' with the key messages, developed by the Ministry of Public Health and partners. IFRC also uploaded cholera information to their automated \*733 line. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture and Communication established a call centre in partnership with Digicel. Digicel also established a number of lines at the request of the government, including a number to call for collection of dead bodies and another for ambulance services. Digicel also developed a system whereby subscribers who travelled through cholera 'hotspots' were automatically sent an SMS with a warning and advice.

It is difficult to compare the experiences of the two call centre systems – one automated (IFRC), one with

lines staffed by employees (Ministry of Culture and Communication) – as neither carried out any kind of evaluation system. Anecdotal evidence suggests the Ministry of Culture and Communication’s \*300 number was hard to get through on, given that only four people were taking calls at the beginning. Call centre staff were oriented on cholera prevention and response during Ministry of Public Health press conferences while questions asked on the helpline were fed directly back into press conferences so they could be publicly addressed by experts.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, however, the technology experience in cholera reinforces the importance of listening and developing capacity to handle questions. IFRC reported 130,000 calls in total to their Interactive Voice Response system, promoted via SMS, although there is no way at present to gauge how many of those people felt the information on the system reflected their needs. Digicel reported that their SMS blasts, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health, resulted in large numbers of people calling the Digicel customer call centre, which overwhelmed staff not trained on cholera. The Noula system had a similar experience, with call centre operations staff put in the position of having to answer questions on a disease with no technical background or support.

“When we send out a message our call centre gets crushed. People call to ask, what is chlorox? Why do I have to wash my floor?...People don’t understand that it is an automated text.”

DAVID SHARPE, HEAD OF PRODUCTS AT DIGICEL

## Cholera and local media

As with the earthquake, the local media response was swift. Radio 1 broadcast a special two-hour programme, using information from the global WHO website, the day before the official confirmation of cholera. The Ministry of Public Health was also quick to put together radio spots and distribute them to local

journalists, and from the start held daily press briefings with experts present to answer questions. Many radio stations broadcast the entire press conference live every day. Stations like Radio 1 also acted on their own initiative, commissioning local artists to record messages and PSAs about cholera prevention and cure. On other stations, especially local broadcasters who had less access to accurate information, the quality of information was in some cases much lower, with rumours and misunderstandings finding their way onto the airwaves.

Local media could, however, be resistant to requests for free airtime, either for programming or running spots. This was partly because the cholera epidemic struck just before the election, and many stations had already pre-sold airtime to candidates, generating valuable revenue (this was particularly an issue in Artibonite). Other stations were happy to broadcast Ministry of Public Health spots, although there were logistical challenges in delivering PSAs to stations.

Training in cholera and reporting was also made available to local media very quickly through an initiative by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and AJH. Both organisations found medical staff in all major Haitian cities that could brief local media. This was mostly organised through personal contacts and relationships built through CDAC Haiti. AJH also commented that previous disaster risk reduction training for media was useful for cholera, as journalists were able to leverage government contacts developed during that training.<sup>2</sup>

Radio was of primary value to the cholera response. One priest in Terre Neuve in rural Gonaives, for example, described how he had first heard about cholera from listening to his radio – the only one in the village. Recognising the urgency of the situation, he included cholera information in his sermons. Until IOM community mobilisers reached the town in early December, the priest’s sermons were the only source of information for people.

## The view from the field

In line with classic public health education methodology, the cholera campaign in Haiti focussed on identifying key messages about prevention and

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jamil Simon, USAID technical support to the Ministry of Culture and Communication, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Desrosier, General Secretary AJH, interviewed on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

## HRC AND PERCEPTIONS OF CHOLERA

A few weeks into the cholera outbreak the HRC psychosocial section held discussions on cholera with residents in four camps in earthquake-affected areas where they were already working.

Although this activity was not conducted for research, HRC staff soon realised that valuable information was coming out of the discussions and started documenting it to inform future programmes. Of particular interest was the fact that participants had perceptions of cholera that were fundamentally at odds with both the scientific reality of cholera, and the way it was being presented in public information campaigns.

The HRC discussions revealed that people didn't believe cholera was actually a disease. They argued that they had lived in these conditions for years and cholera had never manifested before, therefore it must be a deliberate attempt to kill people ahead of the upcoming election. They frequently referred to the Haitian *Kreyol* saying "Mikob pa touye ayisyen" (microbes don't kill Haitians).

Haitians also used frameworks of colonial occupation, distrust of foreigners and past

experience of disease to interpret the cholera outbreak. Participants also expressed disappointment and mistrust of international organisations following the response to the earthquake and the fact that so many people were still living in camps nearly a year after the disaster.

From a psychosocial perspective, the HRC paper identified fear as the driving factor behind most reactions not just to cholera, but also to any of the facilities or methods being promoted as ways to prevent or cure the disease. This fear had very real consequences: cholera treatment centres were firebombed and rejected, people who were sick, had recovered or whose work brought them into contact with the disease, were stigmatised, and perceived perpetrators were attacked. The study also found that the belief that foreigners had brought the disease was undermining the credibility of foreign organisations carrying out information campaigns.

The study concluded that NGOs' ability to launch an effective operational response to cholera was being impaired, in some cases seriously, by local perceptions and reactions to the illness. As a result, the HRC psychosocial team was specifically trained to deal with these fears and beliefs. HRC also developed a participatory approach to communication, which involved reformulating local perceptions through an active listening process.

response and getting them to as many people as possible via as many channels as possible. The information and messaging took medical and technical information, particularly around personal actions (hand washing, water purification, symptom identification) and packaged it in a way intended to make it easy to understand and implement. Posters, radio, TV, SMS and community mobilisers were the primary channels for dissemination of information.

In practice, this approach had limitations. The fact that Haiti had never experienced cholera before led many organisations to think they were starting from a zero sum of knowledge of cholera. In practice, Haitians used existing cultural, religious and social beliefs to interpret the disease. While cholera was medically new, Haiti's narratives of disease (especially HIV), interference in the country by outsiders and disappointment in the emergency response all shaped the early perceptions of cholera and thus the reactions to it. This manifested initially as a refusal to believe cholera was a disease and that it was a deliberate attempt by outsiders to kill Haitians.

The practical consequences of this were considerable. For example, a 200-bed cholera treatment centre in St Marc, which was built to relieve the overcrowded local hospital, was burnt to the ground by the local community two days after it was completed. This pattern was quickly repeated elsewhere, with

communities preventing construction, taking down or attacking existing facilities. The assumption that cholera was not an illness led to the belief that it was a voodoo curse. By December, 45 male and female voodoo priests had been lynched after being blamed for spreading cholera deliberately, most of them in the South.<sup>3</sup>

Such incidents, especially the rejection of the cholera treatment centres, caught the humanitarian community by surprise. The urgency of the situation and the need to establish treatment centres as quickly as possible, had meant that many organisations had assumed that communities would understand that these facilities were intended to help, and had not explained or discussed them with surrounding communities. The nature and function of the centres were also not addressed in any of the early messaging, although this changed after the incident in St Marc.

Once cholera hit and people observed that almost all patients who went for treatment recovered, their attitudes shifted. This again illustrates the need for communication work to evolve and adapt according to circumstances, and to learn from patterns of response. Evidence from the field suggests that those organisations that took a more dialogue-based approach to communication, such as the Haitian Red Cross

<sup>3</sup> 'Haiti urged to halt cholera anti-voodoo lynching', *Reuters*, December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010.

## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION: CHOLERA AND THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Ministry of Public Health in Haiti began its communication response to cholera as soon as the disease was confirmed. The first press conferences were held by local authorities in Artibonite within a few days of the outbreak, without support from international partners.

Central to the Ministry of Public Health response were their subsequent daily press briefings. Every day, the ministry announced the latest mortality and hospitalisation figures, and made senior figures in the government available to the press. They also invited UN and NGO partners to share the platform, and made a point of including cholera experts who could answer technical questions on the disease. In particular, they included key questions made by Haitians during calls to the government \*300 cholera hotline so they could be answered in public by the experts on the panel.

The press conferences were simultaneously broadcast live across key radio networks and television and continued until November 14<sup>th</sup>. The Ministry of Public Health also organised a seven-hour multiplex programme on cholera, led by President Preval, which was broadcast across all key networks.

By November 10th the Ministry of Public Health had approved two posters and developed 12 radio spots, with distribution managed through COMATEL and local journalists.<sup>1</sup> The ministry also worked with Digicel to blast SMSs across their subscriber base, with messaging also used by IFRC in their SMS project with Voila.

They also set up an information phone line in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Communication, taking calls from the affected population. This was understaffed – in the initial days only four people were available to take calls, none of whom were cholera specialists. Aside from the questions feeding back into the press conferences, there is no available data to measure use or impact of this communication response.

<sup>1</sup> The posters, however, were not without problems: in particular there was much confusion over the way information around use of cholera was presented, and over the recipe for oral rehydration therapy. This illustrates the need for careful testing of materials with appropriate audiences, and for predetermined consensus on such details among specialist agencies.

(HRC), were better placed to understand and respond to reactions to cholera. It was also clear that treating these misperceptions as just simple misinformation was also not an adequate response, as this failed to recognise the validity of the Haitian worldview. To miss this crucial point was to misunderstand the nature of the communication challenge entirely.

Organisations that took a listening approach were able to improve the impact of their response programmes. To combat stigmatisation and prevent re-infection, the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) team managing the cholera treatment centre in Carrefour introduced a phone follow-up system for discharged patients, to ensure they continued to follow advice about preventing re-infection. As a result, they have achieved a recidivism level of less than 2 percent.<sup>4</sup>

## How effective was the cholera communication campaign?

Evaluating the overall communication effort on cholera is extremely difficult, and isolating the impact of any specific intervention almost impossible: too many organisations were involved and too many techniques used. This holistic approach, however, was at least part of the reason the campaign was judged effective by almost all interviewees. Community mobilisers also said the fact that the same information was available from so many sources and was thus repeated to communities in so many different ways was extremely helpful.

“The information was like rain – it surrounded people and fell everywhere.”

INTERVIEWEE

In Haiti, two particular models of measuring impact emerged: the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), who carried out a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study in January/February 2011, and CDAC Haiti, which coordinated a multi-agency study of cholera knowledge levels in November 2010. Internews also carried out research that was published in June 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Evaluation of the Canadian Red Cross cholera treatment centre in Carrefour by independent consultant, unpublished, April 2011.





Haitian cholera graffiti, March 2011.

Almost uniformly, the approach taken to determining impact was a classic baseline/endline methodology, which looked for retention and action on the key messages promoted by the cholera information campaign. The evidence provided by the HRC paper and discussions with medical staff and community mobilisers suggest that this was not adequate as an approach, with little scope for identifying key barriers to behaviour change from the Haitian perspective.

The ways in which operational staff commented on the impact of the information campaign, for example, were very different from those benchmarks used by communication experts. Community mobilisers said they knew the campaign was working when families began visiting cholera patients at the hospital (after they overcame their initial fear of the disease). Medical staff, meanwhile, judged effectiveness in terms of drops in the number of patients with advanced symptoms arriving at treatment centres: those who recognised symptoms and knew what to do came earlier and thus were easier

to treat and more likely to survive, making the medical work easier. While anecdotal, such information clearly has value as an indicator of campaign effectiveness and it would be useful to find a way to use such systems in evaluations of communication projects.

This given, the data available does show that the communication campaign succeeded in relaying many basic ideas. The findings of UNICEF's KAP survey, for example, show that the vast majority of people now know the basics of cholera. The CDAC Haiti survey also found that 76 percent of respondents felt that the information available on cholera was satisfactory.<sup>5</sup> However, both studies found that more detailed knowledge of prevention and cure of cholera was patchy.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 'CDAC baseline survey on the impact of the communication campaign on cholera', Haiti, November/December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> CDAC Haiti found that while 63 percent of people said they knew how to prepare oral rehydration at home, only 40 percent knew the correct recipe – the UNICEF study (conducted slightly later) puts this figure closer to 18 percent.

# Recommendations

**The importance of a dialogue-based approach.**

Even in a public information emergency such as cholera, a dialogue-based approach that prioritises understanding local perceptions of the disease, collects feedback and is able to respond quickly to changing levels of understanding is more effective than a one-way, one-to-many public information campaign. The approach needs to be systematic and clearly articulated, with channels for feedback to flow back into decision making and project design.

**Understand the local context.** More effort needs to be made early on in such campaigns to iterate local perceptions into the communication response. People act on what they perceive to be true, and attempts to influence behaviour without understanding the wider context will therefore be limited. Studies such as the HRC paper are essential, and strong cluster leadership to make sure that such findings are showcased and acted upon could also make a difference.

**Make key messages culturally appropriate.** The case for developing consensus at global level around key messages on issues such as cholera is clear, and the importance of consistent messaging at field level is vital. But it is also important to remember that all information needs to be culturally contextualised: a process not just of designing locally appropriate materials, but also of understanding local perceptions and concerns that do so much to determine the extent to which people react to information.

**Repetition.** Even the most basic information needed to be repeated over and over again, and this need continues today. Even six months after the outbreak, the IFRC radio show was still receiving basic questions on cholera, and many community mobilisers identified the time before the 2011 rainy season as a key period to reinforce messages.

**Messaging needs to be clear and flexible.** While basic information regarding cholera may appear simple, in practice production of key messages was difficult. General information had to cover several areas: prevention, identification of symptoms, and treatment. Subsequent to this, further messaging was developed in response to emerging problems, particularly around of the issue of cholera treatment centres and stigmatisation of survivors. Information also had to be locally specific. Systems for developing messaging need to be flexible to ensure new messages and guidance can be generated and shared quickly – this is essential in an emergency environment.

**Test materials.** However urgent the situation, it is clear that failing to test print materials adequately before going into production is a mistake as it is so difficult to rectify errors once materials are produced. As demonstrated in the case of other communication materials in Haiti, testing of materials, especially in emergency situations, does not necessarily require full focus group methodology. Simply asking for informal feedback from local staff, drivers and community mobilisers can be sufficient to identify basic problems.

**Monitoring and evaluation.** M&E should be closely connected to the issue of feedback. While the standard approach to measuring impact is through conventional evaluation methodologies, these have some important limitations in the context of cholera. Firstly, baseline data in an emergency is extremely hard to collect and is rarely an operational priority. Secondly, the findings tend to be static, resulting in snapshot studies published at the beginning and end of projects, rather than the constantly updated information systems needed to guide a fast moving response across a wide geographical area. There is also the additional complexity of having to understand the wider cultural context and operational necessity of understanding local perceptions. Without capture of these opinions the efficacy of work to address them cannot be evaluated.

# Chapter 3

## Communication at agency level

**F**OR MANY INTERNATIONAL organisations, Haiti was the first time they launched programmes for communication with affected communities as part of their emergency response. This chapter will firstly examine the origins of the most effective projects and units in Haiti, and the key factors that led to this work being resourced and mainstreamed. It will then look at some of the different models and approaches used, and what the outcomes were from the perspectives of the communication staff involved, and where possible those working in operations. The chapter will examine the three most common institutional models developed in Haiti for structuring and applying capacity in communication with affected communities.

Again, little feedback from affected communities outside that gathered for this study was available.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the camp-based approach to communication adopted by many agencies in Haiti, the chapter will finish with a look at the ways in which the complex communication challenges of camps were approached and what was most effective in camps of varying size.

<sup>1</sup> One notable source is the HAP 2010 *Humanitarian Accountability Report*, particularly chapter 3 (Voices of Disaster Survivors – Haiti 2010) p83, which analyses feedback from six camps concerning levels of information and communication with service providing agencies.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ To implement successful communication work, adequate institutional support, dedicated human and financial resources and technical capacity were needed.
- ▶ A dynamic and committed individual, a supportive head of office, and a source of funding were fundamental to establishing effective communication work at an early stage in the response.
- ▶ Operations staff who had worked closely with communication capacity almost all described communication work as essential to operational success.
- ▶ The most effective position for communication capacity within an organisation was as technical support to all aspects of a response, with a close working relationship with operations especially important.
- ▶ Successful agency-based communication projects were those that were properly designed, budgeted for, took a multi-channel approach, and facilitated listening and the ability of affected populations to ask questions as well as information sharing.

## Why did it matter for organisations?

Organisations in Haiti who committed to communication with affected communities did so for a number of reasons. Some saw this as an essential part of their organisational commitment to improving accountability and transparency to affected people, particularly with regard to operationalising the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) principles. Some saw it as an important operational need and vital to the technical delivery of projects. Some regarded trying to meet the information needs of the affected community as an area of work in its own right, and a few treated it as all three. The extent to which communication programmes were effectively implemented depended on the degree to which communication was seen to enhance the work of operational staff and senior management. Without this level of buy-in, communication work usually failed to flourish even if funding or capacity was available.

Based on interviews with non-communication staff, two trends became clear. The first was that operational staff who had been exposed to or involved with effective communication work were very positive, citing improved relationships with communities, the ability to identify mistakes quickly, and how effective communication had been a key determining factor in the success of the project. JPHRO, for example, sees communication as central to their overall strategy in their role as camp managers of Petionville Golf Club, one of the largest post-quake settlements.

“We definitely notice that if we let the communication slide then things start going wrong quite quickly. We put about 10 percent of our budget into communication – it’s not expensive but it does have to be done properly. It is an essential part of our work.”

NGO STAFF MEMBER

Research by HAP into the perspectives of affected communities, carried out in October 2010, supports this. HAP found that agencies who committed to communication work and were seen to be making a systematic effort to share information and listen were more favourably regarded by those in the camps. “The communities in which coordinated information

dissemination strategies had been formulated and implemented expressed higher satisfaction with the agencies delivering aid than the communities where efforts to share information had been piecemeal.”<sup>2</sup> Lack of information was cited by camp residents as a explanation for a number of outbreaks of aggression. The research also found that information gaps had led to misunderstandings, damaging assumptions about the commitment and capability of agencies.

The second trend was that organisations that had yet to implement any systematic approach to communicating with communities, including the recipients of their own programmes, subsequently started to see this as a major gap. In most cases this was highlighted by incidents or problems in projects, such as the attack on the cholera treatment centre in St Marc (see Chapter 2).

## Organisations with dedicated capacity

For most organisations in Haiti, the idea of incorporating communication with affected communities as part of a humanitarian response was new, at least at field level. While some organisations incorporated communication into ongoing development – for example the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) support to communication aspects of disaster risk reduction – few had national communication staff, or had considered communication as a form of humanitarian response in their own contingency planning. For those that did move into this area, therefore, most scaled up from a capacity and budget of very little. It is notable that most staff members leading in this area were international.

IOM, UNFPA, MINUSTAH, IFRC and WFP addressed communicating with affected communities early on, all for different reasons. For example, WFP saw the need for local communication capacity as a direct operational requirement of their food distributions while IFRC promoted the importance of communication with affected populations from headquarters, partly based on engagement with the CDAC network at the global level and partly on their own long standing institutional commitment to this issue. IOM also developed field capacity because their proactive public information officer believed that outreach should be



a priority for his organisation and lobbied internally to great effect. UNFPA fielded a Haitian American communication officer who spoke *Kreyol* and tasked him specifically with supporting access to services for victims of gender-based violence (at cluster and agency level). UNOPS, meanwhile, argued successfully from the start that communication was essential to technical delivery of their post-earthquake building assessment project, convincing a major bilateral donor to invest 20 percent of the project budget in communication. Following the immediate post-emergency period, a second wave of organisations, such as Oxfam and WVI, began work in this area, primarily as part of accountability and transparency agendas.

Below are some common denominators among agencies that began communication work in the earliest days after the response:

**The role of individuals.** In almost all cases, early communication work was led by one or two individuals at field level who lobbied for inclusion of outreach in budgets and project design, and managed to secure funding for an entire unit (in the case of IOM). These people were either communication staff, or operational staff with background/experience in communication. With the important exceptions of IFRC, UNFPA and WVI, the initiative very rarely came from headquarters.

This also meant that capacity for communication with affected communities was usually supported by in-country funding mechanisms or by funding allocated by the organisation from their national budgets. Many organisations received an overwhelming public response to their appeals, and were able to use the unusual levels of internal funding with great flexibility.

**Support from senior managers.** Staff who established outreach and communication work early on reported that the support of their head of office was essential. The support of senior managers was particularly important given the lack of core or institutional funding available for outreach in most organisations.

**Support from donors.** As communication work is not systemically covered in the criteria for either CERF or ERRF money, funding raised from donors or the freeing up of core institutional funding was critical. One particularly innovative exception to this was WVI, who secured private sector funding for a child advocacy project. Another interesting case was that of MINUSTAH, which had large-scale pre-existing communication capacity in Haiti and was able to fund projects immediately and provide free services such as spot production and access to radio programming.

**Support from headquarters.** This played a significant role where it was available, especially in early

mobilisation and getting access to internal funds. For example, IFRC was able to leverage internal support for their first-ever emergency response beneficiary communication delegate within days of the response, and the subsequent beneficiary communication unit.

But many of the most successful communication projects and units in Haiti were developed with little or no support from headquarters, being almost entirely the initiative of field staff. By contrast, several organisations with considerable commitment to communication, either through CDAC or through their commitment to HAP, failed to operationalise this work in the field at least during the initial response. In some cases, field-based officers and technical staff in headquarters were unable to link properly and to provide each other with the necessary support.

**Marketability to international media.** Several organisations commented that work in outreach and communication, especially that involving technology, played well with international media and thus helped generate visibility for projects. IFRC particularly attracted widespread coverage for their SMS work, as did IOM for their camp newsletter and camp communication work. Communication with communities staff commented that this helped to raise the profile of their work within the organisation and deepen other colleagues' understanding of what they were doing.

