Assessing Information & Communication Needs

A Quick and Easy Guide for Those Working in Humanitarian Response

May 2014

About the CDAC Network

The CDAC Network promotes the coordinated provision of information as well as two-way communication with crisis affected communities as key humanitarian deliverables. Network Members seek to ensure that communities affected by or prone to crises are supported to better withstand, and recover from, humanitarian emergencies, through active engagement in decisions about the relief and recovery efforts in their country.

To achieve this, CDAC Network Members are committed to mainstreaming two-way communication approaches into emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

The CDAC Network is unique in terms of who it convenes: humanitarian and media development organisations as well as technology and other service providers. By collaborating across traditional boundaries, CDAC Network Members increase mutual understanding of the challenges they face and identify opportunities for partnership in order to bring about innovative and effective field practice.

Current Full Members of the CDAC Network are: ActionAid; BBC Media Action; Development and Humanitarian Learning in Action (DAHLIA); the ICRC; International Media Support (IMS); Internews Europe; IOM; Merlin; Plan UK; Save the Children; Thomson Reuters Foundation; Translators without Borders; UNFPA; UNHCR; UNICEF; UNOCHA; WFP; and World Vision International. Current Affiliate Members are: FdL Development; FilmAid; First Response Radio; Freeplay Energy; Frontline SMS; and HFCC-International Broadcasting Delivery.

For more information and for other Network resources please go to www.cdacnetwork.org

ACAPS

The Assessment Capacities (ACAPS) Project is a project aimed at enhancing the capacity of the humanitarian sector to carry out coordinated needs assessments. The goal of the project is to improve effective humanitarian responses through the provision of improved, context-specific information on humanitarian needs.

ACAPS is dedicated to improving the assessment of needs in complex emergencies, sudden onset disasters and protracted crises. ACAPS provides tools, know-how and training for assessments.

For more information, please go to www.acaps.org

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Why communicate?

Effective communication is essential in an emergency. If communication channels are working, the population can be alerted to facts about the emergency and be made aware of potential threats and how to mitigate risk. If communication is two-way – enabling affected populations to give feedback, ask questions and share information – it means that humanitarian responders can better understand the needs on the ground and respond accordingly. If used effectively, communication can improve quality and effectiveness of programmes and can help reach vulnerable people and isolated groups. It can help manage expectations and help affected populations hold aid agencies to account, as well as being an important and effective tool in addressing the psycho-social needs of a population who have experienced a crisis first-hand. Knowing which communication channels have been affected, which channels remain and are trusted and used by communities, and getting a sense of what is needed in terms of information and communication, allows humanitarian responders to work out the best ways to provide information and to receive feedback from communities.

Introduction

Humanitarian needs assessments are carried out to determine the immediate needs of a population following an emergency or humanitarian crisis. Once an assessment has been carried out and data has been analysed, humanitarian organisations can make key decisions about their operational response including their goals, intended programmes and fundraising plans. Assessments tend to focus on needs in specific sectors such as water and sanitation, health and shelter. It is increasingly considered good practice that these assessments are carried out jointly, either as multi-cluster or inter-agency assessments, especially following large-scale disasters.

Over the last few years, a number of key publications have highlighted the unmet need of information in humanitarian contexts[1,2] and evaluations have emphasised the need to establish and support communication with and between crisis-affected populations.[3,4,5]

When a humanitarian emergency unfolds, whether a 'sudden onset disaster' or conflict, people's communication systems – the way they usually give, receive, share and trust information – may be damaged or destroyed.

Increasingly, efforts are being made to include questions on information provision and communication channels in multi-sector, inter-agency and agency-specific needs assessments. For instance, OCHA's Multi Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) tool includes two questions related to communication needs. Communication questions have also been included in the Kenya Initial Rapid Assessment (KIRA) tool and the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) tools in Bangladesh.

To facilitate the systematic inclusion of questions on information and communication in rapid needs assessments, the CDAC Network, in collaboration with the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPs), has produced this quick and easy guide for field practitioners involved in assessing humanitarian needs.

