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FICHE PRATIQUE

11 GOOD PRACTICES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH COMMUNITIES

LISTENING TO AND ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES IS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND IS ESSENTIAL TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE. HERE ARE 11 GOOD PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION.

1. UNDERSTAND YOUR CONTEXT

- Carry out an information and communication needs assessment to determine what communication channels communities currently use, what sources they trust and how they would like to talk to humanitarian agencies.
- Assessments should describe the local communication and media landscape; how the community shares information; leadership structures; literacy levels; what languages are spoken; the age, gender and diversity of the community (AGD); and other relevant cultural practices.
- The information habits of target audiences and the level of access of different groups are key factors in determining which channels to adopt and how to share information.

2. COORDINATE COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES

- Coordination minimises the risk of conflicting or duplicated information, encourages common messages and allows organisations to pool and share information channels.
- To manage and respond effectively to community feedback, it is particularly important to define and agree roles and responsibilities, both internally and inter-agency.
- Stakeholders should draw up standard operating procedures (SOPs) that define agreed commitments, timeframes for follow-up and the roles of agencies and individuals.
- Coordination mechanisms for communication may already exist; for example, a working group to communicate with communities may have been activated as part of the protection framework. If this is the case, other actors may need to be invited.

3. SHARE FACTUAL, OBJECTIVE AND ACTIONABLE INFORMATIONS

- Work with team members and partners from all sectors to define what information should be shared and, ideally, what response/information is expected in return.
- Ensure that information gaps identified by the information and communication needs assessment are filled.
- Agreeing with stakeholders on procedures and protocols for generating and signing off new messages is a key step, particularly for sensitive information.

4. VARY THE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

- The more channels you establish, the less likely it is that you will not reach a community because one channel has failed.
- Consider how different technologies affect information ecosystems and how high-tech tools integrate with more traditional ones (e.g. information on Facebook can be transferred by word of mouth).
- Non-traditional actors, such as media and media development agencies, telecommunications organisations and software developers, can provide expertise and support on these issues.

5. MOVE AWAY FROM "ONE-WAY" COMMUNICATION

- Communities want the opportunity to question and respond to the information they receive.
- For example, a common mistake is to send out "mass" SMS messages without planning to receive messages from the community in return; as a result, many enquiries, and potentially protection issues, may go unanswered (the factsheet "10 questions to ask yourself before launching an SMS communication" gives good advice on this).
- It is important to establish a forum or discussion platform to generate new ideas and allow people to question and contextualise the information shared.
- These can be high-tech, low-tech or non-tech, for example: Facebook groups run by refugees, radio phone-in shows or meetings.

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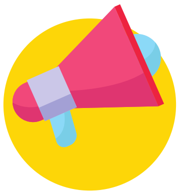
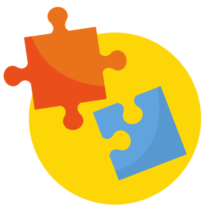


6. MANAGE EXPECTATIONS AND FIGHT RUMOURS

- In all communities, expectations and rumours are normal. Both like information gaps; neither can be ignored.

- Stakeholders can help to defuse them by listening to a community's concerns, • monitoring 'misinformation' and proactively providing factual and verifiable information through trusted channels. We recommend you read the factsheet "• 10 tips to minimise the sharing of false information via social media"



7. DO NOT DUPLICATE EFFORTS

- To sustain communication initiatives, build on the capacity of staff and work with departments that are already active.

- Find out what activities are already underway and build on them. Identify community members, partners and staff with whom you can work.

- For example, if people regularly attend schools, health centres or distribution points, you can integrate your communication activities into these services, working with teachers, parents, medical staff, distribution volunteers, etc.

8. IDENTIFY THE NECESSARY RESOURCES

- This is essential to ensure that you have the capacity to implement, receive and respond.

- Depending on your communications planning and arrangements, emergency operations will require personnel and equipment, including tools, expertise, budgets and possibly additional technology.

- It is essential to include resources for 'listening and responding' in your planning, so that the operation can receive and respond to the information that communities share.

- Consider the sustainability of activities and find effective response strategies. For example, if comment boxes are introduced, ensure that they are accessible (location, language, access to written materials) and that suggestions and complaints are regularly reviewed and followed up.

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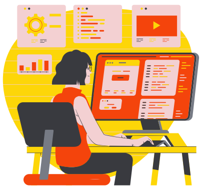
9. TEST AND REFINE

- Consult communities that are not engaging to understand why.
- Work with specific groups in the community - young adults, disability groups, women's groups, adolescents.
- Think of solutions that will overcome the challenges.



10. DO "HONEST" TECHNOLOGY MONITORING

- Technology can facilitate community engagement by opening up new channels of communication; people are increasingly connected. Technology can help reach remote populations, help scale up certain interventions, increase efficiency.
- At the same time, technology is not always neutral and it is important to manage data, especially sensitive data, in an ethical and appropriate way.
  - Don't be driven by technology. To ensure that you "do no (digital) harm", address the following points:
  - Ownership of the technology. Is the owner of the channel associated with a conflicting interest or party?
  - Neutrality. Is the content that is normally shared through this channel biased against a group of people?
  - Data protection. How secure is the information shared through this channel
  - Digital divide. Does this channel marginalise certain groups without access
  - Appropriate. Is this channel preferred and approved by communities?

10. BE INCLUSIVE

- The information and communication ecosystem should be an enabling environment for all. This sheet can help you • make communication accessible to people with disabilities.
- The fewer channels you use, the more likely you are to exclude certain groups and individuals. Invisible" (marginalised) groups will need to be identified and reached using specific information and channels.
- Draw on the expertise of other organisations or colleagues to help you reach the diversity of your audiences more effectively.

More TIPS
To communicate with communities on cwc.westafrica.exposed