## WHERE TO PLACE CAPACITY FOR HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION?

The most comprehensive communication work in Haiti was undertaken by organisations that committed to this area by providing dedicated staff and funding. However, one of the most interesting aspects of the Haiti response was the different ways in which organisations built the work into their organisational structure.

### Communication as part of accountability

Many international NGOs based in Haiti, such as Concern, WVI, Save the Children and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are choosing to put outreach and communication with disaster-affected communities with accountability, or occasionally with M&E. Most organisations base their practical approach to accountability on the HAP benchmarks, including their communication work in this area.

In the case of several organisations, the commitment

## WVI AND ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNICATION IN DISASTER RESPONSE

One organisation that began systemic communication work with survivors in the weeks following the quake was WVI. Building on experience from Myanmar and Pakistan, camp coordination staff established a camp-based humanitarian accountability system within five weeks of the disaster, which included liaison staff, feedback systems and plans for bulletin boards.

The team, led by a Haitian psychologist, became known at the Humanitarian Accountability Team. Initially, they focussed on verbal communication and establishing feedback systems. Team members were also tasked to raise community concerns with WVI. “When we go back to the office we did the advocacy for people in the camps,” says team leader Jony St Louis.

To inform their work, the team carried out an initial quick assessment to find out how people preferred to communicate, and followed this with a mid-term assessment, which included a voting system whereby people could vote for different methods of receiving information. The highest scores

received were for verbal information in meetings, or communication at household level; this influenced the subsequent development of WVI's approach to communication.

Based on the feedback, WVI also began developing ‘scripts’ for camp liaison officers to handle common questions. Feedback systems were also properly supported, with staff members regularly collecting input from suggestion boxes and verbal feedback from camps and logging comments into a spreadsheet, which was shared with operations staff. The Humanitarian Accountability Team also worked closely with operations on project delivery and expectation management.

Assessing the impact of this work over a year after the earthquake is impossible, but it is clear from conversations with staff that WVI found the liaison work and the feedback extremely valuable from an operational perspective, particularly relating to expectation management, building trust with communities and resolving conflict. The impact on camp residents is harder to ascertain and a full evaluation was outside the scope of this study, although (non-WVI) local staff at one camp visited by the infoasaid project team where WVI was providing services were positive about the information provided by the organisation.

to accountability and the availability of core funds meant that outreach and communication work to support it was prioritised, and established much faster than normal (see case study above). Another advantage of placing communication within accountability was that staff did not need to handle the additional workload of external relations or public information.

One drawback to this approach, however, is that organisations tended to prioritise information-up systems such as feedback and complaints mechanisms, rather than information sharing or proactive explanations of what they were about.

“If we had proactively given information about activities, we wouldn't have got a lot of the feedback we did – information like selection criteria and areas of focus.”

STAFF MEMBER  
OF AN INTERNATIONAL NGO

Where agencies taking this approach had looked at proactive information sharing, the focus tended to be limited to information about the agency and specific projects: essential, but not the same as work that addresses the information needs of the population

(which may be much wider).

It is also notable that while an organisation may consider communication as a function of accountability, none of those interviewed for this paper recruited specialist communication staff in this capacity, something they again tended to realise later on was a major gap.

Another disadvantage of limiting communication with disaster-affected communities to accountability is that in practice communication is seen as an area of work that only serves existing recipients of the organisation. Communication systems such as feedback lines are not designed to communicate with those not already receiving some kind of assistance. This means that as closed loops, they run the danger of exacerbating information and communication inequity among survivors.

This also seemed to limit organisational thinking on accountability and transparency as a wider issue. No organisation interviewed for this research, even those with strong accountability units, was providing training in communication or accountability to implementing partners and local transparency organisations, or supporting local or national authorities in implementing transparency and accountability models.

## IOM AND COMMUNICATION AS PART OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

IOM's communication unit was originally intended to be a conventional public relations department. However, the organisation's first public information officer quickly identified the need to communicate with earthquake survivors and designed a unit that would offer community liaison, outreach and communication support to IOM's operational units. The unit was established with funding from ERRF and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The public information officer received support from senior operations staff who saw the value of talking to survivors, but faced some scepticism elsewhere in the organisation. This began to change when communication staff became involved in camp registration, which until then had faced resistance and confusion.

The communication unit produced fliers explaining registration with the use of cartoons and brought DJs and musicians along to the next camp registration to defuse tension. "The idea was a success...Within a few weeks it got to the point where the registration people were coming to us before they went out and asking for our help," said one member of the communication team.

This view is corroborated by operations staff. "Registration was one of the test grounds for all of our communication and it was important because it was controversial – people were expecting things out of registration," commented one longstanding staff member. "We needed to be able to work in camps without our staff being harassed. So it was very important that the message about registration was clear...I would say registration would have been almost impossible without the communication teams."

Within four months, IOM had established a team of dedicated community information staff who were able to implement communication strategies at camp level such as producing information, education and communication (IEC) material and using roadshows as part of camp operations. Later, the unit developed the *Chimen Lakay* camp newsletter and radio programme, expanded the community mobilisation team to more than 60 people, raised awareness of the hurricane season, and initiated dedicated SMS messaging to camps.

Since the early days, the IOM unit has struggled to keep up with demand from the many who have come to regard their support as essential to operational success inside and outside the organisation. Combined with having to cope with at least three major emergencies in 2010, and given the considerable burden of disaster risk reduction and hurricane preparedness for camp populations, the volume of work has been impressive. One side effect, however, has been the lack of capture or monitoring and evaluation of the work completed to date.

### Communication as a part of public information

Many organisations placed communication with affected communities within public information or external relations units. This was usually because there was some confusion or failure to differentiate between the two areas of work at an organisation level, rather than because the two can be complementary.

Nevertheless, the Haiti experience suggests there are advantages to this approach, provided certain boundaries are put in place. Of the organisations that have hired dedicated community mobilisation staff within public information, the largest scale in Haiti is IOM (see case study above). The team now works in close partnership with the operational team, providing communication and outreach support to a wide range of IOM programmes. It has also become a de facto technical resource on communication for the CCCM Cluster (for which IOM has responsibility), providing valuable training to other agencies, conducting research and supporting communication work managed by other organisations.

A challenge in combining communication with communities with public information is that the same person often carried out both roles. This overlooks the fact that both are full-time jobs requiring different skill sets. At IOM, the original public information officer pointed out that both jobs were too time consuming to be conflated. Even dedicated communication staff working as part of public information/external relations reported that when a crisis hit they were often required to support external communication colleagues rather than their core brief - at exactly the time when communication with affected communities was a priority.

### Communication with communities as a standalone unit

The organisational model that has done most to deliver effective communication with communities was developed by the IFRC and the British and Canadian Red Cross societies. The IFRC unit has developed a portfolio of communication projects, including models new to the organisation, provided technical support to IFRC operations in a number of areas and developed

## IFRC AND THE STANDALONE BENEFICIARY COMMUNICATION UNIT

From the start of the earthquake response in Haiti, IFRC was one of the few organisations to have separate communication with communities capacity, in addition to public information. Supported by the Irish Red Cross, they rapidly brought in a delegate specialising in outreach and use of mobile technology who had worked on post-tsunami communication in Aceh.

With strong support from the IFRC global communications unit, IFRC Haiti established the first dedicated communication unit. Its work was closely tied to operational delivery, recognising that few operations staff are or can be communication experts. The unit is also one of the few in Haiti with a strategic approach (including an exit strategy) and a commitment to capture of activities. Its work is also guided strongly by the principles of dialogue and two-way communication.

The unit covers six key areas with regard to programming:

**Partnership and participation:** Beneficiary communication can help programmes collect critical information and engage in two-way dialogue with beneficiaries.

**Transparency:** The unit developed tools that programme staff can use for information sharing and feedback, including SMS and the \*733 information line.

**Education and awareness raising:** Large-scale communication work on common issues such as cholera and hurricane preparedness.

**Advocacy and positioning:** Information collected through communication with survivors is used to support advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy, a particularly powerful tool when the positions presented are those demonstrably relayed from the affected population.

**Strategic advice and support:** The unit provides technical support to programmes looking for practical ways to build accountability and communication into daily activities.

**Capacity building:** The exit strategy of the unit will be to hand over to HRC, including all expertise in managing accountability. The aim is to embed this at an institutional level, not just within the communication team.

To achieve these ends, the unit has established a weekly IFRC radio show, a nationwide SMS system able to target specific geographical areas and a partnership with a local telecoms company. It has also developed pioneering software that has now become a global model and established an automated helpline providing information on everything from surviving gender-based violence to hurricane awareness.

IFRC has also successfully delivered both on standalone communication projects such as the radio show, and in mainstreaming communication methodologies directly into ongoing projects. Operational staff working in projects such as shelter provision regard the support of the unit as essential to the successful delivery of projects.

pioneering partnerships with key actors such as Voila, in accordance with a fully articulated strategy (see case study above). IFRC has been able to achieve this through the establishment of a dedicated team with institutional and financial backing.

## ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES

The most common challenge encountered by those working on communication and outreach, particularly in organisations where this was a new area of work, was lack of understanding of their work by colleagues, especially on the operational side. Communication with communities work was seen as either part of

conventional public information work or viewed to be simply good programming, with no need for technical support. In practice, however, this was rarely true.

A further challenge expressed by communication staff was the difficulty of securing financing. There was a widespread perception that donors were not willing to support communication or accountability work, especially in the early stages of an emergency. Interestingly, this was not reflected at all in interviews with donors (see section in Chapter 5 on standalone communication projects).



## Recommendations for organisations

- ▶ **Establish communication with communities staff as standalone capacity, and make this their only job.**
- ▶ **Develop capacity in communicating with communities.** Having technical capacity available to support project staff in designing communication work as an integral part of project, and in designing and establishing standalone communication projects is essential to the delivery of quality work. This should be part of the work of the staff member responsible for communication with communities (see recommendation above). Expertise can also be brought in from the local private sector or provided by an international consultant. Organisations in disaster-prone countries should address this as part of disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness.
- ▶ **Ensure communication with communities capacity works as closely as possible with operations.**
- ▶ **Communication capacity should also be tasked with supporting accountability and transparency capacity.** Good accountability and transparency work is not possible without a systemic approach to communication.
- ▶ **Ensure the communication with communities section has its own budget.** This could be core funding or a percentage of operational budgets. Staff should also be supported in approaching donors directly for funding for specific projects.
- ▶ **If communication with communities work is placed inside accountability, ensure that it is properly resourced early on in the response and is not limited to implementation of HAP principles.** Tying accountability too closely to communication risks losing sight of the importance of information as a lifesaving resource, and also of the value of working with local media (accountability projects as they are currently designed almost never use mass communication tools).
- ▶ **Build listening and feedback systems into project communication from the start.** These are not effective unless explicitly designed and supported.
- ▶ **Consider the importance of face-to-face communication.** This can either consist of recruiting and training a dedicated team of staff (community mobilisers) or providing communication training to existing personnel.
- ▶ **Ensure communication work begins ahead of projects if possible.** Preparing the ground for projects, such as registration or the launch of a new clinic, can be the difference between success and failure.

## Effective communication as part of operational project design and delivery

This section of the paper will look at communication projects deliberately developed to support operational delivery. This will include both parallel systems offering strategic support and cases where communication was fully integrated into a technical project.

### MAINSTREAMING COMMUNICATION WITHIN PROJECTS

Some projects in Haiti had communication work built into the technical design of the project from the start, and resourced and developed communication support as a necessary part of operational delivery.

## UNOPS AND INTEGRATING COMMUNICATION INTO TECHNICAL PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Within days of the earthquake, UNOPS and the Ministry of Public Works began planning for a large-scale project to evaluate every building affected by the disaster. UNOPS is not an agency that normally implements standalone information and communication activities, but the project designer, who had a communication background, argued that in order for the project to succeed, survivors had to be able to understand and trust the red/yellow/green classification system for buildings developed by the ministry.

Communication was thus pitched from the start as a way to save lives: by ensuring people understood the dangers of red houses but also by facilitating return

to safe shelter by explaining that green houses were safe.

Provision of information to families and management of assessment data were written into the project as deliverables. The donor (the European Union) supported this approach and one fifth of the project budget was set aside for communication work. Community mobilisers were recruited at the beginning of the project, and went out to talk and listen to communities, refer back the information they were hearing to humanitarian agencies and later on support disaster risk reduction activities in camps.

One year later, the value of the community mobilisers was clear to all, including the Ministry of Public Works who specifically requested that the teams be retained. The project also changed perceptions of communication work within the organisation and was considered to be best practice. Other parts of the UNOPS Haiti operation requested support from the community mobilisation team, and the organisation scaled up its team as a result.

## COMMUNICATION AS CROSS-CUTTING ASSISTANCE TO OPERATIONS

At agency level, some of the most successful communication work was based on a close working relationship between communication staff and operations, with communication staff providing technical support. This included communication projects that provided support to several initiatives at once. In the case of CRC, information kiosks provide support to the full portfolio of projects being implemented in Leogane (see case study on next page).

In some instances communication became one of the most effective aspects of a project. At UNOPS, for example, the community mobilisation team proved so useful that they effectively became a standalone team providing support to all aspects of UNOPS operations, specifically in the response to cholera and to mitigation/hurricane preparedness work in camps.

## CAMP-BASED COMMUNICATION

Since so many displaced Haitians established themselves in hundreds of informal camps, many agencies have taken a camp-based approach to assistance. As a result, much of the communication work has targeted camp residents through information about provision of services, preparedness for hurricane

season and cholera awareness. The current focus is on communication around return as both aid agencies and the government seek to close down settlements and find sustainable housing solutions. As camp-based communication systems are an important area for almost all disasters involving displacement, this section will look at three models of best practice for different sized camps being implemented in Haiti (see case studies 1, 2 and 3).

This should not be taken as an endorsement of a camp-based focus for urban disaster response: the failure to explore the potential of communication tools as a means for connecting with and thus helping to assist those survivors who are not camp residents has been identified elsewhere as an ongoing problem.<sup>3</sup> However, the principles of camp-based communication are essentially the same as any community-based work, and the findings here are also applicable to agencies working in urban community environments.

The Concern approach was based on a very high level of personal investment from the organisation's accountability manager, who happened to have a background in communication. Their approach involved an organic process of consultation and feedback based on personal relationships between staff. While this approach delivered a very effective and community-based system, its lack of formal structure and rooting in personal dynamics makes it very difficult to scale up.

Those running bigger camps have found that a

<sup>3</sup> Binder, A and Grunewald, F. *Inter-agency real-time evaluation in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake*, Global Public Policy Institute and Groupe URD, Geneva, August 2010.

## CRC INFORMATION KIOSKS

CRC began developing information kiosks to improve information sharing between the organisation and camp/community residents. The kiosks consisted of a three-sided structure including two sheltered bulletin boards and a suggestions box.

From the start, the kiosks were seen as an integral tool in the CRC shelter programme. They were typically used to share printed materials such as information about project processes, how to apply for assistance, beneficiary selection criteria, lists of those selected to receive assistance, contact details for the organisation and information about other services available.

To ensure communities fully understood the concept and how to use the kiosks, CRC held inauguration ceremonies, including theatre performances, a process which was also used to emphasise CRC's commitment to transparency and communication. Staff stressed their interest in listening to people as well as merely sharing information.

For project staff the kiosk system is now regarded as essential to their work. Communities also appreciate the bulletin boards. "We like the bulletin boards, there is lots of information there. We like it because we don't have to ask questions or call anyone, you just go and check the board...if there is something you don't like you can write a note," said one female resident during an infoasaid site visit.

## CASE STUDY 1 CONCERN AND COMMUNICATION IN SMALL CAMPS

The small Oscart et Rue Dartiguenave camp is home to 188 families affected by the earthquake. While Concern had been providing camp management and support services at the site, they helped people to find more sustainable living arrangements.

Even in such a small camp, the communication challenges were considerable. Explaining something as simple as a return back to the community proved to be very complex, from alerting the camp residents about the move to explaining the process of completing application forms for rental assistance. Decisions about what information to share, when and how have had to be carefully considered at each stage of the process.

After starting with a community-led registration of all families in the camp, Concern began their sensitisation work with a respected community leader, a pastor, leading the process. A meeting was held in a church (a place where tempers were less likely to flare) and included pre-tested handouts in *Kreyol* explaining the basic options and the processes, and a Q&A session with Concern staff.

Concern was careful to put all distributed documents on public display and provided an ongoing source of information and discussion at the camp office, where local staff could meet with



Concern office  
in the Rue  
Dartiguenave  
camp.

residents who dropped in for discussion at their convenience.

For camp staff, the efficacy of the communication work was evidenced by the smoothness of the process, the lack of community conflict and the fact that residents began leaving a camp in which they have remained for over a year peacefully and of their own volition. For residents, the fact that they could go and talk to Concern camp staff at any time and discuss their circumstances was also critical.

Camp residents also appreciated the attention paid to their circumstances. "I am happy today to be among the beneficiaries of this programme," said camp resident Mary Louise. "It is a big step for me and for all those who soon will leave the camp. We did not believe at first, but thanks to the hard work of the Committee of Concern we understood. Today I am finally able to sleep under a proper roof and I know it will be the same for all those who still live in the camp today."

## CASE STUDY 2

### IFRC AND CAMP COMMUNICATION

L'Annexe de la Mairie is a complex camp of around 800 families on the edge of Cité de Soleil. It is on public land and is prone to flooding. IFRC began building t-shelters on site, but due to limited land availability only 350 could be built. IFRC therefore faced difficult decisions over allocation of shelter, in a camp where residents had reacted aggressively in the past.

IFRC developed a communication strategy to address these issues, focussed on mitigating conflict and security issues by ensuring everyone understood and accepted the selection criteria for shelter, and had full access to information about alternative support if they were not selected.

The strategy used several communication techniques and focussed on framing the issue as a question of choice for residents. There was also a focus on feedback and systems by which the community could ask questions, including a shortcode phone line run by a local partner that could also handle SMS, and a suggestion box and a public chalk board where residents could leave comments or questions. The plan also mixed verbal and written approaches, with community meetings, face-to-face discussions and sound trucks announcing the start of the project complemented

by posters explaining the process, maps of the construction process and written explanations of selection criteria and lists of those selected.

Communication was also used to address additional issues that arose during the project. Staff quickly found that residents were blaming IFRC for the low numbers of t-shelters, so staff adapted messaging to explain that this was a Haitian government decision over which they had no control and for which they should not be blamed. Explaining alternative options, in particular that families with land elsewhere could ask for a t-shelter to be constructed, also became very important.

Staff at the camp said that effective feedback systems were critical – in particular the call centres and community mobilisers who discussed issues with the community.

Camp residents appreciated the effort IFRC put into providing information, and particularly in providing the chance for face-to-face discussions. It is notable that residents used the word 'choice' when talking about their plans. "They presented me with options and I chose to have a shelter in the camp," said Roseline Duval who lives with her children.

The camp staff said the best evidence that the communication programme worked was that both shelter construction and allocation of shelter went smoothly. They also added that the communication programme improved community relationships and trust overall.

more formalised approach is necessary. IFRC's pilot communication project in Annexe de la Mairie camp, a site where tensions were running high, was a success and an excellent illustration of the effectiveness of a systematic approach.

Of the three camps profiled here, IFRC was the only one to use a phone line, an investment they felt had made a considerable difference both to camp residents and to capturing and analysing qualitative feedback in a systematic way. One of the most interesting aspects of the phone line, however, was that camp residents appreciated its existence and felt better for knowing they could call 24 hours a day. This suggests that phone systems, particularly those staffed by a call centre, serve a psychosocial and protection function. Also, for many camp residents, the ability to make the call was just as important as the call itself, or the answer they received. This is a fundamentally different perspective to that put forward by many agencies, which are very focussed on being able to answer the question or manage the call.

There are two key challenges for current camp-based communication systems. The first is that of coordination: when different agencies providing

different services all have different communication systems, how can these be streamlined and coordinated so that they do not cause confusion and overlap, for example, avoiding the spread of misleading information on organisations working in the camps. How do these systems interact with local or national government bodies? These are key questions for the CCCM Cluster, especially in environments where camps are large and will be in situ for more than a few months.

The second is the tendency to focus communication work on camp populations. Yet the earthquake affected areas are primarily urban, with almost all of those in camps also part of the surrounding community. Surrounding communities are an important and frequently neglected audience. JPHRO, for example, is currently working on systems to connect camp information systems with community liaison work in Delmas 32 as Petionville Club residents move back to the area, but they are unusual. The communication staff working in these kinds of environments need to think carefully about information needs and the importance of dialogue with host communities.





Community leader making an announcement on a camp-based public information system, Leogane.

### CASE STUDY 3 JPHRO AND LARGE-SCALE CAMP COMMUNICATION

Since the earliest days of the response, JPHRO has managed the spontaneous camp on the golf course of the Petionville Club in Port au Prince, home to an estimated 50,000 internally displaced people. The camp is one of the largest in Haiti, and was one of the first to pioneer a systematic approach to camp-based communication during the relocation of 7,000 at-risk residents to a new camp in Corail ahead of the 2010 rainy season.

From the start, JPHRO implemented a philosophy of dialogue, of offering camp residents a choice of options and creating opportunities for camp residents to find out more and ask questions.

Initially, this approach centred on a system of staffed 'information kiosks' (14 across the camp) combined with community mobilisers and megaphone announcements in areas of the camp implicated in the Corail move in April 2010. Staff in the kiosks were provided with guidelines on answering questions and instructed to take notes of questions they couldn't answer along with mobile numbers. These were discussed at daily debriefs, which also ensured that issues raised by residents were fed straight back into decision making.