Aims of the Guide

This guide aims to:

1. Highlight the importance of understanding the **community's information needs** and **available communication channels** during the initial phases of an emergency

2. Provide guidance on **which key communication questions to include** in needs assessments and **what to do with the data** once you have it

3. Support the **coordination** of communication with crisis-affected populations, through using common assessment questions

4. Address the **limited resources** available to humanitarian staff on how to **assess a communities' information and communication needs and access**

This guidance outlines a number of actions by humanitarian responders that can be taken to assess how to enhance communication with and among affected communities during the different stages of an emergency, namely the preparedness phase, the first 72 hours (*Phase 1*), the first 1-2 weeks following an emergency (*Phase 2*), and within 3-4 weeks (*Phase 3*). These benchmarks are in line with guidance produced by the Needs Assessment Task Force, an inter-agency body chaired by UNOCHA[6].

[1] World Disaster Report, IFRC, 2005
[2] 'Left in the Dark: The unmet need for information in humanitarian response' BBC World Service Trust, 2008
[3] 'The State of the Humanitarian System' report, ALNAP, 2012
[4] 'Synthesis Report', Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006
[5] 'Closing the loop: Responding to people's information needs from crisis response to recovery development', Mandel, J. & Sommerfeldt, E., Internews, 2011
[6] See provisional version of the operational guidance, NATF, March 2012, p13.

Data Preparedness

The more you know about the information and communication ecosystem of a community – knowing how and when people receive and share information, and anticipating how this may change during an emergency – the better you will be able to decide which communication channels and initiatives to focus on in your response. This information constitutes **pre-crisis secondary data** - data which already exists, having been collected for a purpose other than the assessment at hand. Knowledge of a community's preferred channels of communication in advance will give you an idea about where support may be needed during and after an emergency. Draw on lessons learned from similar emergencies in the past to anticipate how information ecosystems may change.

Depending on the country context, there could be a range of different methods by which people access information, from mass media such as radio, newspapers or television, to the more traditional channels such as word of mouth, participatory theatre, through leaflets, or community leaders. People's preferences may vary depending on their age, ethnic group, gender or religion, and can change over time, particularly following an emergency. Preferences could also vary depending on the time of day and the format in which communication takes place or information is delivered. For example, in urban environments, early mornings and evenings are often the most popular times to listen to the radio or watch television, but this may be different in rural areas or in a camp context.

A good understanding of the media and telecommunications environment is important if you are considering working in partnership with print or broadcast networks to facilitate two-way communication, particularly in conflict situations. This is because media outlets may be partisan or belong to certain ethnic groups or clans and a partnership could breach humanitarian principles, such as the Code of Conduct[7] or Do No Harm

principle. In past civil wars, for example, media has been used to broadcast hate speech and incite violence. State media may serve as the propaganda tool of government, therefore using it as a communication channel may have implications in terms of trust and reliability.

The following sources can help in preparedness:

Media and Telecommunications Landscape Guides

Media and Telecommunications Landscape Guides are a compilation of all communication channels and resources available in a country. Twenty guides were developed by the infoasaid[8] project for the most crisis-prone countries between 2010 and 2012, and can be a useful source of pre-crisis secondary data. The guides are available at www.cdacnetwork.org. Plans to update these guides are under discussion between the CDAC Network and other partners.

If no guide exists for the region or area you are working in, undertaking the development of one can be a valuable emergency preparedness activity.

The Media and Telecommunications Landscape Guides generally provide information on:

- Profiles and contact details of the main radio stations, TV channels, newspapers and news websites

- The most popular and trusted sources of news and information

- Media outlets that command significant national, regional, ethnic and religious audiences

- Peak audience periods for radio and television

- Languages to use in local and national broadcasts

- A brief summary of the more traditional forms of communication such as theatre, music, dance and via respected messengers such as religious or community leaders or local celebrities

- Profiles of the main telecommunications companies in each country and mobile network coverage

- Mobile phone ownership and usage by the local population

- Media resources including media service providers or local artists with whom aid agencies could engage to produce radio programmes, print posters or create videos

Identifying Sources in Country

Websites

There are a number of websites detailing how the media works in each country. These are:

- The Committee to Protect Journalists (www.cpj.org)

- The Annual Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders (https://en.rsf.org/)

- Article 19 (www.article19.org)

Media development agencies

Media development agencies can be a good source of information on the media preferences of populations. A number of them have programmes in crisis-prone countries including BBC Media Action, Fondation Hirondelle, International Media Support, Internews, and Search for Common Ground. They commonly undertake comprehensive information and communication needs

assessments, including in-depth assessments of damage to the media environment.[9]

Private sector

There are several companies which undertake media and audience surveys, which vary from country to country. As their data is mainly aimed at advertisers, their surveys are only available on a paid-for basis. These companies include the following:

- Nielsen: Active in Africa and Asia http://nielsen.com/us/en.html.