While the full kiosk system was too labour intensive

to maintain outside of this specific move, and also not necessary, JPHRO scaled back to five kiosks and added tent-to-tent outreach and informal discussions with residents. Community mobilisers were also tasked with identifying vulnerable people and connecting them to the protection team.

Over time JPHRO found that the system needed to be strengthened. The volume of information and the need to address expectation management – especially the level of service provision expected from JPHRO – was growing. New ways of sharing information about the return process were devised, for example, by assigning staff to smaller sections of the camp, and using a newsletter to reinforce information dissemination. JPHRO also worked closely with other NGOs operating in the camp such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) who had their own outreach teams.

Given the size and complexity of the camp, JPHRO staff have found that maintaining a comprehensive system for information sharing and feedback is essential to maintaining the relationship with residents, picking up on and addressing rumours and ensuring residents have access to the information they need. JPHRO invests around 10 percent of its camp coordination budget in communication, an investment they feel is essential. "The amount of time that is invested in communication and conversation especially when it comes to relocation is quite substantial," said one senior staff member.

# Chapter 4

## Communication at system level

**T**HIS CHAPTER WILL LOOK AT HOW communication with affected communities should be organised and managed at the level of the humanitarian system. It will look at the

models applied in Haiti and how they evolved over the course of the year, particularly as a result of the cholera outbreak. This chapter will also explore donors' perspectives on communication work and funding.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Communication with communities is a cross-cutting issue.**
- ▶ **Capacity at cluster level to handle communication was important in ensuring consistency and best use of available resources at a sector level.**
- ▶ **Aside from the CDAC group, there is no structure tasked with supporting communication within the humanitarian system. This gap needs to be addressed.**
- ▶ **CDAC Haiti worked best as a cross-cluster support mechanism. Delivery of this service, however, requires funding, staffing and support services, and a host organisation willing to take on the additional burden.**
- ▶ **Local communication organisations including local media were not sufficiently represented in CDAC Haiti at the time of writing. Nor was it sufficiently designed with their needs in mind.**
- ▶ **A centralised system for disaster-affected communities to access information overall does not exist in Haiti and this should be explored, especially considering the potential of technology to facilitate this.**
- ▶ **There is currently no system-wide complaints or feedback system for the Haiti response.**
- ▶ **Technical support to government authorities, including local government, in communication is still a major gap.**

## CDAC AND COORDINATING COMMUNICATION

CDAC Haiti began on January 14<sup>th</sup> after CDAC network members, who were almost all deploying to Haiti, decided to initiate a CDAC coordination mechanism at field level. OCHA asked Internews, the organisation from the CDAC network with the largest field presence in communication, to take the lead in Haiti. OCHA also supported funding applications to the ERRF, which included resources to set up a dedicated CDAC coordination team through Internews.

Originally envisaged as a three-month experiment in response to the earthquake, CDAC Haiti found itself playing a key role in planning for the hurricane season. It also was actively involved in responding to a serious storm on September 24<sup>th</sup>, Hurricane Tomas in November and the outbreak of cholera. Three months of funding was awarded, later extended to five and then to the end of the year at the request of participating agencies, including the Government of Haiti with a further grant from OCHA. CDAC Haiti, continued to operate into 2011 with funding from WHO and others.

Initially, most activity centred around weekly meetings, which were held in a local media facility and in French to facilitate attendance by local partners, including the local media. Once CDAC Haiti scaled up with the arrival of dedicated coordination staff, the team also implemented a number of services and projects. For example, they coordinated the screening of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in camps and arranged messaging at match events. During the cholera crisis, CDAC Haiti was asked by the Humanitarian Coordinator to function as a de facto cluster – recognition of the importance of communication coordination. However, this was a decision that came with its challenges due to the lack of CDAC Haiti's formal status.

While tangible outcomes – as with all coordination mechanisms – are hard to measure, it is clear from talking to partners that CDAC Haiti played a key role in facilitating partnerships and building relationships, and that the operational model filled a gap in a way much appreciated by partners. CDAC Haiti also provided important common services such as who-what-where for the communication sector, sectoral situation reports during the cholera emergency, and coordinated exercises such as the joint knowledge mapping on cholera carried out in November 2010.

## The coordination challenge in Haiti

The Haiti response saw the first effort to address communication with affected communities at the level of the humanitarian system. The formal humanitarian architecture is not currently geared towards addressing the issue of communication with communities, or the concept of information as a form of humanitarian assistance in itself. No agency or cluster is tasked with leading on communication, and there is no recognition of communication as a cross-cutting issue.

### THE CROSS-CLUSTER APPROACH

CDAC Haiti was the humanitarian system's first attempt to provide an operational solution to the lack of systems to support communication work in humanitarian response. It was positioned from the start as a cross-cluster service and tasked by OCHA to provide coordination, technical support and advice to all humanitarian responders in communication, and

common services.<sup>1</sup> It was also intended as an advocacy platform and a bridge between international responders and local media, communication NGOs and the communications private sector.

There is no question that almost all of those who participated in CDAC Haiti regarded it as essential to their work and as filling a critical gap in humanitarian response. The extent to which Oxfam, WHO, Internews and OCHA were willing to provide funding and staff to keep it going speaks to the value they saw. More than 20 organisations, including local government bodies, were also willing to provide supporting testimonies and requests for funding to continue when the project's initial grant came to an end in September 2010.

The initiative was also praised by early studies of the response including the central three-month inter-agency real-time evaluation. One of this paper's recommendations was to "improve communication with the affected community and ensure they are better informed. Clusters should systematically use the communication services and expertise of the CDAC initiative vis-à-vis the affected population as part of their cluster strategy."<sup>2</sup> The evaluation of OCHA's response to the earthquake also examined the CDAC Haiti initiative, commenting that the initiative met with

<sup>1</sup> CDAC at global level at that time described itself as a community of practice, a coordination mechanism and an advocacy platform.

<sup>2</sup> Binder, A and Grunewald, F. *Inter-agency real-time evaluation in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake*, Global Public Policy Institute, Geneva, August 2010, p58.

“some success” and finding that “activities such as a daily news programme on local radio and information kiosks for people affected by displacement were appreciated and commended by national NGOs and communities.”<sup>3</sup>

CDAC Haiti was most commonly criticised by interviewees for this research and other papers<sup>4</sup> for being unclear in its role and mandate, and for failing to do enough to connect with local media and organisations. Another tendency was for humanitarian actors to regard communication work as ‘CDAC’s job’, particularly with regard to projects, thus potentially lessening agency and cluster commitment to communication work.

It is also clear that the management and support of CDAC Haiti placed a considerable burden on the lead agency, Internews. This ranged from supporting recruitment and staff management for CDAC Haiti to fundraising. While Internews and OCHA demonstrated considerable commitment to the idea and implementation of CDAC Haiti, recognising the operational weight of hosting CDAC is important, especially when other future responses come to grapple with this question.

Overall, the experience of CDAC Haiti served as much to highlight the need for a systemic level approach as it offered solutions to some of the problems faced. The fact that CDAC Haiti – an experimental project with just three staff – has so far been extended three times at the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator, taken a central role in the response to the cholera emergency and attracted support from the Haitian government, local media and a wide range of humanitarian partners, indicates that some kind of structure to manage communication at a system level added value to the response.

## WHAT WORKS? LEARNING FROM THE CDAC HAITI EXPERIENCE

- ▶ **The opportunity to connect.** An overwhelming number of people currently involved in CDAC Haiti said the most valuable aspect was ‘the water cooler factor’ – the chance to meet others working in the same area, make connections and form partnerships.

- ▶ **Proactive mapping of efforts, gap analysis, advocacy and coordination.** CDAC Haiti was seen as an active coordinator, helping to map communication initiatives, analyse and match up projects, identify gaps and find people to fill them, and to advocate across the humanitarian sector for the importance of communication.
- ▶ **Assistance in connecting with local partners, especially local media.** One of the first things that the full-time secretariat did was to create media and communications services directories. Organisations appreciated access to media research, media contact lists, support in identifying appropriate partners, mapping of possible private sector partners, and services such as standardised rates for PSAs and airtime. CDAC Haiti also organised a series of off-the-record ‘Meet The Press’ events, which enabled local media to meet and discuss the response with leading humanitarians.
- ▶ **Incubator of inter-agency initiatives.** In addition to projects such as the *Koute Ayiti* caravan, CDAC Haiti facilitated partnerships to address key areas of work. These included the IFRC/IOM/UNOPS partnership on communication around early warning and hurricane preparedness, and a series of inter-agency assessment missions to the provinces to prepare for hurricane season. CDAC Haiti also facilitated Internews’ initiative to provide training in basic research techniques to local staff in a number of other agencies including IOM and UNOPS.
- ▶ **Help with troubleshooting.** Several staff members, especially those working either for small NGOs or those who were not well supported within their agencies, said that having a forum that could assist them with challenges was really helpful.
- ▶ **Strategic leadership.** Organising and leading initiatives, such as the inter-agency planning trips to understand communication needs in areas vulnerable to hurricanes, and planning for emergency response, was an important strategic role played by CDAC Haiti.
- ▶ **Coordinating research.** CDAC Haiti led a partnership of agencies in carrying out initial research into the impact of cholera public information work; this was particularly praised.

<sup>3</sup> Bhattacharje, A and Lossio, R. *Evaluation of the OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake*, January 2011, p37.

<sup>4</sup> Tsujisaka, Ayako. ‘Coordinating Communications in Emergencies: A Case Study of the CDAC Initiative in Post-Earthquake Haiti’, thesis submitted for the MSc in Humanitarian Programme Management, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, 2010.



- ▶ **Production of situation reports and analysis of gaps/needs in communication.** Haiti was the first response in which communication was adequately reflected in situation reports, humanitarian achievements and needs/gap analysis produced by OCHA. It was also the first response to have written records of communication work as it was implemented.
- ▶ **Support with fundraising.** CDAC Haiti worked with OCHA to support applications for funding by agencies and ensure proposals filled identified gaps, particularly during the cholera outbreak.
- ▶ **A hub of electronic material.** The CDAC Haiti website centralised materials such as radio spots, posters, up-to-date key messages on cholera etc. that could be downloaded and used by all, including the local media.

## THE CLUSTER PERSPECTIVE

The Haiti response was characterised by an uneven approach to communication across clusters. Some, such as the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster, regarded communication as an essential part of their work and developed working groups to manage and coordinate this capacity. Haiti was also the first response in which the Shelter Cluster deployed a dedicated communication staff member and established a technical working group, a move praised by partners particularly in the early stage of the response.

By contrast, the coordinators of clusters in sectors in which communication is not already hardwired struggled to make the case for this capacity, as it is not written into any of the existing structures or terms of reference and is not an accepted function of the cluster. Several, in particular CCCM, commented that in retrospect the capacity to manage communication coordination would have been operationally very useful. Although this was never formalised, the IOM communication unit became the default communication capacity for the cluster.

The Health Cluster in Haiti also advocated for technical support in communication, possibly to be placed within the Ministry of Health, but this was not achieved until some weeks after the cholera outbreak and was prompted by that emergency. Other clusters, notably agriculture, identified the need for communication capacity following the cholera emergency.

## WHAT DO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS WANT FROM COORDINATION?

- ▶ **Meetings and materials in a language they can understand.**
- ▶ **The chance to connect with and understand international humanitarian responders.**
- ▶ **The opportunity to build working partnerships, including sourcing funding and working together on projects.**
- ▶ **The opportunity to get the resources they need and actively participate and influence the way humanitarian operations are run. This includes humanitarian assistance for their own workers, for example, tents for journalists.**
- ▶ **Centralised ways of getting information.** (Radio Boukman appreciated the ability to download radio PSAs from the CDAC Haiti website as they could not access them any other way.)

“The cluster should build on innovations in Haiti and links with sectoral initiatives to make communication with the affected community a strategic issue in future emergencies.”

EXTRACT FROM THE REVIEW OF THE SHELTER CLUSTER DEPLOYMENT IN HAITI 2010, IFRC

## COORDINATING COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITIES

An additional emerging issue experienced was the need for coordination in communication at camp/community level. At least one organisation managing a large camp in which several agencies were working encountered the challenge of misinformation being circulated on the activities of some agencies, and of different information being shared at different times.

The proliferation of helplines and demand for community time in community meetings also suggests that a coordinated approach would be helpful for all concerned. This was recognised by some partners working in Haiti who at the time of writing had begun to discuss how they might collectively respond to this

challenge. One group, consisting of Save the Children, WVI and the Lutheran World Federation, worked with HAP to develop a joint camp-level complaint and feedback mechanism as a pilot. However this was adversely affected when the camp in question was served with a sudden eviction order by the landowners.<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, JPHRO – the agency responsible for camp management in Petionville Club camp – was also working with partners to address this question.

## Communication at government level

As in any disaster, much of the information needed by survivors related to services provided by the Haitian authorities and was thus their responsibility. With the devastation suffered by ministries and local authorities alike, and with the amount of uncertainty surrounding the political environment, organising communication work on the scale necessary was beyond their capacity.

The lack of government communication was a key problem in Haiti for survivors and responders alike, and clearly one rooted in far deeper problems than lack of technical capacity. Nevertheless, eighteen months after the disaster, much remains to be done despite the key role government authorities have in some of the central issues around the earthquake response, particularly the provision of sustainable housing to survivors.

UNDP and other partners have for many years supported bodies such as civil protection (*La Direction de la Protection Civile* – DPC) as part of disaster risk reduction. This was however insufficient effort to address additional needs after the earthquake and even less at departmental or mayoral level. There was also considerable demand from survivors for information that could only come from government sources, such as how to replace lost papers, register the dead and claim inheritance.

One of the only projects to provide this support was started in the early days by USAID and partners, which helped the Ministry of Culture and Communication to communicate more effectively with the affected population. During the cholera crisis, leadership on health information came from the Ministry of Public Health, which was proactive and responsive within days of the start of the outbreak (closely supported

by a number of agencies such as UNICEF, WHO and Action Contre la Faim – ACF). They also held daily press briefings, which were shared with representatives from other ministries and international organisations, including the UN, and also experts on the disease.

The question of local level government communication capacity was also important in Haiti. During emergency preparations for Hurricane Tomas in November 2010, local authorities had little or no capacity to communicate or share even basic information with those under their jurisdiction. While DPC is working to address this, as are international organisations such as UNDP, Internews, IMS and UNESCO, their current capacity is limited.

## WHAT WORKS AND WHAT IS NEEDED? GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

Commitment and capacity to implement communication work, along with understanding of what communication was and should be, varied from ministry to ministry and also at local level. Ministries that saw public information as key to operations, such as the Ministry of Public Health, were better resourced. Others, by contrast, had no communication capacity.

The Ministry of Public Health, which had a proactive and competent team working on communication around cholera response, expressed great appreciation for the support of international organisations but was also frustrated by weak coordination, especially during the cholera crisis.

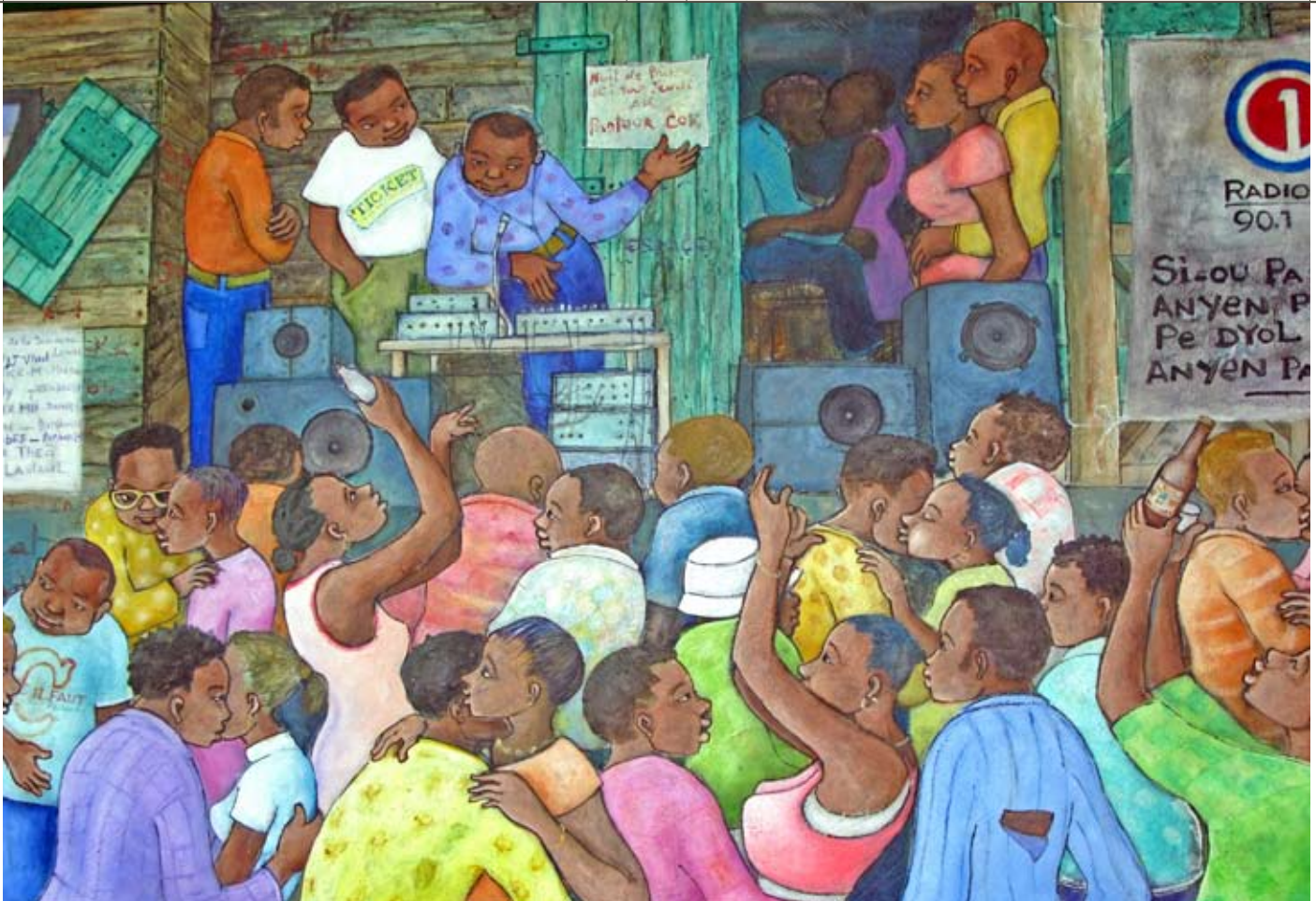
“A number of organisations active in this sector, which had funds, began launching all kinds of communication activities without conveying the same message. We set up the CADME (Committee for Development and Learning Materials) to handle this, so all these organisations could rally around a single message,” said a government official.

The Ministry of Public Health also found logistics a greater challenge than professional competency. While they could handle design and production of materials, distribution of items like posters and fliers was more difficult.

For DPC, support from the international community was essential, but in the longer term staff said they felt strongly that government leadership and funding for disaster risk reduction communication was vital. They were also very appreciative of ENDK – “an invaluable resource” – and stressed the importance of working with radio.

The Ministry of Culture and Communication also

<sup>5</sup> The group nevertheless published the tools and models they had developed in order that others may learn and draw on them. They can be found at [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/896A4516D717A799492577C00250E81-Full\\_Report.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/896A4516D717A799492577C00250E81-Full_Report.pdf)



Radio 1 painting

played an essential role, in which it was supported primarily by USAID. The Ministry was provided with key infrastructure, including a press centre, and technical advisors and support, from the earliest days of the response. These facilities were widely used both by other line ministries and on occasion by the UN and visiting dignitaries. The Ministry was also supportive of early communication efforts, including CDAC Haiti – the Minister appeared regularly on ENDK, particularly in the first weeks after the earthquake. Assessing the impact of this model is hard as no evaluation is available and the Ministry of Culture and Communication was not able to engage with this research process.

## COMMUNICATION PROJECTS AT SYSTEM LEVEL

While few projects were explicitly designed to share information about the whole humanitarian response (as opposed to individual projects or sectors), some functioned this way particularly in the early days, and in doing so provided an important service. The ENDK radio show provided as much information as they could, as did programming by MINUSTAH FM. In the early days, the TRF/EIS also sought to provide a system-wide

tool to share information via SMS with subscribers. One project that explicitly sought to create a common platform was the *Koute Ayiti* ('Listen to Haiti') caravan, developed, managed and funded by CDAC Haiti.

A major gap not addressed was the question of a system-wide approach to handling questions, comments, complaints and feedback from disaster survivors. One key challenge identified by all evaluations of the Haiti response is that the voices of disaster-affected communities and local partners have been almost completely excluded from the decision-making process.<sup>6</sup> As a result projects and responses were developed according to external ideas of field priorities, not those of the affected community.<sup>7</sup> This is a transparency and accountability issue, as well as one of communication, and of survivor rights. At the time of writing, 14 months after the earthquake, IOM and The World Bank are working to develop a pilot model, but this is still in the early stages.

6 As highlighted in the inter-agency evaluation in Haiti (see footnote below). Point 69: Despite innovations such as the CDAC initiative, overall the earthquake response has been highly exclusive. The affected population was not consulted, informed or included in the design, planning and implementation of the humanitarian response (p41).

7 Binder, A and Grunewald, *Inter-agency real-time evaluation in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake*, Global Public Policy Institute, Geneva, August 2010.



## THE KOUTE AYITI CARAVAN

The *Koute Ayiti* caravan (*Kreyol* for 'Listen to Haiti') was developed to address several systemic gaps in communication. The project, which cost US\$25,000, involved a travelling event with debates and Q&A sessions with aid workers and local authorities, followed by evening performances of music, street theatre, dance and comedy. From the start the project was a collective effort, led by CDAC Haiti and the Ministry of Culture and Communication,<sup>1</sup> with 17 local and international organisations participating.

<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Public Health and DPC were also involved.

Event management and daily organisation was outsourced to a local company.

As well as promoting information exchange about the earthquake, the caravan was also used to inform the public about more general issues such as gender-based violence, sanitation and HIV prevention. Around 200 people were counselled and tested for HIV by a local organisation working on site every night.

The caravan travelled to eight locations. It was covered by in-country media as well as the ENDK show, which took questions from audiences every night and ran special editions of their mailbox section.

According to the Internews team, which captured impact

at two events, the caravan was welcomed with considerable enthusiasm by audiences who especially appreciated the chance to ask questions. Others, however, commented that it wasn't as relevant to their living situation in a camp as they had wanted, illustrating the need for highly localised information. On the entertainment side, many interviewees of the Champs de Mars event in Port au Prince said that they hoped there would be more such events, and most could recall at least one piece of information shared during the event.

Many other organisations expressed interest in replicating the model, particularly after the cholera outbreak, but at the time of writing had yet to do so.

## The donor perspective<sup>8</sup>

On the whole donors interviewed for this research were far more willing than was assumed by aid agencies to fund communication work, as long as it fit with their overall objectives. DAI, an implementing agency contracted by USAID, for example, have allocated 10 percent of their overall budget to communication and outreach. They were also less demanding in terms of deliverables and indicators than many agencies assume, particularly in the phase of early emergency response. Nearly 18 months after the disaster, donors particularly expressed interest in projects that tackled system-level access to information and that promoted debate, discussion and listening. They stressed the importance of looking to the longer term, of supporting government capacity and moving away from an agency-based information dissemination model.

### PROJECT DESIGN IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND TRANSITION

Although the donors interviewed for this report are in principle happy to see both communication projects

and communication elements in technical projects, this still seems to depend very much on the level of understanding of the individual assessing the project of communication work. "I'll be honest, the purists don't like to have communication in documents," said a donor representative. "Communication, information is not the first thing that humanitarians think about especially at the outset of the emergency."

Other donors saw the same issue and moved away from hardware as a result. "Everyone else was funding the hard core, so we decided to go for the software – the social engineering – which is something we have to take more and more care with."

"Most of the first projects we signed in the first month after the earthquake were input driven and to do with supply. But we then started to move from hardware to software, and this is where communication and the relationship with beneficiaries is taking place."

A DONOR REPRESENTATIVE

Donors are also aware of how communication work needs to adapt to the different stages of response. "At the early stage we would seek to address the population to tell them what is happening, what aftershocks are, who's affected, what's going on with the current response, where to access basic services? Now, more than a year down the line, we would change the topic

<sup>8</sup> As part of the research process representatives of three major donor agencies (ECHO, DAI and ERRF) were interviewed in depth. The analysis presented in this section represents their views. Unfortunately it was not possible to carry out a more extensive survey of donor partners in Haiti.



and communicate with owners, municipalities, camp leaders, more decision-making people who can help us to start solving medium lasting projects and trying to find solutions.”

Others agree. “Immediately after the earthquake the question was how to get information to Haitians about services and aid, especially as neither the authorities nor the local media were providing the necessary degree of information. What we have transitioned to 6 to 12 months afterwards is moving from provision of news to people towards starting to look from a civic engagement perspective...We are, for example, looking at pilot programmes around civic engagement work, debates and discussions around parliamentary decisions.”

## DONOR PRIORITIES IN HAITI 18 MONTHS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

“The number one thing we look for is how it fits with our programme objectives, like increasing citizen engagement with government and reconstruction effort,” said another donor representative. “The other thing we look at is: are we filling a gap? We’re not going to fund a programme if other people are doing it. We are also interested in new ideas, and projects that catalyse. Is it something new?”

“I don’t like the standalone concept, and I think communication cannot exist for communication’s sake. It should be a means to strengthen other points of view,” said another major donor. “I would like to use it to really help communities understand who to call, where to go, legal issues, possibilities of rental possibilities, cholera information, but then allowing the population to have a reflection from the humanitarian community.”

Donors were also keen to stress their interest in working with local organisations, and particularly in capacity building of government and national authorities, including at departmental level. DAI, for example, design their contracting requirements so they can provide funding to Haitian community-based organisations and NGOs who do not have the ability to contract directly.

More than one donor also commented that they do not fund many communication projects simply because they are not asked to. “At the moment we have very few communication projects – but that’s mainly because agencies aren’t asking us to fund them. We are not specifically against anything. If we see the added value and it is clear then we try to find ways to do it. And communications work is not expensive,” said one.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

M&E are basic donor requirements and donors are entitled to know whether the public funds they provide will be properly spent. In Haiti, donors expressed varying opinions on how organisations approached the important application of M&E.

“The number one thing we look for is how it fits with our programme objectives.”

DONOR REPRESENTATIVE

One donor expressed frustration at the quality of indicators and deliverables outlined in the projects they had received. This is surprising, especially given that donors tended to stress that they were happy with relatively straightforward indicators. “I would ask for a clear reference of what stations, which population is being covered, what is the frequency and content of the messages, and was there any post monitoring? That would be a start,” said one. “We have to insist in trying to know very basic elements – normally that doesn’t exist in the proposals at the initial stage. We have to ask for it every time – we have to say, can you explain. Which is a bit worrying – it should be a bit more structured.”

Other donors were equally clear that they could provide guidance on requirements. “Take our citizen engagement work,” said one. “That could be creating forums for dialogue – that’s open to very broad interpretation. Easy indicators would be: how many meetings? How many people came? Did you have key government people show up? Then at the end we will look for things associated with perception – did perceptions of government change? Then we would focus on specific objectives. This you would look at through things like endline/baseline survey focus groups.”

Others were less concerned about indicators, especially in the earliest days of an emergency. “I am convinced there is an added value but I can’t describe it,” said one. This indicates that personal belief in the value of communication work is still an important factor in whether a donor will decide to fund a project or not.

While project staff often spoke of their lack of capacity and funding to measure impact in a way that satisfied donor requirements, at least one donor stressed their willingness to fund research and M&E as part of the project. “We are prepared to fund research. Depending on circumstances we will either fund within a project or we will do a second grant to get an outside group to do the research.”



A local press conference at the Gonaives City Council, November 6<sup>th</sup> 2010. GUILLAUME MICHEL

## COORDINATED HUMANITARIAN FUNDING

There is little recognition of communication as a form of aid in coordinated humanitarian funding mechanisms such as CERF, ERRF and CAP (Consolidated Appeal Process). This makes it difficult for organisations to secure funding for communication under these frameworks. In fact, no communication programmes were funded through the CERF in Haiti. Although information is referenced as a valid form of aid under Protection, there is also no obvious area within ERRF/CAP mechanisms, which take a cluster-based approach to allocating and approving funding requests (with additional scope for coordination). One agency that submitted a communication project through the CAP process under Protection had the project rejected by the review team at headquarters on the grounds that it did not relate sufficiently to the objectives of the cluster, despite strong support from the cluster lead in Port au Prince. This was subsequently revoked after pressure from OCHA and the cluster lead in the field, and the project was included.

Others had more success. Following a relationship pioneered in Pakistan in 2005, Internews was able to secure funding from ERRF in Haiti for communication

services and – for the first time – capacity to coordinate communication (CDAC Haiti) by working through the Protection Cluster. ERRF also funded communication work positioned as disaster risk reduction and information work around cholera.

The cholera emergency, however, provided a different picture. Here, communication and provision of information was widely accepted as a lifesaving form of assistance. Public information was fully mainstreamed and supported, with CDAC Haiti elevated to the status of a semi cluster and tasked with coordinating submissions for communication-related projects to the emergency appeal on cholera.

The cholera experience clearly highlighted the current systemic gap regarding communication in the humanitarian system: while CDAC supported coordination of project proposals and development and OCHA regarded CDAC's recommendations as to which project should be supported in the same manner as they would with a cluster, there was no scope for including a communication section in the cholera appeal. As donors increasingly look for coordination, partnerships and evidence that a project proposal is filling a gap, a system for managing this with regard to communication projects is clearly necessary.

# Recommendations

**Coordinate communication.** Reliable operational capacity to manage cross cluster coordination of communication with disaster-affected communities needs to be an integral part of a humanitarian response.

**Document and use best practice.** The models that functioned in Haiti need to be captured and iterated into future disaster responses.

**Dealing with challenges.** Clusters need to consider how they can address the communication challenge, what this means for their sector and what benefits it can bring.

**Build partnerships.** Coordination mechanisms for communication need to develop better partnerships with local organisations, including local media and government.

**Advocacy.** CDAC networks and others in the sector need to lobby strongly at global level for better mainstreaming of communication within disaster response, including reforming the project funding criteria at CAP/CHAP, CERF and ERRF level.

## FOR GLOBAL-LEVEL RESPONDERS

**Fund communication work.** The CERF, ERRF and CAP/CHAP frameworks and criteria for project funding need to be amended to include information and communication work, and to fund communication work as an integral part of projects submitted.

**Share the whole picture.** Recognise and support evolution of communication projects that help share information about responses as a whole. This may include improving affected communities' access to existing sources of humanitarian information such as websites and OCHA maps.

**Support government capacity.** Consider emergency support in communication to key government authorities from the very start of the response. This may include hiring private sector capacity to provide technical support. In particular, provide consistent support from the start for the line ministry responsible for communication, including construction of facilities, funding for campaigns and technical support staff to work within the ministry.

**Develop feedback system at systems level.** Work with national authorities in disaster-prone countries to develop collective ways in which survivors can feed back into responses, including submitting complaints or being able to ask questions about assistance.

**Design field-based coordination models.** Continue to work with the CDAC network at the global level to develop realistic and viable models for managing coordination of communication at field level in disaster response.

**Position communication with communities.** Work to determine where and how communication with affected communities fits in the global and field-level humanitarian architecture.

**Invest in information needs assessments and communication research.** Include this sector in existing needs assessment/research processes as part of a response.

# Chapter 5

## Standalone communication projects

**T**HE PROJECTS COVERED in this chapter focus exclusively on information sharing and communication as the project output. Different sectors of the mass media are explored and the importance of other approaches, such as face-to-face communication using community mobilisers, is stressed. While analysing different communication channels separately, the case studies in this chapter make it clear that the most effective approaches combined several techniques, creating systems that capitalised on the advantages of different channels, thereby hedging against and cancelling out their weaknesses.

Support to local media emerges as a key issue in the very earliest days of a response. Provision of basic humanitarian assistance to journalists, and mobile phone credit and Internet access, as well as more basic supplies such as fuel for generators, emerged as key and largely unmet needs. Another finding is the importance of localised information projects. Most radio work, for example, focussed on national audiences, but the immediate success of the CRC project in Leogane illustrates the demand for information tailored to particular areas.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Specialist media organisations need to be ready to deliver immediate assistance to the local communications sector.**
- ▶ **Connection with the operational side of humanitarian response was essential.**
- ▶ **Those working with local media should focus on identifying and supporting existing work rather than immediately setting up new systems.**
- ▶ **Systematic research and analysis of communication environments were key to the development of many communication projects in Haiti, as was the commitment of organisations that carried out such research to share with other agencies.**
- ▶ **Survivors prized information that was relevant to their realities, especially in the weeks following a disaster.**
- ▶ **Person-to-person communication, including call centres, was essential, as it provided an opportunity for survivors to ask questions, discuss their personal circumstances and share their experiences.**
- ▶ **Print materials were more useful than widely assumed.**
- ▶ **Feedback systems were vital and delivered on many levels.**
- ▶ **Twitter feeds were an easy way to get information out within minutes and are free.**



## ENDK AND EMERGENCY RADIO BROADCASTS

Internews developed ENDK based on similar broadcast models from emergencies in Indonesia and Pakistan. The aim was to provide actionable information and advice on the response to the earthquake disaster. Produced by a team of Haitian journalists in Port au Prince, it has been on air ever since it was first broadcast eight days after the earthquake.

The show is 15 minutes long and uses a mix of news, reports, interviews, vox pops and audience feedback, all designed to provide information that survivors can use in their daily lives.

ENDK generated an enormous response from the first days it was broadcast. Within weeks it was being broadcast by more than 20 stations in Port au Prince, and thus could be heard across Haiti and by diaspora audiences online. When the team began soliciting audience feedback via an SMS hotline, they received more than 800 messages within the first 24 hours. Over a year later, the show is still broadcast by 27 stations – despite not paying for airtime.

Humanitarian agencies also made use of ENDK to promote and explain their services. Distributing English language summaries of the programme daily to the humanitarian mailing list also did a great deal to build knowledge and understanding of the programme. Through these connections ENDK was able to secure interviews with major players in the response, including President Clinton. The reputation of the programme now is such that they regularly secure interviews with senior Haitian government officials.

ENDK was still on air at the start of the cholera outbreak in October. The team was able to broadcast basic information on cholera within 24 hours of confirmation of the outbreak, and then launched a more comprehensive disease prevention campaign. This was particularly important in the rural areas of Haiti where communities were primarily dependent on radio and SMS for information on cholera, especially at the start of the outbreak.

From the early days ENDK has also been supported by an audience research team. Their findings have been essential in developing editorial content and have been widely shared and used by other organisations working in communication. As the newsroom became stronger, ENDK also served as a training centre for journalists from the regions to learn how to produce humanitarian programming.

ENDK today is produced by a team of 19 journalists,



ENDK reporter working in a settlement of displaced earthquake survivors.

broadcasts five days a week and now serves as a training hub for young reporters including staff from departmental radio stations. Some of the stations that broadcast it use the programme's popularity to generate income by charging higher rates for advertising. It is still very popular but participants in infoasaid focus groups commented that while they would always turn to ENDK in an emergency, they would prefer more regional information.

"This is a very great show. It helped very, very much during the time of the earthquake. I always want to listen to the show because I find information about everything regarding life in community."

RAYMONDE CALIXTE, DELMAS 56, PORT  
AU PRINCE

"Since the earthquake happened, we heard this show [ENDK] and we learned about the aid that is available for our communities. We are not used to these disasters, and through the programme we found much information regarding the behaviours we need to adopt to avoid the worst happening."

RICHEMONDE PIERRE, LEOGANE

Chimen Lakay Haiti illustration, Guiler Junior Mercier for IOM.



## CHIMEN LAKAY AND CAMP-BASED RADIO

*Chimen Lakay* ('The Way Home') is a radio project run and developed by IOM, originally in partnership with commercial network radio Ginen and now with the community station, Radio Boukman. It has been broadcasting since August 20<sup>th</sup> 2010 and complements a camp newsletter with the same name.

The *Chimen Lakay* project emerged from a need identified by IOM to listen more to camp residents, and to share information. The IOM team of community mobilisers found that camp residents were increasingly angry and frustrated at the perceived inadequacies of the response and the failure of aid agencies to engage in dialogue, and tended to take this out on the teams who were visiting the camps.

Unlike other radio shows, *Chimen Lakay* was at first broadcast live, every day, from different locations in the camps. From the start, the show took an experimental open mike approach to allow people to share views and generate discussion on camp issues. Initially, the format caused problems – neither camp residents nor NGOs understood the approach. "The show was live, which was very difficult for us to start, not only with the camps' population but also with some organisations that do not quite understand this approach," says one producer. "But gradually as we proceeded with the project some organisations like Oxfam, CHF and

MDM have begun to join us."

The team discovered quickly that this approach proved very effective at lessening tensions in camps. "It's amazing – people grumble and shout but you put a microphone in front of them and they calm down and people start talking properly. I was concerned at the beginning that we would have real security issues with the radio show, but we have never had them come back and say, we need security," said IOM head of communications, Leonard Doyle.

Building on the success of this approach, the radio team began being asked to go specifically to camps with problems. "When there is an eviction threat in a camp and the community mobilisers are afraid to go, we send the radio team in first. We go under the guise of media, not providers of aid. It calms things down," said an IOM staff member.

The radio team also received requests from camp managers in other organisations to troubleshoot problems, notably in Terrain Accra at the start of the cholera outbreak when the community objected to the construction of a cholera treatment centre by taking it down overnight the day after it was finished. The camp manager reached out to the IOM team, who organised a broadcast from the camp that day to discuss cholera, which also included an American Red Cross doctor who spoke *Kreyol*.

"It is very difficult to draw a direct causal link," said one senior member of the camp management, "but we went from them tearing the cholera treatment centre down one week and absolutely opposing it, to the camp committee being OK with us building





one that was twice as big. I would say that the radio programme was helpful, really helpful. And it was a good event – not much happens when you live in a camp.”

The programme has gone through many changes during its time on air. “One difficulty we have had is that for the kind of work we do now, we find that journalists are not always the best communicators. Their instinct to go for the big story, and to talk up conflict can be unhelpful – our guys are now much more about discussion and facilitating dialogue,” said an IOM team member.

The lack of structure did cause *Chimen Lakay* some problems. When Radio Boukman took over the project the first thing they did was to make the format more structured. The freeform nature of the programme also continued to cause problems for organisations that programme producers say are still sometimes reluctant to take part. “One thing I would add is a message to organisations, which at times are too reluctant to intervene in our programme,” commented one member of the production team. “It is high time they understand that their *Chimen Lakay* offers the opportunity to hear the voice of the people they serve and can also provide an answer as communication in action.”

The format is, however, popular with camp populations according to the available evidence (there has been no monitoring and evaluation or capture of the project). One resident participating in a broadcast attended by infoasaid commented that *Chimen Lakay* is extremely important and is one of

the few opportunities they have to make their voices heard.

It was interesting to note, however, that camp residents saw the value of the broadcast in generating discussion about their camp, rather than as a useful radio show per se – they complained, for example, that it had been five months since the radio team last came to the camp and they should come more often, apparently discounting the broadcasts made daily from other camps.

This disconnect with the general radio audience was reflected in the feedback from focus groups conducted by infoasaid. Participants were confused about how to listen and the frequency and time of broadcast. “I think it’s a good programme as I listen to it now. I wish the persons in charge could design a way for it to be diffused across the country,” said a participant in Artibonite.

Among general audiences, *Chimen Lakay* was far less popular than ENDK. This is partly a reflection of the fact it broadcasts on a much smaller network. There is a demand, however, for more consistent broadcasting and availability on a wider network. One listener in Petionville Club camp in Port au Prince, for example, called his brother in Jeremie – at the time the centre of a series of attacks on voodoo priests – and made him listen to an item on how priests were not responsible for spreading cholera via his phone.

## Radio

Of the Haitian mass media channels, radio is overwhelmingly the most popular. After the earthquake local radio stations became vital community hubs of news, information, updates and solace across the affected area. Journalists were acutely aware of this responsibility and worked extraordinarily hard, often at great personal cost (many were bereaved themselves) to provide information services to their audience. Much of the most effective radio work in Haiti following the earthquake was the initiative of stations themselves (see Chapter 1 on earthquake response) without any external support.

“We are the eyes and ears of Leogane and provide basic but essential information. We have focussed on the earthquake since the 12<sup>th</sup>, we guide the population, tell them where distributions are taking place, what to do in order to get their share of the humanitarian help. We relay the information”

ELMONT PIERRE, DIRECTOR, COOL FM,  
LEOGANE

The need for aid organisations to work with radio (aside from the needs of local media as affected communities in their own right) was evident from the start of the response. In addition to the numerous PSAs and interviews produced and conducted with NGO staff, Internews, IOM and IFRC also developed standalone radio projects.<sup>1</sup>

ENDK, the daily humanitarian and information programme produced by Internews, has been very successful at providing information in different formats. Its main weakness is that it is still produced only in Port au Prince, and the opportunity to develop regional models at a much earlier stage was missed. This is being addressed in 2011, but similar projects in the future should try to find practical ways of decentralising as quickly as possible, especially in a context (as in Haiti) where so many survivors left the affected area and urgently needed to find sources of help in other parts of the country. ENDK could also possibly benefit from broadcasting online.

<sup>1</sup> In addition, the UN has Radio MINUSTAH, a station that has been going for several years and produces some dedicated humanitarian programming. At the start of the response, Radio MINUSTAH had a small audience share, although this appears to have grown during 2010. Radio MINUSTAH also rebroadcasts ENDK.

## Recommendations for working in radio

**Build feedback and discussion into every show even if they are not live.** For example, use call-in shows, invitations to SMS questions for upcoming guests and general feedback systems.

**Ensure times of broadcasts and frequencies are well publicised.**

**Broadcast online in addition to conventional distribution mechanisms.** For example, upload finished shows to the agency website.

**Consider paying for airtime, sponsoring shows or providing some kind of assistance in exchange for airtime. Focus on building partnerships with radio stations.** Most stations are still unable to generate income due to the damaged economy and journalists interviewed were very clear that aid agencies need to recognise that their stations are often businesses that have themselves been badly hit. Those who object to paying for airtime should consider paying for production costs, sponsoring production of radio shows or providing in-kind assistance. Understand local costs and don't distort the market by under or overpaying.

**Capture audience feedback in a way that can be shared more widely.** For example, document and analyse discussions.

“We paid great attention to this programme [ENDK] because it was one of the most complete shows after the earthquake. And when cholera happened again ENDK shared information non-stop to the population.”