- Gallup: This has an affiliate in Pakistan www.gallup.com.pk/

- Ipsos: This has an affiliate in Kenya www.ipsos.co.ke/home/index.php

NGOs and the UN

In some countries, media audience research is conducted by individual NGOs and UN agencies. For example, UNICEF often has information on communication preferences and channels through work done through their Communication for Development (C4D) programmes. Contact the relevant organisations in country for more information.

Community Profiling

If you cannot find information on how communities receive and share information, consider carrying out a community profiling exercise. This can provide useful information about language, literacy, access and use of media by different members of the community, and is best achieved through focus group discussions with different segments of the community. Suggested 'Community Profile Questions' can be found on the CDAC Network website (http://www.cdacnetwork.org). These questions will need to be adapted to individual contexts.

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[9] See https://www.internews.org/global-issues/humanitarian-information/assessments and http://www.i-m-s.dk/publication/the-central-african-republic-media-in-a-complex-emergency/

Assessment and Response

Phase 1 (first 72 hours)

Retrieve any preparedness data already collected. If you don't have any, it would be a good idea to quickly build a profile using available public resources as mentioned in the preparedness section above. Then proceed to 'in crisis' data collection.

In Crisis Data Collection

Following a natural disaster, it is highly likely that damage has been caused to the communication infrastructure. Conflict and civil unrest can also impact communication channels, with telecommunications towers, radio or TV stations deliberately shut down or destroyed and broadcasting disrupted.

To determine how best to communicate with affected communities, the following information would be useful:

- Areas which have lost coverage of phone, radio and TV

- Mobile phone networks, radio and TV stations which are still operational

- Areas which have lost power

- How people are currently receiving and sharing information

Check what data is already available from media reports, government information agencies, government situation reports, and reports from other organisations working in the affected area. On the ground, direct observation can give some idea of the damage (e.g. damaged telecommunications towers; tuning in to radio stations to check which are still on air; checking for mobile phone signal in different areas).

Other sources of information on communication infrastructure include:

- National regulatory bodies, mobile phone companies, journalist networks (e.g.

unions), state radio and TV and any media development agency in country. If relevant, check existing Media Guides for contact details.

- The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (if it has been activated) or national/international associations of telecommunications companies (e.g. GSMA: www.gsma.com).

What to Do with this Data?

- Consider how your agency will communicate with the crisis-affected population, given how the crisis has impacted the communication infrastructure

- Ensure the information you have collected on communication channels and infrastructure is shared with relevant humanitarian structures/mechanisms in country (national and international)

- Check if a communication coordination mechanism[10] has been set up and contribute and participate where possible

Phase 2 (first 1-2 weeks)

Ensure questions on communication channels and information needs are included in rapid needs assessments.

Phase 2 is typically when initial rapid inter-agency, multi-sector (i.e. MIRA) and agency-specific rapid needs assessments are conducted. Including communication questions in field data collection will enable rapid assessment teams to ask community members directly about information sources, access to channels of communication, and their information needs.

Obtaining this information is the first step in helping to restore normal communication systems

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[10] These have previously been led by Media Development Agencies (see CDAC Haiti Learning Review) and UNOCHA (see

CDAC Network Typhoon Bopha Learning Review). These and other Learning Reviews are available at www.cdacnetwork.org.

and ensuring communities can access vital information.

People's radios or mobile phones may have been lost, damaged or destroyed; communities may have been displaced and so their usual methods of sharing information may have changed; they may be unable to buy phone credit; and electricity or network outages may be affecting normal access to media and telephone communication.

To find out how best to communicate with crisis-affected communities, consider including the following five questions in rapid needs assessments. These questions can be used in quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews or focus group discussions.

Suggestions of prompts can be found in the Pocket Guide in Annex 1. These are not designed to limit responses, but can provide a template for survey data collection and facilitate analysis across multiple sites.

1. **A) What are the main channels of communication available to your community now?**

   B) What channels did you use before?

We ask this to find out which channels (radio/TV/mobile phone/loudspeakers/noticeboards/word of mouth/etc.) can be used to communicate alerts and warnings as well as critical information about relief distribution to the population. We ask what channels people used before, to determine whether there has been any change, and whether we may be able to help re-establish these channels of communication if prioritised by the community.

2. **A) What, if anything, is preventing you from getting the information you need now?**

   B) Are there groups within the community who have more difficulty accessing information, and why?