PARTICIPANT, CAM MARC ANDRE,  
JALOUSIE, PORT AU PRINCE

In contrast to ENDK, the IOM programme *Chimen Lakay* takes a loosely structured approach to improving communication with disaster survivors. Born of a need to troubleshoot conflict in camps, the programme has focussed on facilitating camp-level discussions using open mike sessions, listening to residents and using radio to defuse tension.

The third large-scale radio project in Haiti is the IFRC show *Radyo Kwa Wouj* (Radio Red Cross), a partnership with the biggest nationwide station in Haiti, Radio 1. The show is a weekly magazine format that



dedicates 20 minutes or more to a call-in on the issue of the week. Feedback from focus group participants suggest the IFRC programme is less popular than ENDK, and although the live phone-ins have generated important insights into trends in community concerns such as misunderstandings about cholera, there is no method at present for systematically collecting and sharing these more widely, particularly with other agencies or operational staff.

## Print

A common assumption in Haiti is that because literacy rates are low,<sup>2</sup> print work is of limited value. Although Haiti is without question primarily an oral culture, this appears to be an overstatement of reality. Community mobilisers cited fliers as an essential part of cholera work, and organisations who displayed information such as selection criteria for shelter projects or lists of aid beneficiaries found these were welcomed by communities. During the cholera response, one organisation reported that people were so desperate for fliers that when the organisation ran out they began paying themselves to copy those they already had for distribution to friends and family.<sup>3</sup>

“Posters are very useful because we can keep them and they have important information like phone numbers for hotlines. I have seen one regarding the sexual abuse and it’s important because it happens here in this large camp.”

ROSE ANDRE, PETIONVILLE CLUB, PORT AU PRINCE

Both camp residents and community mobilisers downplayed the lack of literacy, saying that people just took materials to someone they knew could read and asked them to explain. Some aid agency local staff also commented that the low literacy actually meant that written materials had a greater impact and authority because they were seen as statements of respect.

From an aid agency perspective, written materials also offer a way of managing the misunderstandings

<sup>2</sup> 65.3 percent on average, higher in rural areas. Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2010, using the definition ‘Percentage of people aged 15 years and older who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on their everyday life.’

<sup>3</sup> Samaritan’s Purse, quoted in the OCHA Cholera Sitrep, November 2010.

## Recommendations for working with print

**Do not discount print work because a working environment is low literacy.** Some forms of information, such as beneficiary lists, are best conveyed this way.

**Keep print work simple and low tech.** Simple fliers emailed or printed on office printers make distribution faster and easier, especially in emergencies.

**Use print materials to display information to affected communities.** For example, codes of conduct, information about helplines, details of how to apply for assistance, recipient lists, maps and information on epidemics are all appropriate.

**Think carefully about distribution.** Work with existing channels to disseminate print materials such as the local media or piggy back on distributions of non-food items, or develop simple models that can be emailed. Distribution plans for anything regularly produced, such as a camp newsletter, are essential.

**Test all materials on appropriate subjects before**

## HOW PRINTED MATERIAL CAN SAVE A LIFE

“I was at home with my wife in Terre Neuve in January one night when I started feeling unwell. I quickly began developing symptoms, including diarrhoea. From the IOM leaflet we had at home I recognised the symptoms as cholera, and I knew I needed to get help immediately even though it was 1am. We had no car, so we went to the house of René Eugene, who I knew worked with IOM on cholera. He put me in the back of his truck and drove me for three hours to a cholera treatment centre in Gonaives, where they took me in and gave me treatment. René and that leaflet saved my life.”

PIERRE VIVANDIEU, 40, CHOLERA SURVIVOR

from verbal exchange. “It’s so difficult because you have to be careful about what you do say. So much gets manipulated. I speak French and I had a lot of meetings with committees and you think you have everything clear – but one week later you might get: ‘well, you said this [promised something] last week...’ There was one camp I couldn’t even visit for three days because of a misunderstanding like that,”<sup>4</sup> commented one international staff member with camp liaison responsibilities.

Haiti’s biggest newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*, publishes daily in French and is mostly read by the literate elite in Port au Prince. Those working on communication with affected communities tended, therefore, not to see it as a useful partner. This may have been a mistake: while it isn’t widely read in the camps, most radio newsrooms use *Le Nouvelliste* as a key source for their own bulletins and to set their news agenda, and some smaller stations read stories out wholesale.

In part, the debate over the role of print seems to be a product of the way agencies frame their approach to communication, seeking to ‘rank’ communication channels in terms of popularity and using an either/or approach, rather than looking at the value added and function of different forms of communication, what is appropriate in different circumstances and how they can mesh together.

## Television

With the exception of a few high profile debates organised with the Tele Ginen network, humanitarians have generally not worked much with television in Haiti. Assumptions were made that it was not an important medium and that it was not used much by people due to the loss of TV sets during the earthquake and damage to the TV station and electricity networks. However, research by Internews following the cholera outbreak found that a third of survey participants frequently used TV as a source of information.<sup>5</sup> The study concluded that it was an under-used means of communication.

The most notable exception here is the use of visual media by MINUSTAH, who early on began screening their educational soap opera ‘Under the Sky’. This project was then expanded as part of a coordinated

effort led by CDAC to allow the broadcast of the 2010 FIFA World Cup – more screens were erected and a complex set of negotiations led to the insertion of a number of PSAs and public information work around the screenings. Unfortunately neither activities were systematically monitored and evaluated, making it difficult to pass any value judgement on the effectiveness of the work.

## Community-based communication systems

The Community Address System (CAS) was an innovative and successful project in Leogane, implemented initially as a disaster risk reduction exercise by the Haitian group, *Sosyete Animasyon ak Kominakasyon Sosyal* (SAKS), and the Japanese telecoms NGO, Basic Human Needs (BHN).

The success of the CAS model demonstrates that those working in communication need to think beyond mass media, and look closely at systems that truly meet community needs (see case study on page 61). Although BHN have since left Haiti, other organisations should look at piloting this system elsewhere in the country, and those planning for future responses should make use of this model.

## Face-to-face communication

This research highlights and reiterates the importance of face-to-face communication. Many actors, especially those involved in the cholera response, attached high value to this approach of communicating with communities. Close to the majority of participants involved in Internews focus group research (83 percent) cited mobile community workers as an important source of information.<sup>6</sup>

While face-to-face communication has been central to aid agency projects for many years, the models discussed in this context relate to dedicated, trained

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, however, print materials did not feature highly in the Internews research into valued sources of information concerning cholera.

<sup>5</sup> Mandel, J and Lafont, F. ‘Audience Research In A Time of Cholera: Focus Group and Survey on Haiti’s Frontline’ July 2011. This number dropped in rural areas however, where only 19 percent of focus group discussions identified television as an important source of information.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



**UNOPS community mobilisers hand out government fliers and explain cholera.**

communication staff able to reach out to survivors, not simply meetings with project staff. In Haiti, this was most obviously implemented through the work of community mobilisers (also called 'liaison' or 'animation teams' by some organisations). This kind of work was key for three main reasons. Firstly it was often the best way to share information, especially on complex issues, as it allowed for dialogue and for recipients to ask questions. Secondly, person-to-person communication was by far the best means of sharing practical information that required demonstrations such as securing tents. Thirdly, the feedback from Haitians strongly suggests that they liked face-to-face communication because of its psychosocial value: the feeling that someone cared and was willing to talk to them.

Compared to other forms of communications such as radio or SMS, face-to-face communication is time consuming and requires a lot of investment in management and organisation. In Haiti, however, this was a valuable undertaking. Some community mobilisation teams such as those run by UNOPS and IOM played a critical role in supporting technical projects. They were also the cornerstone of accountability, feedback and camp liaison systems such as those run by WVI. The UNOPS team had their origins in a project to carry out assessments of buildings but were so successful they effectively became a standalone project, providing vital outreach capacity during the preparations for hurricane season, the response to Hurricane Tomas and to the cholera outbreak.

## ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY MOBILISATION TEAMS

Some organisations, like Concern, were lucky enough to have existing teams from pre-quake projects but most needed to recruit new staff. UNOPS, who recruited 50 community mobilisers within weeks of the earthquake, advertised at the university, targeting psychology,

engineering, sociology, architecture and communication students in their final year. They received around 130 CVs, and then gave all applicants a day of basic training at the Ministry of Public Works before asking them to take an exam on what they had learnt. All those who got 80 percent or more were hired. Other successful community mobilisers interviewed for this project were staff with backgrounds in psychology, teaching or church leadership.

## MANAGING THE TEAMS

Written Q&As, outlining the correct organisational answers to common questions, were found to be very valuable by agencies who used them, although these needed to be constantly updated. Reporting systems were also vital, with IOM implementing an innovative approach where mobilisers used Twitter to provide updates from the field. The best were then reposted on the Citizen Ayiti website.

Community mobilisers stressed how important it was to receive psychosocial support: their jobs carried huge emotional and psychological pressures, and many were themselves disaster survivors coping with grief, loss and trauma. Staff also emphasised the need for training in communication and conflict resolution and negotiation. Only a few organisations provided such forms of support. Concern, for example, found their teams especially effective because they were already fully trained in conflict management from the time they worked for peace-building projects in gang areas before the quake.

## Departmental-level information projects

*"We prefer to listen to local community radio programmes to encourage our discussions."*

DEROSIA MIMA, LEOGANE<sup>7</sup>

The lack of communication work at departmental level is one of the biggest gaps in the humanitarian response. This is particularly surprising as working with journalists in places like Leogane or Jacmel is relatively easy and cost-effective – stations charge far less for

<sup>7</sup> Comment made at infoasaid focus group, Leogane, April 2011.

## MINUSTAH AND PRODUCING A SOAP OPERA IN POST-EARTHQUAKE CAMPS

From a production perspective, one of the most interesting communication projects carried out in Haiti in 2010 was the MINUSTAH soap opera, a drama series entitled 'Under The Sky'. It was designed to reflect life in camps while weaving in information around issues such as registration, gender-based violence, child vulnerability, coping with post-earthquake stress and the importance of hygiene.

The films were shown on specially erected screens in the camps and on six Haitian television stations, with each episode costing around US\$6,000. Thematically, many of the ideas for issues and messages were solicited from international agencies, primarily through CDAC Haiti. Much of the story development, however, was done during the production process, by the production team who was actually living in camps at the time. Rather than follow a conventional model of formally researching storylines, testing storylines in focus groups and carrying out surveys among the target audience, the production team drew on life in the camps around them.

"We came up with characters together," says director Jacques Roc. "We lived in the camp, we slept in the camp. Every time we produced a show, I slept in the camp. That's how we ensured it was based on real life. We needed to talk to people, to walk around, to see how it was at night." In this the team benefited from being both Haitian and a local independent company contracted to MINUSTAH: no international organisation would have allowed staff to spend a night in the camps. The team also hired camp residents as extras.

The team handled as much post-production as possible on site. "We set up a stage in the camp

and did all the post-production there. When we were producing at night people would come and watch and would give us feedback all the time, on the spot. We would find that people wanted to tell us their stories. One storyline came directly from that: we were in Champs de Mars camp and one night we found there weren't many people in front of the screens. I went and found them all sitting up on the hillside in their tents. They said it was because people were cutting the tents to steal from them so they didn't want to leave. So we did a storyline about theft from tents."

Filming in the camps was not always easy: sets flooded, mud made use of selected locations impossible and in some cases the team encountered hostility for setting up free screens in places where TV owners were charging people to watch broadcasts. Some aid agencies also worried that setting up screens in camps would actually attract people to settlements that agencies were trying to close down.

An interesting consequence of their approach was that at times, the storylines and the real lives of camp residents began to merge. "We had a rape story that went across three episodes and of course we were filming in the camp...When we filmed the scene where the rapist was arrested, as the cops were handcuffing him they threw him on the ground – and the whole crowd was cheering." Serious issues were also addressed through comedy: asked by IOM to tackle the problem of forged registration cards, the team developed a storyline in which a character hatches a plot to buy and sell cards and is thwarted by neighbours.

Although the production team talked to audiences after screenings to gauge reactions, there was no formal monitoring or capture of the project so it is impossible to judge how effective it was. Audiences told international journalists at the time that they enjoyed the films, but there is little other surviving documentation of impact.

airtime than in Port au Prince. Despite OCHA and other organisations at departmental level advocating strongly for more work with local media, this was not realised in 2010.

Local media themselves, meanwhile, have continued to do the best work they can in sourcing and sharing information, often with very limited resources, and this is clearly appreciated by audiences. Participants in infoasaid focus groups could all name several local stations they felt had provided them with useful information. None of these broadcasters had systematic assistance from international partners. But the case study of the CRC radio show in Leogane illustrates both how straightforward and inexpensive such work is, and

how dramatic the benefits can be (see page 63).

Other localised efforts to improve communication included OCHA's Cafe Media Humanitaire in Petit Goave, an initiative modelled on a similar concept in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Journalists and humanitarians met informally once a month at a roundtable to talk about the response. While this was a success, OCHA did not have the capacity to continue managing the events. In retrospect, senior staff at Internews also said that regional versions of ENDK should have been developed much quicker after the earthquake. Decentralisation of the programme, and support to other localised efforts, are key to their work plans for 2011.



## THE COMMUNITY ADDRESS SYSTEM

The Haitian group, SAKS, and Japanese NGO, BHN, started CAS as an early warning system for hurricane season across 13 camps in Leogane. The original concept was to install loudspeakers and sirens in the camps to ensure that warnings about hurricanes or other hazards could be quickly and easily shared with the whole community. Speakers were mounted on solar power streetlights, controlled by a central unit, an AM receiver and a microphone. In addition to hurricane alerts, the project also includes on-site community facilitators who help community leaders to use the system and ensure that important information is broadcast.

Since the first CAS was established in August 2010, however, communities have found many innovative and interesting ways to use the system. For example, CAS is used to broadcast radio, make community announcements of births, deaths, engagements and marriages, and alert residents to the start of meetings and other community events. Community mobilisers also use the system to share information about cholera and other public health threats, and organisations use it to announce vaccination services or other forms of assistance.

“The system was originally established about 500 metres away, where the old camp was. It has been here since August and everyone loves it. When the camp was dismantled and we received t-shelters here, the community liked the system so much they dismantled it and rebuilt it here,” says the leader of one recipient community, Willy Petit-Homme.

“People like the music too – life in the camps is boring. That’s the other reason we play the radio. We sound the siren before we use the microphone to make an announcement so everyone knows to listen. This one unit can reach about 550 people. If it breaks we will find a way to fix it.”

In a different camp visited by infoasaid, residents explained that they used the microphone during meetings so the whole camp could listen. “We use it sometimes during important meetings – people take it in turns to speak with the microphone and that way the meeting is shared with everyone even if they don’t come. If new people come to the camp, especially foreigners, if they have something to say or a new project to propose we give them the microphone,” explained a committee member.

The system is also used by communities that surround the camps. “I have a radio but sometimes I don’t have a battery so I come to the camp to listen to the shows because it’s a nice distraction,” said a woman.

People interviewed by infoasaid in two camps said that CAS was the single most important piece of assistance they had received since the earthquake. They also appreciated the streetlamps, saying that the light was really important as there was little electricity in the camp at night, and that children sat underneath them to do their homework.

Again, however, no evaluation could be traced nor staff at BHN (which subsequently left Haiti) interviewed for this research.

## Recommendations for working with community mobilisers

**Recruit staff with skills in communication or conflict management.**

**Provide community mobilisers with basic training in communication and in conflict management and negotiation.**

**Make sure that staff can feed back regularly to operations and to senior management, including at cluster level.** Regular verbal briefings and presentations are as effective as written reports.

**Provide staff with psychosocial support.** For example, regular team debriefs and access to counselling if they need it.

**Provide mobilisers with work phones and/or set up beneficiary feedback/hotlines.** Community mobilisers will otherwise feel obliged to give camp residents their personal numbers, leading to calls 24/7 and often long after they have changed organisation or position.

**Give staff media training so they are able to give interviews and effectively represent the communities they work with to the media.**

**Invest and support teams over long periods of time.** Properly supported, community mobilisers will become an increasingly effective and important asset.

**Mother and child  
at camp Eric Jean-  
Baptiste, Port au  
Prince, Haiti.**  
GERALD YVES CHERY



## WVI AND COMMUNITY LIAISON AND MOBILISATION

INTERVIEW WITH JONY SAINT CLAIR, HEAD  
OF HUMANITARIAN ACCOUNTABILITY  
TEAM AT WVI, FEBRUARY–JUNE 2010

I started with World Vision International on their camp liaison team on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2010. Our job was to handle relationships with camps where WVI was providing camp management services. There was no terms of reference so we developed the team as we went along. I did go on the WVI website to look at similar work in Rwanda, but that was it.

To start with everything was verbal – that was the best way – but we also provided fliers with written information when we did shelter or non-food item distributions. We did written information, and then planned bulletin boards, because most of the time we talked only with the community leaders and I knew that if they didn't understand they couldn't share properly with the community. If you put information on a board everyone can read it and know about it.

Information and communication were key to building our relationship. In our culture, we like it when people try to understand us. Camp residents said, "You need to listen to me and understand me." The complaint box is the same. It is a way of saying, "We have respect for you, we want to understand your concerns." That is very important. I would go to camps where people were hungry, and angry.

Always after a night of rain they would be furious. But the way you talk in these situations is as important as what you say. You need to keep a smile on your face, you need to let them talk and then you say, I hear you. Even when they say bad things about WVI. People would say, "You are a robber, you steal from us." But just by listening you can understand and prevent problems.

You have to be very careful how you share information and operations people don't always understand this. For example, there was one time WASH needed to pay some people for work in the camp. I was working with WASH and they said, "We will pay on the 10<sup>th</sup>." I knew they still needed to do payroll. I said, "Today is the 8<sup>th</sup> – do you have the money yet? If not I won't tell people. When you have the cash in your hands we will tell them." If you give people a date and you break your word, you lose your authority and their confidence.

Communication is the most important thing. Without communication you can't organise anything. Next time, I would organise better communication first. I would provide training for my team, especially on how to handle discussions and manage conflict and anger. Guidelines would also be useful: SPHERE needs to talk about communication. That would be very helpful. Staff also need psychosocial support from the organisation. When you are camp liaison, you are the focus for all the frustration in the camp, and it is very stressful.

## THE CRC RADIO SHOW IN LEGANE

CRC is one of the few organisations to implement local level radio work. Starting in March 2011, they began hosting a weekly 30-minute interactive radio show about their work on Radio Belval in Leogane.

The programme was developed after frustrated local communities disrupted projects in January 2011 because they were unhappy about the humanitarian services they were receiving. CRC recognised this as a communication problem and designed the show to allow listeners to call in and ask questions.

The show consists of two CRC officers in the studio talking on a given theme (health, shelter, prevention of violence etc.) and taking questions from listeners on a dedicated phone line. The officials have key messages with them in the studio, which are adjusted each week as a result of questions from listeners. CRC has also involved other national societies in the project including the Spanish, Dutch and Haitian Red Cross societies.

At the time of writing, the show had only been running a few weeks but was already popular. The CRC staff were inundated with calls, which come from as far away as Grand Anse in the south.

“From the start of these broadcasts the relations between officers of the Red Cross on the ground and the population has improved significantly, because everyone has a better understanding of the nature of the work of the CRC,” says Mimy, General Secretary of CRC in Leogane. “Having worked in radio for four years, including immediately after January 12<sup>th</sup>...I can attest to the importance and impact of information in humanitarian relief.”

In focus groups held by infoasaid in Leogane, participants said they liked the CRC radio programme because it specifically addressed problems in their neighbourhood. The project is also providing some much-needed financial stability for Radio Belval, one of the few stations in Leogane to survive the quake

## Recommendations

### **Integrate communication with operations.**

Standalone humanitarian communication projects need to be fully plugged into the operational side of a response.

**Use what is already in place.** Communication projects work best if they use existing systems and networks and thus build on channels that audiences already trust and which already function.

**The many facets of communication.** Communication projects are often about far more than information sharing and collecting: they can also be key to trust building, conflict resolution, effective participation, provision of psychosocial support, transparency and accountability.

**Best practice.** Multi-channel projects deliver best: those that focus on a single medium such as radio are most successful if they are part of a wider communication effort.

**Create space for interaction.** Dialogue and debate are at least as important as information dissemination. The ability to ask questions is particularly important. All standalone projects should support interaction.

**Capture information.** All projects should have capture and feedback systems built in, and systems for this information to flow back up to humanitarian responders.

**Innovate.** Look beyond traditional media to projects that meet community information needs.

**Face-to-face and personal interaction is essential.** Projects using community mobilisers should be regarded as an investment and supported accordingly.

**Test all materials.** This is a basic but often neglected practice. Pilot designs can be shared with local staff or informally with beneficiaries to generate sufficient results. Developing products in partnership with affected communities, such as the MINUSTAH soap opera, is another possible approach.

**Monitor and evaluate.** Generate data that can be constantly fed back into development of projects and use all possible ways to capture impact, including video, audio and photography.

# Chapter 6

## SMS, social media and new technology

**H**AITI WAS THE FIRST LARGE-SCALE humanitarian response in which phone and web-based technologies were used systematically to collect and manage data from affected communities, share information about the response, and perhaps most importantly, by surviving communities themselves. This chapter will seek to capture the most successful models used and will draw on these projects to present a detailed and nuanced analysis of what works in the Haitian context.

There is no question that the experience in Haiti marked a paradigm shift at least from the international perspective, and that humanitarians have now come to realise the potential this technology has in strengthening communication. However, while technology has considerable potential to revolutionise disaster response, it is important to continue using lower

tech yet highly effective approaches such as simple face-to-face communication and to remember that the use of new tools always takes place in an environment defined by existing cultural, social and political mores.

Some experienced aid workers felt that while technology was improving the ability to share information, it was also facilitating a certain level of personal isolation from disaster survivors. “Overall in humanitarian response we need to move away from a mechanised approach and into an intelligent approach,” said one cluster lead. Scepticism about the use of technology expressed by experienced humanitarians is often dismissed as luddite-ism or simply a lack of understanding. But several made the point that real understanding cannot be developed without person-to-person contact.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Innovation in use of technology in Haiti, especially by the poor, was driven by the ingenuity of local populations and the private sector.
- ▶ Disaster survivors were more knowledgeable about technological systems of communications in Haiti and how they were popularly used than humanitarian agencies.
- ▶ Helplines were very popular, with call centres systems staffed by people generally preferred, especially by women.
- ▶ Exciting as the possibilities offered by technology are there is no substitute for human interaction.
- ▶ There was a lack of M&E or capture around existing technological tools, underpinned by a lack of an agreed methodology to measure impact of this work.
- ▶ The role of the Haitian private sector was essential in many ways: in providing funds and subscriber databases, developing new software and technologies, conducting research and increasingly designing M&E and capture models.



## RADIO 1 AND MULTI-PLATFORM USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Radio 1 is one of the biggest radio stations in Haiti and one of the few that broadcasts across the country. The station also broadcasts online to a diaspora audience and has an international landline. It was also one of the few largely undamaged by the earthquake.

One of the first staff members to go back to the station in the hours after the quake was music manager and DJ Carel Pedre, a well known Haitian broadcaster with a strong Facebook presence and a Twitter feed followed by thousands. Before arriving at the station Carel had been taking pictures of the destruction and had posted them on Twitter along with English and *Kreyol* updates. As a result, he was contacted by international media and began giving interviews from the station via Skype, which he also simultaneously broadcast live.

Radio 1 was besieged by listeners (especially those with family outside the capital) wanting to share their stories, announce that they were alive or broadcast appeals for information. In addition, Carel also began receiving hundreds of messages from across Haiti and overseas on his Facebook page and Twitter feed, asking for his help in locating friends and family.

To respond, Carel and his team set up a multi-platform information system capable of

consolidating incoming requests, systematically attempting to respond to them and sharing information collected with his broadcast and social media audience. The system involved four friends with laptops all logged into his Facebook page and Twitter feeds, compiling requests and responding to messages. In addition, a team of producers interviewed those arriving at the station (an average of 50 an hour) to take down details. Each day, the office courier went out on his motorbike with the lists of people to find, returning each evening with as much information as he could find. The team then simultaneously uploaded this information to Facebook and Twitter and broadcast it on air.

Carel himself was acutely aware of the responsibility involved. He recalls, "There was so much inaccurate information, and so many rumours. I had the US embassy following me, the rescue teams – I had to be sure what I was saying was true because it was my name and my reputation on everything. I made a rule that I double checked everything unless it came from someone I really trusted." Within days, the requests widened. Carel remembers an orphanage that reported 50 children in need – he called them to verify the information, located them on Google Earth, and then tweeted the GPS coordinates and request for help. An international Red Cross organisation picked up the information and offered to respond.

While this system is impossible to evaluate now, it is clear that the demand for this service was overwhelming. Carel subsequently received a special award from Twitter in recognition of his work.

## The local technology response to the earthquake

The use of technology by local responders and survivors, much of which occurred outside the international humanitarian framework, was considerable. Survivors in Haiti and the diaspora made extensive use of phones and social media in the days after the earthquake. The phenomenon of trapped survivors texting from under the rubble is well known, although it is important to note that most people sent their emergency text messages to friends and family who subsequently organised rescues, rather than to international rescue teams (who were overwhelmed). In other instances, journalists working for Radio 1, like Carel Pedre, meshed Facebook, Twitter, SMS and live broadcasting into ad hoc family reunification systems. Haitian specialist technology companies such as Solutions developed indigenous systems to map local

needs and match them with humanitarian assistance (see case study next page).

The local technology response is notable for its ingenuity, its flexibility and the extent to which it flourished in a country characterised by such extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup> The Radio 1 reunification model, for example, illustrates how even in a major disaster in a profoundly poor country, multiple new media platforms can be meshed with more traditional media (radio) to create a system that leverages all forms of communication to deliver an information service. Both the Radio 1 project and Noulà are impossible to evaluate from a user perspective as neither were formal projects and both were conceived in an emergency context.

<sup>1</sup> Haiti is ranked 145<sup>th</sup> out of 169 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index, the lowest scoring country in the Western Hemisphere. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

## NOULA AND THE LOCAL TECHNOLOGICAL RESPONSE

The Noula project (*Kreyol* for 'We are here') is a web-based system for mapping local needs and sources of assistance developed immediately after the earthquake by a Haitian technology company called Solutions. The project was an idea that came out of a staff meeting a few days after the quake and launched on February 21<sup>st</sup>. As Solutions' founder Kurt Jean Charles remembers: "We felt so powerless. We didn't have any medical skills, any nursing skills. So we decided we had to do something, as therapy for us, to help with the emergency but also for the long term."

The company developed a web-based map charting needs and where help was available, which could also be accessed by the wider population online, with real-time requests for help also posted. The team also set up a call centre so people could phone with needs and questions. A script was developed for operators, who were also given a two-day training by client management specialists and a day's training from a psychologist in handling calls.

The original concept was to connect the mapped needs with those who could respond: NGOs and the

Haitian authorities. The latter were too overwhelmed to engage, but Kurt also met with OCHA, who were interested and could see the value but were not set up to respond. Kurt's perception is that Noula may have been seen as competition with one response, that aid agencies were not comfortable with Noula's level of transparency (where reported needs are published on the site as well as the response, and aid agencies are invited to publish details of everything they are doing). Kurt also felt that international organisations were wary of the fact that Noula was a citizen initiative but coming from the private sector and assumed he was looking for business.

The breakthrough for Noula came when they connected with Ushahidi, a non-profit software company that develops free and open source software for information collection, visualisation and interactive mapping. Ushahidi provided some financial support and training, and helped them connect to aid agencies. Noula presented at CDAC Haiti and subsequently began negotiations with IOM and IFRC, which have now led to formal partnerships.

It is very difficult to measure the impact of the Noula project for earthquake survivors as M&E was not included in this private initiative. But the call centre received 25,000 calls in six months with no advertising, which suggests at least that 25,000 people saw sufficient value to try to use it.

## THE POTENTIAL OF TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Two other aspects of the Noula system carry particular lessons for future responses. The first was that in the months following the quake the team received a high volume of calls from survivors who had left Port au Prince but wanted to know how they could claim aid in their new location. There is no way to check the veracity of these calls, but this suggests that call centres have huge potential for survivors who have left a disaster area to find information about their rights and entitlements. The data could also have been very useful in analysing the needs of those who had departed. The second was that engagement of local capacity could have done a great deal to assist humanitarians in developing accurate real-time on-the-ground information in a fast changing situation.

The Noula case study in particular illustrates not only the level of existing capacity in the country, but the potential of working with the local private sector from the earliest days and the use of local capacity to source and handle information that international players would struggle to connect with (such as the capacity to run a nationwide *Kreyol* speaking call centre within days of the quake).

## THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA

One aspect of the response that technology particularly facilitated was the role of the diaspora. Firstly, the Haiti experience suggests that the diaspora population needs to be considered both as an affected population and as key information gatekeepers for survivors. The communication links between the diaspora and Haitians in Haiti are extremely strong: not only do family and friends talk regularly by email and mobile phone, but the main Haitian radio stations also pick up a large diaspora audience by broadcasting online, many overseas Haitians are on Twitter and many Haitian diaspora organisations make deliberate use of Facebook to organise and share information. In the early days of the response, thousands of Haitians overseas were using these tools to find family and friends in the affected area. They were also actively looking for information to relay to those who had survived. The diaspora, especially those with detailed knowledge of the affected area and *Kreyol* language skills, were also essential to the success of the crisis mapping carried out by Ushahidi and other tech-based information management systems.

## THE TELECOMS PERSPECTIVE

Both Digicel and Voila – the two providers of mobile phone services in Haiti – were extremely responsive and open to use of their services by NGOs, despite being badly affected themselves. Both organisations initially struggled to get permission to land planes with essential equipment and staff to repair the damage to infrastructure, as the mobile phone system was not considered a humanitarian priority.

Voila opened up their subscriber base to NGOs to send information to affected communities, but were quickly forced to rescind this due to the network being affected by spamming. Voila closed the system to all but the organisations they considered responsible, which included IFRC. IFRC then approached them with regard to developing a more sophisticated system that would facilitate targeting of customers by geographical location (see case study on page 72).

Digicel meanwhile was also inundated with requests from NGOs asking for services and/or access to their customer base, many of whom expected both for free. Digicel partnered with Ushahidi and the EIS team, allowing them to use their existing subscription-based shortcode system number for their SMS information/collection service.

Like Voila, Digicel also realised the need to carefully identify the organisations they were going to work with. During the cholera outbreak, they limited support to organisations working in close partnership on communication with the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Culture and Communication, and mostly provided services at the direct request of the national authorities. This included establishing a number to call for an ambulance, and a number to request collection of bodies (both direct requests made by the Office of the President). Digicel also agreed to send out ‘blast’ SMSs on behalf of the Ministry of Public Health carrying basic information about prevention and response to cholera and to support the call centre established with the \*300 shortcode.

One immediate impact noted by Digicel of their SMS blasts was that many recipients who wanted to ask questions called the Digicel customer support centre. “When we sent out a message our call centre got crushed,” recalls David Sharpe, Head of Products. “People were calling to ask, what is clorox? Why do I have to wash my floor? That meant our service level went down. People don’t understand that it is an automated text – it’s the

same for everything when we do mass SMSs so it wasn’t a surprise. We put up a recorded message for those who couldn’t get through. Our people had no medical or technical training – and although of course we did internal awareness giving advice on cholera, this is so outside our role as a private company. There was also an overwhelming attempt to contact the number from which the SMSs were sent. The key message to NGOs is that you need to have a system which can cope with requests for further information – and someone to handle that response.”

One other key innovation piloted by Digicel in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health was a project to automatically send an SMS to anyone with a Digicel phone who had passed through a cholera hotspot, alerting them to this fact and recommending they take precautions. This kind of an intelligent and responsive SMS system clearly deserves further investigation and piloting.

Though slightly outside the scope of this research, another major innovation by Digicel was to work with the University of Colombia and two universities in Sweden to map population movement after the earthquake through mobile phone signals.<sup>3</sup> This methodology was also used to analyse and predict population movement in the early days of the cholera outbreak.

## PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION

One unintended but important side effect of the methods used by the mobile phone companies to manage the numerous requests from NGOs was to reinforce humanitarian coordination systems. In restricting access to their bases, only accepting requests and messaging that had been sanctioned by the relevant authorities, phone companies were acting in the best interests of their consumers, but also indirectly creating a very effective and much-needed system for coordinating and approving information.

<sup>2</sup> Clorox is the brand name for disinfectant products used in water purification and widely referred to in cholera awareness information materials including SMS, as it has become the generic Haitian Kreyol term for bleach.

<sup>3</sup> For full details on this technique, see Bengtsson, L, Lu, X, Thorson, A, Garfield, R, and von Schreeb, J. ‘Improved Response to Disasters and Outbreaks: Tracking Population Movements with Mobile Phone Networks and Data’, paper produced by the Columbia University, Stockholm University and the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden, unpublished, March 2011.



Man receiving a text about cholera on mobile phone.

JAMIL SIMON

## The end user perspective

### SMS TECHNOLOGY

Over a year from the earthquake, there is evidence – almost entirely anecdotal – to indicate that receiving information via SMS is accepted and welcomed by Haitians, and may be particularly important in rural areas where access to other sources of information may be limited.<sup>4</sup> During the infoasaid focus groups, community leaders, especially those in rural areas, reported relying on SMS information to inform their own outreach initiatives, with many regarding the systematic sharing of information they receive as a duty and some organising information relay groups for this specific purpose.<sup>5</sup>

“We have a group of leaders in our association...they have the responsibility to share any information to their communities. So recently in cholera crisis, SMS info really helped us to save lives.”

PASTOR LOUIS WILSON, VICE PRESIDENT  
OF THE ASSOCIATION NOUVEAU DEPART  
IN ST MARC, ARTIBONITE

<sup>4</sup> This is very different to the picture in the early days of the response, when the situation was much more confusing. See *Media, Information Systems and Communities: Lessons from Haiti*, Internews, CDAC and the Knight Foundation, January 2011.

<sup>5</sup> According to focus group participants, forwarding an SMS is not popular as it is expensive. Recipients prefer to relay information verbally, either on an ad hoc basis or through community meetings etc.

## Recommendations for working with phone companies

**Engage early.** Begin discussions with phone companies prior to a disaster, and consider the potential of partnerships in the context of disaster risk reduction work rather than just response.

**Core business.** Appreciate that phone companies are commercial organisations.

**Join forces.** A coordinated, collective approach is more likely to be successful, especially for smaller organisations.

**Work with the regulator.** This is especially important in countries where there are multiple providers.

**Look at other options.** Recognise and explore the private sector’s potential role in capture, data management, M&E and research – telecoms companies have far more to offer than subscriber databases and access to services or funding.

**Protect users.** Consider protection issues in collecting and managing phone numbers of affected communities. Haiti was a profoundly liberal communication environment: in other contexts creating lists of phone numbers or users identified with particular locations or services could have very serious implications.

“When DPC announce the hurricane last year it was our first experience of the rainy season in tents. I recall all the information I received on my cell phone and I passed it to all my camp residents and ask them to remember and to share with their partners and friends; to start to fix what needed to be fixed to avoid fatality. SMS was a source of information for me.”

LUC, CAMP MANAGER IN CERCLE  
BELLEVUE, PORT AU PRINCE

In terms of content, very broadly speaking, participants preferred specific information that they could act on which they said tended to come from aid agencies. Government SMSs referring to aid agency services caused confusion. This indicates that branding of SMS is important when it comes to the trust placed on the content.



“I am a pastor and a community leader. I work as an archivist too. When I began receiving information through SMS I started to share the information with my community and I teach them the concept of sharing the information with each other to disseminate more messages to more people. I subscribed to \*4636<sup>6</sup> and to Red Cross and to Twitjako (twitmobil) to have more sources. This way helps us to find more info because there are not any radio stations in Gros Morne with health care shows.”

MERCY JEAN HUGHES, GROS MORNE,  
ARTIBONITE

As with other forms of communications, anecdotal evidence suggests that SMS is appreciated not just for the content text messages provide, but for the sense it generates that someone is concerned about the individual or community's welfare and wants to help them. However, the most recent Internews research into the cholera response found that only 3.2 percent of respondents described SMS as a 'most used source' for cholera information.<sup>7</sup> More research into SMS, the types of information and systems in which it is most effective and the ways in which it is used by Haitian societies is urgently needed if more nuanced understandings of this channel are to evolve.<sup>8</sup> This includes better and much more rigorous capture and M&E work by aid agencies employing SMS-based systems.

## HOTLINES

A number of organisations experimented with hotlines in 2010. The largest scale project was IFRC, which introduced an automated, nationwide system using the \*773 shortcode as part of their partnership with Voila. The system was originally designed to provide information on hurricane preparation and awareness, but was adapted during the cholera epidemic to provide information on preventing, managing and responding to the disease. Other call centres established included the \*300 government hotline established by Digicel, the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Culture and Communication. Digicel and the Haitian

authorities also established specific numbers for services such as body removal and ambulance requests.

Anecdotal evidence from infoasaid focus groups reflects data from IFRC regarding the popularity of their system. IFRC reports that more than 400,000 people called their service for information about preparing for hurricanes after a promotional campaign in September 2010, followed by around 310,000 who called during a campaign to warn about Hurricane Tomas in November 2010. During the first month of the cholera outbreak 90,000 calls were made to access newly uploaded information about preventing and responding to the illness. At the time of writing, IFRC had not however surveyed those who used the service to determine the extent to which they liked the service or acted on the information.

Aside from these, and existing information services such as the Digicel \*4636 shortcode system,<sup>9</sup> most phone lines run by NGOs were feedback systems or complaint hotlines designed for beneficiaries of those agencies. A notable variation on this was the IFRC call centre established for the residents of Annexe de la Mairie camp in partnership with local tech company Solutions.

Findings from the infoasaid focus groups suggest that call centres are very popular and liked by Haitians. The evidence also suggests that hotlines have considerable psychosocial as well as practical value. In Annexe de la Mairie camp in Port au Prince, where IFRC run a pilot helpline supported by a call centre, camp residents who had used the system indicated their satisfaction levels were 100 percent, even in cases where callers were not happy with the actual answer they received.

“One friend of mine went away for two weeks; when she came back in the community she explained to me as her close friend that she had felt sick and she used the Ministry of Public Health hotline to find information and she went to a cholera treatment centre alone and followed the treatment.”

WOMAN CAMP RESIDENT, PORT AU  
PRINCE

The most significant users of hotlines identified through the infoasaid focus groups were rural women, who reported use of the Ministry of Public Health and IFRC hotlines. Urban women were less likely to express interest in these services, but were more likely to know

6 There may be some confusion here as the IFRC SMS service is not actually subscription based.

7 Mandel, J and Lafont, F. 'Audience Research In A Time Of Cholera: Focus Group and Survey On Haiti's Frontline', Internews, July 2011.

8 This will be true of each context in which this work is implemented.

9 While most commonly associated with the response, the \*4636 shortcode system existed well before the earthquake as a way for service subscribers to source information about a range of subjects.

of and use hotlines relating to sexual violence and abuse.

Women focus group discussants clearly expressed a preference for systems where their call would be answered by an individual rather than an automated system. Men were aware of hotline services but were much less likely to report using them or have a preference for a particular system.

From the aid agency perspective, however, one key issue is that voice automated systems cannot respond to queries outside the pre-set information available. Also of importance is that automated systems are unable to be of therapeutic benefit, which can only be provided by a call centre approach with operators.

Many aid agencies interviewed assumed that call centres would be either too complex or too expensive to run but the experience of those who have done so, however, suggests otherwise. Firstly, a call centre model can be anything from one mobile phone number for a select group (project beneficiaries) up to a national system. Most are in-between. The IFRC call centre for Annexe de la Mairie camp, which serves 800 families, now receives an average of three calls a day (several months after being established), while the Oxfam and CARE systems (both feedback lines for beneficiaries) are answered by one individual. CARE report around six calls a week; Oxfam say theirs has exceeded 200 but that this is very unusual.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, research carried out by HAP also found that hotlines were popular and key to maintaining good relationships with communities, with camp populations reporting that for them, “the most efficient process by which to lodge a complaint was through a toll free telephone number advertised among communities.”<sup>11</sup> Again, the ability to speak was found to improve the relationship between camp residents and the agency. “In all instances in which the system had been successful in addressing a complaints issue, the beneficiaries spoke positively about raising their concerns and as a result these aid agencies were held in higher esteem than those that did not have similar mechanisms in place.”<sup>12</sup>

## TWITTER

One of the most interesting findings of the focus group discussions concerns the popularity and use of Twitter in Haiti. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Twitter is popular among certain groups in Port au Prince, particularly local journalists, and among the Haitian diaspora.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, use of Twitter also appears to be used by other groups, especially in rural areas, and particularly as a source of information, through a simplified phone-based system called twitmobil.

“I received an SMS from the Red Cross regarding cholera about the 400 number. Then a friend told me if I just pay 4 Gourdes I will get all the information about cholera by following lakou28 on Twitter, so I did and it works.”

ETIENNE PRINCEVIL, ST MARC,  
ARTIBONITE

Twitter is an increasingly important tool for local media in Haiti. Many journalists run their own Twitter feeds, and turn to the system when there is a breaking news story. Local organisations and personalities also continue to use Twitter to run appeals and ask for help. Carel Pedre, for example, was asked by HRC to support a blood drive, following his prominent role in the response to the earthquake. He organised a promotion on Facebook and Twitter that resulted in the collection of 85 bags of blood in one day – one of the most successful on record according to HRC.

“What makes this possible for us is that we had access to high speed Internet (facilitated by IOM) – the difficulty will be to replicate the same experience in rural areas. One way to resolve this would be to create media centres with Internet access so stations in rural areas can also benefit from the technology to share information.”

STAFF MEMBER, RADIO BOUKMAN, PORT  
AU PRINCE

<sup>10</sup> The frequency of calls could also relate to the levels of awareness of numbers among beneficiaries, and thus the amount of effort an agency has put into promoting them. This study did not have the capacity to look at the promotion methods of Oxfam or CARE, or to compare them.

<sup>11</sup> The 2010 Humanitarian Accountability Report, p97.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Researchers for this paper could not find any systematic research into levels of Twitter use in Haiti. This urgently needs to be rectified.

## TWITMOBIL

Twitmobil is a system of receiving Twitter feeds on a mobile phone by subscribing to a specific feed. It is a cheap and simple service available via both mobile networks (Digicel and Voila), whereby subscribers who have a Twitter account can – instead of using the Internet – receive any tweets posted by their chosen Twitters real time on their mobile phones. Many people have built up considerable followings this way, and some run their Twitter feeds as commercial enterprises, charging local Haitian companies to advertise via tweets on their feed.

Twitmobil was referred to frequently in the focus group discussion with most participants being fully familiar with the system and many of them using it. Interestingly, like SMS, it seems to be particularly important as a source of information in rural areas where access to other sources of information is scarcer. Some participants reported actively seeking Twitter feeds that could provide regular updates on cholera and hurricane awareness.