We ask these questions to guide appropriate planning, to ensure we are able to communicate effectively with as many members of the community as possible. For example, marginalised groups might not be included in community meetings where key information is disseminated, or radio sets might need batteries or charging facilities in order to function. Sometimes the obstacles may be simple to solve (e.g. providing mobile phone charging stations) and sometimes they will be more challenging and beyond our capacity to fix (e.g. re-establishing network coverage). It is important to find out if there are particular groups who have additional needs regarding accessing information.

3. **A) Which sources of information do the people in your community trust the most?**

   B) Which sources do people trust the least?

   C) Are there any groups who trust different sources of information? (e.g. Men/women, young/older people, disabled people)

Knowing which programmes, stations or people are most trusted by communities can help determine who to collaborate with when communicating with affected populations. Trusted information sources could include government, community leaders, religious leaders, doctors, NGOs, armed forces or volunteers. It is equally important to find out which information sources are not trusted by communities, so we don't use them to communicate. It's important to differentiate between different groups as they may trust different sources. The potential responses for this question will need to be adapted for each context.

4. **What would the community like more information on at the moment? What do you need to know more about?**

We ask this to find out the information and communication needs identified by communities. This data might need to be shared with the relevant cluster/sector, with a request that they provide the community with the information they

need either via their own channels or through an established coordination mechanism. For example, people might not know where to access clean drinking water, how to access health facilities, or what to do if their child gets diarrhoea. This question could be left open, or prompts could be used. WARNING: This question is often misinterpreted to mean general needs, rather than information needs, and may need some more explanation.

5. **How would you most like to communicate with aid agencies? (e.g. to ask a question, to complain, or to make a suggestion)**

We ask this to determine how humanitarian responders can best get feedback on their activities from the communities they are aiming to support. The way people feel comfortable communicating with agencies is likely to be very culturally specific.

What to Do with this Data?

- Based on the information collected, develop a communication strategy[11] in line with your humanitarian programme that identifies aims, objectives, target audiences, key messages, communication methods and feedback channels. This will help to integrate communication activities into your overall response and ensure the content, audience and method/channel are appropriate. A useful resource for developing messages is the infoasaid Message Library (http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/message-library).

- Explore ways to more effectively use the communication channel(s) identified by the community.

- Discuss how best to get information out to affected communities, and to ensure communities can communicate easily with your agency. This may involve working with local media stations[12], community leaders,

volunteer networks and other trusted sources of information

- If a communication coordination mechanism exists (e.g. a communication working group), ensure you regularly share your communication activities through regular meetings and other info-sharing methods.

- Investigate the possibility of being part of a common service project with other actors to ensure effective coordination of communication activities and to avoid duplication or contradiction of messages, which can lead to confusion. Examples include a telephone hotline, inter-agency community consultations, or collaborating to sponsor a radio or TV programme for affected communities.

- Consider engaging with media stations identified by the community and ascertain how you could collaborate to enable effective two-way communication. Note: check beforehand who runs the station and if a partnership with them could threaten or contradict humanitarian principles.

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[11] For more details, check infoasaid's communication strategy template on http://www.cdacnetwork.org/ and Develop a Communication Plan in Nine Steps' Catholic Relief Service (http://www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/general/co mmunication-toolbox-template-develop-a-communication-plan.pdf)

[12] For guidance see CDAC Network 101 Seminar Series: Humanitarian Broadcasting report: http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/

Phase 3 (3-4 weeks)

Phase 3 is often when more detailed assessments are carried out, usually by individual organisations or by multiple agencies or clusters. This enables humanitarian responders to design effective programmes based on the needs identified and, in the case of sudden onset disasters, to move from response to recovery.

As with other sectors, approaches to two-way communication will evolve along with changes in the situation on the ground. In some humanitarian contexts, the communication infrastructure can be restored relatively quickly; in other contexts, such as conflict situations, it may take much longer. It is therefore essential to continuously check on what is working and what is not.

Funds and capacity permitting, media development agencies such as BBC Media Action, Fondation Hirondelle, International Media Support and Internews may conduct more comprehensive information and communication needs assessments.

The media development agencies who are part of the CDAC Network have agreed to use common assessment tools which are available on the CDAC Network website. These tools, or questions from them, can be used by any humanitarian agency or other stakeholder.

For information on these tools or to find out more about conducting in depth communications assessments visit the CDAC Network website or contact info@cdacnetwork.org.