There seems to be a real opportunity for aid agencies and government departments here, especially those unable to pay for SMS systems: Twitter is free and very cost effective as management would only require one person spending a few minutes a day to transfer information to the network. Most agencies are at present unaware of the twitmobil system, and none aside from IOM have made any effort to use Twitter systematically.

“I have subscribed to lakou28 after the earthquake – my son made the registration. But when World Cup started all I received was news about soccer. After that period, all information I received was advertising so I asked to cancel this on my phone.”

COMMUNITY LEADER, ST MARC

Of the international organisations, IOM was the only agency interviewed for this research that was using Twitter in any systematic way. IOM local communication staff and community mobilisers are required to tweet their activities, which then appear directly on IOM's Citizen Haiti website. As well as providing a constant flow of updates on IOM activities, this system also provides important data for IOM on staff activity, and an instant alert system should any individual come across a problem in the field.

“I just want to tell you that Twitter can really help you in your activities. Like Obama did when he was running for President – he used Twitter to let people know he was on the radio. With Citizen Haiti,<sup>14</sup> we use Twitter to let people know what we are doing and what information is available.”

IOM NATIONAL STAFF MEMBER, PORT AU PRINCE

## INTERNET

While Internet access is surprisingly high, even in camps in Port au Prince,<sup>15</sup> it is mostly used for personal email and for making cheap international calls.<sup>16</sup> The most significant use of the Internet from a communication perspective lies with local media, for whom it is an increasingly important tool for sourcing and sharing information. Radio 1, for example, culled all the information for their first two-hour cholera special (broadcast the day before the formal confirmation of cholera in Haiti) from the global WHO website. For Radio Boukman, in Cite de Soleil, a high speed Internet connection is now essential to their daily operations. During the cholera epidemic, like other stations, they were also able to download public information spots and other information from the CDAC website, particularly important given their location in an area with security restrictions. By contrast, efforts to distribute radio programming burned onto CDs to stations in Cap Haitien were held up for several days when demonstrations turned violent and aid agency staff were put on lockdown.

<sup>15</sup> Internews research suggests up to 30 percent of camp residents have access to the Internet.

<sup>16</sup> Research conducted by the Internews Research Team, unpublished at the time of writing, April 2011.

## IFRC, VOILA AND PUBLIC/PRIVATE TELECOMS PARTNERSHIPS

The most comprehensive and successful partnership between an aid provider and a telecoms company to emerge from Haiti is that between IFRC and local provider Voila, a subsidiary of parent company Trilogy. The two partners are working together to develop the necessary systems to enable the most effective use of SMS as an information provision and communication tool for the Haitian community.

The SMS system was originally designed to support disaster risk reduction, helping populations to prepare for hurricanes and providing early warning alerts by text. It subsequently played a vital role in the response to cholera, providing a key tool to disseminate information about prevention and treatment within minutes nationwide. In addition to SMS, the IFRC/Voila partnership has also led to the establishment of a free automated information line, \*733, which can be used to provide basic information on any current issue.

The partnership ensures access to the overall Voila subscriber base for IFRC, and a strong corporate

social responsibility model for Voila, and has also led to the development of software that may have some commercial value for the organisation. Crucially, Voila allowed IFRC to use existing systems that track phone traffic by tower, meaning that IFRC was able to target information to geographically relevant areas rather than just the entire network.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the IFRC/Voila project is that it has led to the development of pioneering software and a technical model, including contracting modalities. The same system can be set up anywhere in the world with a local partner. IFRC and parent company Trilogy are now in a global-level agreement to roll this system out elsewhere – a first for both organisations.

Additional benefits for IFRC include the system's ability to capture data regarding use and response to the service. There is considerable further potential in this area, as automating data collection is technically not a difficult process, although IFRC will have to resource the capacity to manage and analyse information. This has exciting implications for improving monitoring and evaluation of SMS/phone line projects (who uses them, how, why, and when, and what sorts of information generate the greatest response).

## The aid agency perspective

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Haiti was the first large-scale emergency response in which international aid organisations systematically attempted to use technology-based systems to improve communication with affected communities.

The names most associated with the use of technology and the early response were international volunteer tech communities such as Ushahidi and Crisismappers.<sup>17</sup> The early days of the response also saw the first deployment of EIS, which sought to deliver information to disaster survivors via a subscription-based SMS service. This project became effectively merged with Ushahidi when both began using the Digicel \*4636 shortcode.

The picture of the use of SMS in the early days of the response is both confused and very controversial,

and has been explored in more detail elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> A survey of 400 EIS subscribers, conducted by the *Centre de Formation et d'Encadrement Technique* (CFET) for TRF, revealed that 94 percent of respondents found the service 'very useful' and 74 percent had altered behaviour based on information received, mostly relating to personal hygiene.<sup>19</sup> It is notable that the enthusiasm of the population for SMS-based information reflected here contrasted with the views of aid agencies (based on perceptions rather than any actual data), although given that this study looked only at those who stayed subscribed it cannot be taken as an indication of the popularity of SMS or even of the EIS system overall. This picture is still very confused. A separate study of NGO participation in the \*4636 shortcode, also commissioned by TRF, found that such systems were not well understood by humanitarians.

In addition, IFRC set up a separate blast SMS system in partnership with Voila, initially to share warnings about hurricanes but which was also used during the

<sup>17</sup> Their work lies outside the scope of this study, not least because it has been thoroughly explored elsewhere.

<sup>18</sup> See Chan, J and Crowley J. *Disaster Relief 2.0: The Future of Information Sharing in Emergencies*, OCHA, UN Foundation, Vodaphone Foundation, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, New York, March 2011; Kocmich, N, Mock, N, Morrow, N and Papendieck, A. 'Independent Evaluation of the Ushahidi Haiti Project', Development Information Systems International for Digicel, Port au Prince, April 2011; and Mandel, J and Lafont F. 'Audience Research In A Time Of Cholera: Focus Group and Survey On Haiti's Frontline', Internews, July 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Telephone survey of 400 subscribers to the emergency \*4636 service, conducted by the CFET in Haiti on behalf of TRF, April 2010.



## BRC AND SMS COMMUNICATION IN RURAL AREAS

After the earthquake, BRC established a programme to subsidise the school fees of 8,000 children displaced by the earthquake to the rural southern area of Les Cayes. After assessing families to see if they qualified, BRC faced the problem of communicating their decisions to the many thousands of families involved. BRC staff had recorded the phone numbers of all participants during assessment (including designated community leaders where people did not have phones), and the team decided to use SMS as the only way to simultaneously inform everyone of their decision.

Schools were prepared to help parents with any further questions they may have after being

informed of the decision. A BRC staff member was present in the schools to handle the next stage of the project once the SMS went out. The SMS told those selected for assistance to go immediately to the school. It was timed to go out at a time when parents would be able to travel and the schools would be able to handle the follow up. Immediately after the SMS was sent, recipients began arriving at the school.

According to project staff, the SMS worked because it avoided the time consuming and expensive alternative of travelling to every community to share the news. It also helped ensure transparency and equity by ensuring that everyone got the news at the same time. It worked because it was part of a communications system: it was carefully timed and organised, plans were in place for handing follow up and the SMS was carefully phrased to direct families on what to do next.

response to cholera to share key messages on prevention and treatment.

Overall, the use of SMS – a very new technology for most organisations – as a tool for facilitating aid has been piecemeal and largely dependent on individuals. Organisations that have piloted ideas, aside from IFRC and TRF, include Internews (feedback system for the ENDK radio show), DPC in hurricane alerts and IOM in tailored hurricane alerts to camp residents (in their capacity as CCCM Cluster lead). The British Red Cross (BRC) has also used SMS very effectively in rural areas (see case study above).

## SMS AND FEEDBACK

The use of SMS as a way for people to ask questions or provide feedback is new in Haiti and still being explored. Experience to date suggests it has both advantages and drawbacks. Advantages include the fact that SMS is cheaper than phone calls and that SMS can easily be captured and logged through an automated system, making data capture and analysis much easier than with calls.

One major disadvantage on the other hand is that the SMS format does not lend itself to any level of detail or nuance: it is suitable for definable information such as a question about cholera symptoms, but not for handling a detailed query about housing. In addition, although automated systems are valuable, organisations found that to get the best analysis and results from an SMS-based feedback system or as a way to allow survivors to ask questions, it is essential to have someone monitoring the system. Internews, for example, employed a local staff member to read through the text messages on a daily basis to make an editorial assessment of key

concerns and issues being raised and to select the three that would be used in the mailbox section of the programme.

Unfortunately, none of the agencies currently working with SMS had developed or carried out meaningful evaluations of their work at the time of writing, with the exception of TRF. Organisations that work with SMS at the moment tend to simply use the numbers sent as indicators, which of course does not reflect whether the information was welcomed, perceived as useful or acted upon. Anecdotal evidence, however, and data from other surveys of blast systems suggest that SMS information systems were well received and particularly important in rural areas.<sup>20</sup> This, however, needs to be explored further.

A key problem is that at present, this work is too new to humanitarian response to have developed frameworks or best practice approaches to M&E. Such systems, of course, need to capture the end user experience to build a true picture of usefulness. The development of effective and meaningful M&E in communication work involving mobile phones is essential, as those pioneering this work are developing models which will be drawn on for many purposes by the whole humanitarian sector in emergency response planning for disasters to come.

<sup>20</sup> Telephone survey of 400 subscribers to the emergency \*4636 service, conducted by the Centre de Formation et d'Encadrement Technique in Haiti on behalf of TRF, April 2010.

## USE OF PHONE LINES

Most international agencies that have established phone lines have done so as part of their transparency and accountability work. These systems are designed to allow beneficiaries to call to ask questions, make complaints or feedback generally.

Interestingly, among agencies that are not running phone lines there is a perception that they are complex and expensive to run, while those who have phone lines regard them as relatively straightforward and a useful source of data and information. Those run as agency feedback systems receive calls in single numbers over a given day, usually employ one (local) staff member whose job it is to handle the calls, log the information and pass it to the right people within the organisation. While some agencies have developed proper systems with free phone numbers and shortcodes (Oxfam's \*400 system for example), for others it has been as simple as buying a handset and a local Sim card, and publicising the number.

Several agencies stated they were not running phone lines, but discussions with the local staff, especially community mobilisers, revealed that they were giving personal numbers to beneficiaries. These agencies were therefore effectively running ad hoc phone helplines through their local staff. Those who had given numbers to beneficiaries regarded this as an important part of the work, but also reported (especially in the early days after the earthquake) that this created a great deal of extra stress and work.

One key reason why agencies and other bodies (government departments etc.) should consider helplines is to formalise such systems and take the pressure off local staff by having a set way to manage such calls and share the burden (one dedicated staff member handling calls, staff taking it in turns to be responsible for the 'duty phone'). Initiatives such as the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Culture and Communication cholera hotline also need proper support by agencies, including training for call centre staff and funding, as neither body has the capacity to run the kind of full call centre service that is needed.

All organisations who have run call centres or helplines report positive feedback even on complaints lines, with beneficiaries calling to express their thanks to the organisation or commend a specific form of aid. One key issue for aid agencies is that awareness of hotlines is not high in rural areas – stronger and more comprehensive promotion is needed.

## Recommendations for working with SMS

**Ensure a budget is available.** SMS work is relatively inexpensive, depending on the model used, but not free and phone companies are unlikely to provide free systems.

**Establish systems to handle response to messages.** Such systems (call centres) will provide important feedback and insight into recipient misunderstandings and concerns.

**Create beneficiary databases.** For those not working with phone companies directly, systematically collect phone numbers from beneficiaries and establish databases (with appropriate security). Software such as Frontline SMS is available for free to manage this, depending on volume. Protection issues concerning management of the databases created will also need to be considered.

**Improve M&E.** Work with phone companies to explore ways in which SMS data can be used for M&E.

**Think carefully about the target audience for SMS.** The more nuanced and targeted, the more effective the response. Overloading SMS systems, especially in the early days of a response, can 'clog' the system and distress recipients, especially if they do not feel the information is relevant to them. It may be more effective to target 'information gatekeepers' such as local journalists, community leaders, nurses etc.

**Opt-out.** All blast SMS systems – as well as subscription systems – should have an 'unsubscribe' or 'block' function which should also be explained.

**Brand all messages clearly.** Many rumours are spread via SMS and it is important to recipients that they can see who is sending the information.



Woman checks her mobile. IFRC

## IFRC AND MANAGING A CALL CENTRE

In implementing their shelter project in Annexe de la Mairie camp, IFRC realised that survivors' queries about assistance and sensitivities around shelter needed to be handled through a call centre.

They contracted local technology company Solutions, designers of the Noula system, to set up and run the call centre. The hotline was widely promoted in the camp and camp residents were informed that they could SMS or call for free to ask a question or log a complaint. Call centre staff were provided with a detailed Q&A of standard questions they might be asked, such as 'how are families selected for the shelters'. Any questions or complaints that they were unable to answer were logged and followed up by IFRC.

Noula recorded around three calls a day to the hotline between October 2010 and February 2011. Between February and March 2011, when more detailed data collection systems were implemented, Noula reported being able to answer 68 percent of calls without further reference to IFRC. This removed a considerable operational burden from the

organisation.

There is no question that the Noula system was strongly supported by camp residents. Callers to the centre were very happy with the service, with 85 percent of those surveyed by IFRC saying they were satisfied with Noula's service even if they had not received the answer they wanted to their query. This increased to 100 percent in a more recent survey. This is also reflected in the views of those in the camp: residents were very aware of the Noula service and appreciated the opportunity it offered to register complaints and deal with questions. Interestingly, many of those surveyed expressed satisfaction with the call centre service even if they were not completely happy with the information they received. This suggests such services can have a psychosocial impact in and of themselves.

IFRC also found the system useful. Information regarding the nature of inquiries provided the organisation with ongoing feedback regarding camp concerns, and also highlighted a number of cases where camp residents were not receiving support for which they were qualified.



## Recommendations for working with phone lines

**Use phone lines.** Phone lines are popular, more straightforward than is often assumed and provide useful data for aid agencies as well as helping fulfil accountability and transparency responsibilities.

**Promote the service.** Phone lines need to be thoroughly promoted if they are to deliver.

**Simple systems work.** A complex system is not essential: for smaller scale operations, a single handset and phone number are all that is needed.

**Plan and implement systematic ways of logging calls and passing on information received.** This is essential both from a transparency perspective and to capture real time information about needs and concerns on the ground. It must be systematic and planned. Weekly briefings of senior staff, logging of calls in a way that allows for trend analysis and weekly written summaries of issues raised by callers are all highly recommended.

**Man phone lines with people.** Where possible, ensure calls are answered by an individual. Automated systems may be effective for clearly circumscribed topics such as cholera or hurricane alerts, but are limited for anything more general. Automated systems also have severely limited potential for gathering feedback and data from callers.

## Recommendations for working with technology and communication

**Understand the local technology environment.**

The ways in which disaster survivors and other local populations use phones and SMS can be very culturally specific and dependent on location, gender or social status. Until this is understood, it is difficult to work effectively.

**Recognise the level of capacity among local populations in using technology.** Many aid workers seriously underestimated the potential of technology in Haiti due to their own assumptions about phone ownership, Internet access and SMS use.

**The most detailed understanding of the local technology sector and how local people use technology will most likely be found in the local private sector.** Outsourcing to the local private sector can be a good way of overcoming the lack of specialist expertise in most aid organisations.

**Collect contact data from disaster survivors from the start of projects, including mobile phone numbers.** Have a system that includes adequate data protection systems to ensure data is not stolen or abused. Be very clear who manages, has access to and is responsible for contact data.

**Design systems from the start to facilitate two-way communication.** To regard SMS as simply another tool for one-way information dissemination is limiting. In particular, overcome concerns regarding implementation of interactive systems unless rooted in concrete past experience or data. Every organisation, including local NGOs and companies, that established a hotline was worried about being overwhelmed, about handling angry callers and about being unable to answer questions. None of these fears manifested in practice.

**Develop models for capturing and evaluating projects using technology that look at the impact of projects, especially their level of usefulness and importance as seen by disaster survivors.** Again, local tech organisations and the private sector may have a key role to play here.

**Explore the potential of technology to facilitate access to information and aid regardless of distance.** High levels of mobile phone ownership among disaster survivors create exciting new opportunities to locate and maintain contact with people on the move, including those who leave an affected area, move in with host families or go overseas.

**Explore models that mesh new technology with old (such as radio) and which make the most of the many-to-many systems such as Twitter and Facebook.** In particular, do not lose sight of the importance of face-to-face contact: much of the relationship-building capacity of communication depends on interaction.



# Chapter 7

## Monitoring and evaluating communication

**T**HIS CHAPTER WILL LOOK at three key areas: the process of monitoring and evaluating communication projects, the importance and function of research, and the issue of documenting projects (capture). Given the weakness of M&E in Haiti, this chapter will look at ways in which various agencies attempted to address this question, particularly those who experimented with innovative approaches designed to function in the particularly difficult circumstances of a humanitarian emergency. It will also consider how non-communication humanitarian personnel, including operational staff, judged the effectiveness of communication

work and what benefits may lie in capturing this perspective in formal impact evaluation models. The particular challenges and opportunities presented by communications technologies will also be considered.

In the area of research, this chapter will look at the importance of analysis of the communication environment and information needs of survivors, how this was produced and how it was used by other agencies. It will look at how dedicated research capacity in one agency became a source of information and data for the whole response, and how important this was as a common service.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Implementing M&E in any emergency response is extremely challenging, and for those projects using unfamiliar tools (particularly involving technology), there is very little available or no established methodology on which to draw.**
- ▶ **Good quality monitoring and evaluation of communication initiatives was, with few notable exceptions, a major gap in Haiti. Few organisations had systems in place to attempt this.**
- ▶ **Capacity to measure impact of communication work can be provided through strategic partnerships and more effective use of existing sources of data.**
- ▶ **There was a lack of clarity on the aims of communication indicators and how they could be designed.**
- ▶ **The operational perspective of the impact and value added of communication work was often profoundly different compared to the models applied by communication professionals.**
- ▶ **Simple M&E models that were fully integrated into the project and that generated constant data, which fed back into operations, were found to be effective and useful by those who used them.**
- ▶ **Research data, including that originally intended for M&E, proved extremely valuable as a resource and tool for a whole range of responders.**

Cholera awareness banner on a tent in  
Cité de Soleil.

## Monitoring and evaluation

### THE EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

The research conducted for this report did not find any communication project from the early days of the earthquake response that captured or analysed the impact of communication for affected communities. The exception to this was Internews, who established the ENDK research team (see case study on page 83) and consequently produced data widely used by others across the response. Some organisations such as IOM and WFP created records by default through public relations work or written mission reports but these are partial, unsystematic and were produced from an institutional perspective rather than reflecting the survivor experience of these initiatives. They also do not constitute anything evaluative. In most cases, including some of the innovative work in SMS piloted by IFRC and the pilot models developed for camp relocations in March 2010 by IOM, there is little even in the way

of documentation and capture of the work. HRC, for example, does not have records of the content of the SMSs they sent out alerting survivors to vaccination services.

There are several reasons why monitoring and evaluating communication work during the earthquake emergency was weak. The extreme pressures of the operating environment, the difficulty in working (which meant most energy went on simply making projects happen), insufficient donor support, lack of technical support in designing indicators and the fact that several communication staff in Haiti were completely new both to aid and to emergency response were all factors cited by interviewees. Many of these are not limited to communication: all sectors typically struggle with the challenge of M&E in emergencies for these reasons. There was also a clear lack of systems in place to capture and analyse data that was available.

Deciding what is realistic, manageable and operationally effective is a necessary first step in designing models in future emergencies. To justify investing in research and mobilising organisational support, such models need to deliver data that can be acted on or used to inform a response immediately and which can deliver on several levels simultaneously. This in turn means moving away from baseline/endline

models into more iterative and less methodologically complex approaches to data collection.

## THE CHOLERA RESPONSE

Unlike the response to the earthquake, the cholera outbreak in October 2010 was recognised from the start as an emergency in which public information and education were critically important. Not only was funding invested in communication and public information work, but also in M&E, a recognised part of any project cycle based on behaviour change or public education.

As was discussed in the chapter on cholera, all three of the large-scale research and impact evaluation exercises focussed on knowledge retention and information awareness, some to a considerable level of detail. This was of course valuable. In particular, providing analysis that identified levels of weak knowledge or awareness or particular gaps in education enabled communication project managers to adjust how they were deploying staff, and what information they were providing. The CDAC paper, for example, identified areas of geographical weakness and also found that over 60 percent of respondents could not identify their nearest cholera treatment centre.

With the exception of the HRC paper, which analysed focus group data on perceptions of cholera (see Chapter 2), none of these exercises focussed on understanding and discussing underlying fears and perceptions of the disease, despite the fact that operationally these were the driving forces behind public reaction both to the outbreak and to measures implemented to mitigate the impact.

It was also notable that of the three papers analysing the impact of cholera communication (CDAC, UNICEF and Internews), only the CDAC Haiti exercise involved multiple agencies. The survey generated considerable buy-in from the organisations involved and the wider CDAC group, which appears to have facilitated the willingness of agencies to operationalise the findings.

Timing of the release of data and research findings is also critical. While the CDAC Haiti study was available to responders by early December 2010, the other two studies were not published until March (UNICEF) and June (Internews) 2011. While this does not invalidate them by any means, it does mean that they were not useful to those working during the critical early weeks as systematic feedback on their work.

## WHAT WORKED?

While many projects were not able to include effective M&E strategies, some did. This section will focus on innovative models and approaches that were piloted in Haiti.

### Evaluating multiple perspectives

TRF, whose EIS project was a pilot undergoing its first field deployment, commissioned two studies after they had finished operations: one an analysis of the humanitarian perspective, the other a survey of those who used the service.<sup>1</sup> As a result of both, the organisation could demonstrate impact and also gather useful data on how and why people had subscribed, what sort of information they prioritised etc. They also identified important limitations of the service as perceived by subscribers, which can be used to improve the service for the next deployment.

It is particularly interesting that TRF was able to carry out this work despite having a very limited operational presence in Haiti. They resolved this by designing models that could be outsourced to local companies, and hired an independent consultant who could operate without the support of an office. Other organisations also found that large-scale resources weren't necessary if M&E and capture processes were well designed. CARE, for example, carried out extensive surveying in Artibonite for a radio project with four staff, who stood by the side of roads inside and in-between towns to interview passers by (this was for a pre-earthquake project in Artibonite). During the cholera response, CARE combined surveying and community liaison work, instructing staff to survey communities on practices such as water management and then to lead discussions on cholera at the end, focussing on gaps identified by the questionnaire. Community perspectives were thus researched and captured, and responded to immediately.

### Evaluating the communication process

One of the few effective models that succeeded in capturing impact of a communication process was that used by IFRC when evaluating their call centre in Annexe de la Mairie camp. Interestingly, although the call centre was part of a much wider communication exercise in the camp, this was the only element systematically studied, mostly because the organisation regarded the outsourcing of the call centre as a new model and a pilot initiative, and wanted to make sure it

<sup>1</sup> 'Telephone survey of 400 of the 20,000 subscribers to the EIS service', CFET for TRF (April 2010) and 'Survey of NGOs and IOs using 4636 EIS in Haiti', Post Quake for TRF (June 2010).

worked before scaling it up.

One of the questions asked by the team concerned satisfaction levels with the call centre service itself, not IFRC, thus enabling them to evaluate the service as opposed to the IFRC shelter project and isolate the value added of the communication aspect. They found that 187 of those who had used the call centre were happy with the service it provided (out of 218), whereas only 101 were satisfied with the IFRC. IFRC thus captured a fascinating finding concerning the impact and perceived value of a communication process (the call centre) as opposed to that of the information shared. This indicates that analysis of the psychosocial value of communication processes (as opposed to successful transfer of information) is both possible, and potentially an important indicator in assessing the value added of communication work.

### The iterative 'loop' approach

The IFRC model is particularly interesting because all their surveys were carried out and finalised during the project, meaning that the findings could be acted on and the project refined as a result. Additional data turned up during the surveys – information about problems with individual cases, for example, could also be passed to the shelter teams and acted upon. During the emergency phase, when time is at a premium and formal research very difficult, iterative models such as this can be much more effective than those that rely on base/endline surveys, allowing for data to be fed directly back into humanitarian operations.

WFP, for example, found an ongoing approach made much more sense in the days immediately after the earthquake. By listening to feedback collected by the national public information officer, “we were able to determine quickly what people didn’t understand and ‘fix’ it by tweaking our messaging. This process was informed by the feedback the national public information officer received during and after his radio appearances, which were then passed down the line. The process highlighted that what WFP thinks is clear and impossible-to-misinterpret messaging may not always be understood that way by the people we are assisting, giving us a mechanism by which we can go back and clarify matters. In this sense, the evaluation of the communications strategy is an ongoing ‘real time’ process, rather than coming afterwards,” wrote Marcus Prior, Head of Communications, in his end of mission report at the time.<sup>2</sup>

Interviewed for this paper, the national communication officer felt strongly that with a better

system for capturing and managing the feedback he was receiving, much more useful and productive data could have been produced that would have benefited the organisation. In particular, he commented that an office mobile phone, a software system to capture and catalogue incoming SMSs and support in handling and logging incoming phone calls would have made a considerable difference. In retrospect, he would have proposed two monitoring staff, a dedicated phone line and a system for managing incoming SMSs.

## GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The issues around monitoring and evaluating projects in Haiti fall into two main categories: the inherent difficulties of organising M&E in an emergency environment that are common to all sectors, and the lack of methodology available for capturing and evaluating communication projects in a humanitarian context per se. The former is part of the nature of humanitarian response and will continue to be a problem. The latter can, however, be addressed.

The experience in Haiti indicates firstly that there are considerable practical difficulties in implementing standard models for tracking communication projects (baseline/endline, KAP surveys etc.) in emergency contexts. Discussions with a wide range of actors, however, indicated that it is possible to develop different models more suited to emergency response, and that there may be much to be gained from finding new, more flexible approaches. As has been explored elsewhere in this report, there are clear and tangible benefits to effective communication not currently explored or captured by conventional M&E methodologies. These include finding ways to capture the impact on operational work and identify the impact of the communication process (especially from the survivor perspective). Failure to look at these perspectives risks failure to capture some of the most important and meaningful outcomes of effective communication work.

Overall, findings in Haiti indicate that there is much to be gained from improved monitoring and evaluation of communication work using new tools and incorporating wider perspectives, not least the real-time generation of information that is valuable to operations teams. In addition, the fact that the sector needs to base M&E models on what is realistic and viable in a highly pressured emergency environment with limited resources and capacity is also not necessarily a drawback. Systems that make better use of existing data, that seek partnerships and that justify investment by delivering outputs that can serve multiple ends may well

<sup>2</sup> Prior, M. 'Mr Rice: Local media communications in a quick-onset humanitarian disaster', internal report for WFP, March 2010.



prove easier to fund and implement.

Although little methodology exists, agencies in Haiti did explore and identify some simple ways to generate data to demonstrate impact, whether in the context of communication as an integral part of a project or service delivery, or as a standalone project. These include:

- ▶ **Partnerships (with other agencies and within the organisation).** Leveraging capacity elsewhere in the organisation or in a partner organisation is one simple way to capture basic impact, especially if the information in question concerns service delivery. For example, there is anecdotal evidence that when IFRC began promoting vaccination services through SMS, doctors working for Red Cross national societies reported people arriving at clinics and asking for the service. This is a model that has been successfully implemented elsewhere, and which requires little additional capacity. If the promotion of the service is occurring through a partnership (for example through the ENDK radio show) then both organisations stand to benefit from the collection of this data.
- ▶ **Viewing M&E as an ongoing iterative approach.** As the WFP and Internews examples illustrate, iterative models make much more sense in emergencies as they enable the same data to serve multiple functions. M&E clearly needs resources to be successful – but developing models that can generate useful data for many parties simultaneously increases the argument for investment.
- ▶ **Making the most of existing data.** Many communication systems generated data of considerable use to operations teams and the overall response, but which was never systematically exploited to this end. In these cases, developing a simple capture and analysis system for existing data would be hugely beneficial. This includes questions asked during radio call-ins or to call centres, and feedback given to community mobilisers. Such systems would also have the benefit of facilitating information sharing with other agencies and at system level. By writing a short paper and sharing it, HRC's cholera study brought important feedback from affected communities into the response policy-making arena.
- ▶ **Using technology to capture and process existing data.** One of the reasons the Internews SMS system functioned from the start is because the organisation asked for information via SMS that was logged directly onto a computer and thus could be catalogued and searched. It would be more than possible – as IFRC subsequently did in their Annexe de la Mairie camp call centre, to develop systems for logging calls to a call centre, or other channels through which feedback is already being generated. Projects using SMS or mobile phones are particularly well placed in this regard.
- ▶ **Capture of anecdotal evidence.** This is sometimes done on an ad hoc basis by some organisations, usually in the context of public relations work. In some cases this represents almost the only record of communication done in the early days. Some of it is still available from agency websites but much has been lost, and little was systematic. It is also notable that the best sources available today on work by local media come from international reporters. Many journalists covering the response wrote detailed stories on the work by Signal FM, Radio 1 and Caraibes. It is also worth noting that the very important HRC research essentially represents a systematic effort to capture and analyse anecdotal information received during a project implemented by the psychosocial team, and not the communication unit. This is interesting as it shows the value of anecdotal information, often underestimated by monitoring and evaluative processes that tend to focus on hard, often quantitative data. Communication as a sector needs to work to ensure that the full value of anecdotal evidence is recognised given the complex nature of this area of work.
- ▶ **Supporting independent research by academic partners.** Organising full independent reviews can be expensive and complex, and especially challenging in a major emergency. Both CDAC and IFRC, however, are successfully working with Masters students to conduct research in exchange for support from the organisation.

## THE OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

One of the most interesting contrasts found during this research was the different ways in which communication professionals and operations staff saw the benefits of communication for affected people. Benefits from an operational point of view usually related to improvements in relationships with communities who had a better understanding and greater acceptance of the project in question. These are important consequences of effective communication work that are rarely captured by current models for evaluating communication work, yet within organisations are often critical in generating the necessary internal support for continuation of communication. Doctors and nurses in cholera treatment centres interviewed for this research, for example, commented that they knew that communication work was having an impact when cholera patients began arriving for treatment at a much earlier stage in the disease, having recognised symptoms and having had the necessary information on how to act on them. The same was also true for work addressing the complex issue of stigmatisation. Community liaison staff from CARE in rural Artibonite, for example, said that they knew the message was getting through when local people became willing to have contact with cholera patients and survivors.

“At the start, people were afraid of the illness, they were afraid to come to the cholera treatment centre. Now they are not afraid – they know what cholera is. At the start people waited till it got bad and now they come if they see any symptoms that even look like cholera. We have to decide if it is cholera. This is a good thing.”

DOCTOR, MARMELADE, ARTIBONITE

None of the studies set up by communication experts included ways to capture field-level behaviour change noted by frontline staff responding to cholera – even though as far as the latter were concerned, this was the most meaningful outcome of the communication campaign. This suggests that either the current models for evaluation, or the way they were implemented, missed a perspective that not only indicated meaningful impact of communication work, but also helped to understand communities’ response to information, and what triggered those responses. One important caveat

here is the difficulty – by definition – of identifying in advance what those responses will be, in order to develop ways of tracking them.

While many organisations are now systematically doing communication work using SMS and call centres, automated and otherwise, the M&E methodology has not kept pace. Organisations have a tendency to use numbers of messages sent or calls received as indicators, rather than providing any evidence based on audience response or impact. Partly because these systems are one-way information distribution models, there is by definition no data being generated by feedback or audience response mechanisms. To generate good M&E, such projects need to either enable audiences to interact more with these systems in a measurable way or develop parallel surveying models.

SMS in particular, however, has great potential as an M&E tool in its own right. Interviewed for this research, phone company Trilogy commented that when SMS is used to promote other services such as phone lines, it is also technically possible to look at spikes in use of the phone line. SMS also clearly has wider potential as a tool to facilitate M&E and feedback in the context of other operational projects, for example, to confirm receipt of aid by affected communities, but this lies beyond the scope of this paper.

A further set of opportunities and challenges in M&E rests on the finding of this research that for survivors, the process of communication is just as important as the information itself. At present, M&E in communication tends to focus on the extent to which information or knowledge is successfully transferred (in either direction) and to how many people (usually, the more the better). However, IFRC succeeded in isolating information regarding the benefit of communication from the information when they conducted a survey on their call centre in Annexe de la Mairie camp. They found that while only half of phone centre users were happy with the information received, all were happy with the presence of the call centre. The call centre was in fact a source of comfort and security for camp residents. During infoasaid focus groups, women commented that knowing that a helpline existed for people affected by gender-based violence in itself made them feel safer, as if there was somewhere to go if this ever happened to them.

It is telling that at present, the only indications for this are purely anecdotal. Developing ways to capture and evaluate this way of looking at communication would both provide a new way to demonstrate the value added of communication work, and also help deepen understanding – at a local and a global/sectoral level – of why communication matters so profoundly to disaster-affected communities.

## THE INTERNEWS RESEARCH UNIT

Media development organisation Internews established a research department from the earliest days of their response in Haiti, the first time they had done so in a humanitarian emergency. The unit began as a way of mapping and understanding the best tools to improve communication with affected communities, and their information needs, in order to improve Internews daily humanitarian news programme ENDK (see Chapter 5).

The team established bi-monthly rolling audience assessments, which began in March 2010 and covered the earthquake-affected area. Since then, every two weeks, the team has returned to the same places to assess if and how information needs change. The team also analysed the 50–100 SMS messages sent to ENDK on a daily basis, helping to select which should be addressed in the mailbox section of the programme. Since the start, the findings of the research team have also been fed directly back into the radio programme to help shape the editorial agenda.

The research team has also carried out a series of focus groups to track reaction to ENDK broadcasts. Information from these groups is also central to the

Internews M&E strategy in Haiti. Through this they were able to demonstrate the programme's reach and impact. In February 2010, for example, a month after broadcasts began, 80 percent of participants were aware of ENDK.

Internews' research was originally intended to be completely internal. OCHA and other partners in CDAC Haiti, however, suggested that it might be of interest to the wider humanitarian community. In collaboration with CDAC Haiti, Internews began sharing their data with the other humanitarian players, including the Haitian authorities and local NGOs. Many organisations and partnerships began using it to develop their own information and communication work. "People started coming to me...wanting the research," says Jennifer Mandel, Research Director. "Our distribution list is now over 100 people." Those interested also included local media who were broadcasting ENDK, and who saw the value of the research in attracting advertising revenue.

A further and originally unanticipated impact of the research work is that Haiti now has 19 staff trained to a high standard in audience research methodology and practice. Internews is supporting their team to start their own independent research firm to serve both the humanitarian community and Haiti's media sector.

## Research

This section looks at the value of research as a standalone activity, particularly the importance of replace with fragment with: mapping and analysing the communication environment overall as well as the information needs of survivors etc. Research on the communication environment in Haiti both before and after the earthquake was essential to the development of a functioning communication sector. A study produced by Voice of America (VOA) in August 2009 provided key information on levels of ownership of mobile phones, for example, and the importance of radio.

The most important post-earthquake initiative in this regard was the Internews research unit (see case study above), most particularly because the agency worked with CDAC to ensure it was widely available. This was also important as the current needs assessment processes carried out as part of a major response do not include any questions addressing communication capacity or information needs. The separate work carried out by agencies including IMS, Internews and AMARC to assess the impact of the earthquake on the media sector was also key.

Internews also participated in other partnerships facilitated by CDAC to share knowledge and best

practice around effective research, including training staff from organisations such as IOM, UNFPA and IMC to carry out effective focus groups. This has been promoted as best practice and as an effective form of advocacy for better communication practices within agencies not specialising in communication.

*"There were organisations I believe who really took to heart what was coming out in the research and modified their communications strategies as a result."*

JENNIFER MANDEL, RESEARCH DIRECTOR, INTERNEWS

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), using the local agency Dagmar, also commissioned very high quality research work to improve media responsiveness to listeners. This research was designed to help local media understand their audiences by gathering feedback to bring listener patterns and needs to their attention. According to OTI, seven stations have subsequently adapted their programming, and local marketing and advertising firms have been using the data to negotiate rates. Aid agencies were mostly unaware of and thus unable to use the data. This was particularly

## HRC AND CAPTURING COMMUNITY BELIEFS

In November 2010 HRC published a short paper analysing perceptions and beliefs among Haitians regarding cholera and the origins and nature of the outbreak. It was one of very few initiatives that attempted to probe the underlying social and cultural context of attitudes towards cholera that were at the time having a very serious impact on the ability of the response to operate.

The paper was based on information collected by the report's authors between mid-November and early December during nine group discussions and awareness-raising sessions with communities in four urban and rural earthquake-affected areas with an existing HRC presence. The groups were originally organised as part of the HRC's psychosocial response to cholera and were not set up with any research purpose. As the report itself states, it was while this work was in process that "the authors realised they were getting information

that was valuable and should be documented and shared to inform subsequent interventions."<sup>1</sup> Because the original intention was not to conduct research, the groups were recruited through a simple door-to-door invitation and consisted of mixed groups of men and women. The meetings were co-facilitated by the two authors who took notes, which were analysed to identify common themes.

The approach may have been simple, but the paper was shared widely among humanitarian actors and highlighted important issues for all working on the response, including communication personnel. It was used to advocate for the importance of better understanding of the Haitian perspective, and the need to incorporate this understanding into project design. As a result of this study, the HRC psychosocial team was given training to manage local fears and perceptions.

<sup>1</sup> Grimaud, J and Legagneur, F. 'Cholera outbreak: Note on community beliefs, feelings and perceptions', Haitian Red Cross Psychosocial Report Programme, December 9<sup>th</sup> 2010.

unfortunate given that this was the only research at the time providing detailed analysis of stations and audiences outside Port au Prince when many international organisations were trying to implement communication work nationwide as part of the response to cholera.

## RESEARCH, COMMUNICATION AND OPERATIONS

In addition to researching the communication environment, there is also the wider question of how communication projects can ensure the information and feedback they receive are fed back into the overall humanitarian decision-making process, both at agency and system level. WFP, for example, included public information staff in daily senior management meetings where operational decisions were made, both so they

could ensure the latest information informed the development of messages, and also so feedback received by the national public information officer could be fed back to the operations team. Most projects, however, had no effective systems for capturing information collected as a by-product of communication, or of feeding it back into operations and decision making.

Again, the best example of where this was done successfully was by HRC in their paper on perceptions of cholera (see case study above). This study was done entirely within existing resources, and without a specific budget line for research or capture.

As the HRC case illustrates, there is clearly potential for communication agencies to contribute to the evidence base on which humanitarian operations staff make decisions, channelling information about questions, concerns and also positive experiences back up from the field. This is an important dimension of meaningful two-way communication with affected communities.



# Recommendations

**Communication projects in emergencies need stronger M&E methodologies.**

Communication projects also need stronger commitment to evaluation from the agencies implementing them. This includes resourcing M&E, research and capture work from the start of a response.

In particular, methodologies need to be developed to evaluate and capture data in projects that make new use of technology, especially mobile phones. Those working in partnerships with phone companies or already implementing these kinds of projects need to focus on developing approaches to M&E that they can then share across the sector.

M&E models need to be developed that capture ways in which other parties, particularly operational staff, see value and impact. There is great potential for working with operational staff to develop new frameworks for capturing field-level impact.

M&E models also need to be developed that take account of the importance of two-way communication with affected communities, rather than simply focussing on information delivered, or absorption of key messages.

M&E models that focus merely on the amount of information delivered or the number of outputs produced are limiting. Neither agencies nor donors should accept indicators that simply count the number of text messages sent or radio programmes produced. Without evidence of audience impact or feedback these benchmarks have minimal value.

M&E methodologies in emergency response should include an iterative approach as well as (or rather than) baseline. They should leverage data collected as a by-product of projects and seek to develop information 'loops' that ensure data collected from audiences is made available in a useful form to the ongoing operation as quickly as possible.

Agencies should also look at ways in which M&E, feedback, research and advocacy functions can be combined. Ensuring operations departments have access to data collected and that senior managers hear this feedback is key.

For both research and M&E, simple models that require minimal training and make the best use of existing data and structures should be preferred to full research methodologies. In an emergency, timeliness is more useful to humanitarians than perfect data that is out of date by the time it is finalised.

Include communication as a sector in existing needs assessment processes. Questions should be written into processes such as the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment.

Establish research capacity to map communication environments and needs after a disaster, and identify and analyse the information needs of the affected communities. This is important to make sure that all agencies working in communications have reliable and penetrating analysis on which to base their communication work. This should be produced as a common service.

# Acronyms

<b>ACF</b>	Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)	<b>JPHRO</b>	Jenkins/Penn Haiti Relief Organisation
<b>AJH</b>	Association des Journalistes Haitien	<b>MDM</b>	Médecins du Monde
<b>AMARC</b>	World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters	<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>ARC</b>	American Refugee Committee	<b>MINUSTAH</b>	United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti
<b>BHN</b>	Basic Human Needs (Japanese NGO)	<b>MSF</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<b>BRC</b>	British Red Cross	<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>CAP</b>	Consolidated Appeal Process	<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>CCCM</b>	Camp Coordination and Camp Management	<b>ORS</b>	Oral Rehydration Salts
<b>CDAC Haiti</b>	Communications with Disaster Affected Communities Haiti	<b>OTI</b>	Office of Transition Initiatives (implementing agency for USAID)
<b>CDAC Network</b>	Communications with Disaster Affected Communities Global	<b>RSF</b>	Reporters sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders)
<b>CERF</b>	Central Emergency Response Fund	<b>SAKS</b>	<i>Sosyete Animasyon ak Kominakasyon Sosyal</i> (Society for Social Mobilisation and Communication)
<b>CFET</b>	Centre de Formation et d'Encadrement Technique	<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>CHAP</b>	Common Humanitarian Action Plan	<b>TRF</b>	Thomson Reuters Foundation
<b>CHF</b>	Cooperative Housing Foundation	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>CRC</b>	Canadian Red Cross	<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>CSR</b>	Catholic Relief Services	<b>UNDAC</b>	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
<b>DPC</b>	Direction de la Protection Civile	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>ECHO</b>	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>EIS</b>	Emergency Information Service (run by Thomson Reuters Foundation)	<b>UNOPS</b>	United Nations Office for Project Services
<b>ENDK</b>	<i>Enformasyon Nou Dwe Konnen</i> (Internews radio project)	<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>ERRF</b>	Emergency Response Relief Fund	<b>USAR</b>	Urban Search and Rescue
<b>HAP</b>	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership	<b>VOA</b>	Voice of America
<b>HRC</b>	Haitian Red Cross	<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>IMS</b>	International Media Support	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>IOM</b>	International Organisation for Migration	<b>WVI</b>	World Vision International
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee		

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