

Communicating in emergencies

Guidelines



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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About the guidelines

These emergency communications guidelines were developed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with strong support from the Norwegian Red Cross.

Communicating in emergencies represents a unique opportunity to get our message across to the public, the media, donors, beneficiaries, governments and other decision-making bodies.

Coherent and powerful emergency communications, which is in line with National Society and secretariat strategies, is therefore vital in order to gain credibility, public and government support, and to mobilize resources, as well as advocating for affected and vulnerable people.

These guidelines are not meant as a field handbook, but as a basis that will enable both National Societies as well as the secretariat (Geneva and the zone offices) to build comprehensive and effective communications and to make communications strategies operational during emergencies on a local, national and global level. The aim is also to contribute to build a communications culture both within and between National Societies and the secretariat.

The guidelines cover planning, human resources and training, strategic communications, advocacy, capacity-building, beneficiary communications, monitoring and evaluation, and budgeting. They also include a range of relevant emergency communications tools.

While the secretariat should take the lead in disasters attracting international media attention, the host National Society should take the lead in disasters that attract national media attention.

Please note that this is the first version of *Communicating in Emergencies*. We consider this tool as a work in progress and will be updating and developing according to lessons learned and feedback from national society communicators.

Please send all queries or comments to:
Communications department
media.service@ifrc.org

1. *Preparing to communicate in disasters*

Disaster preparedness is one of the Red Cross Red Crescent's core activities and competencies, and communicating in emergencies should be an integral part of disaster preparedness.

Preparing to communicate in disasters means having in place human and technical resources to be mobilized; a clear understanding of roles between National Societies and the secretariat; well-established relations with the national, regional and international media, along with an overview of the most likely scenarios with corresponding plans and strategies.

Emergency communications planning should therefore cover the following:

Human resources and training

- Identify existing human resources and draw up a list of on-call communicators and audiovisual communicators at the secretariat and in National Societies.
- The secretariat should provide training on how to shoot, use and distribute audiovisual material to roster members. One way of conducting training is to send new roster members to the field and to simulate an emergency in order to test procedures and working methods.
- Red Cross Red Crescent communicators should be supplied with branding to distinguish them from other actors in the field.
- The secretariat should provide audiovisual communicators and roster members with comprehensive briefings before missions; clear terms of reference; pre-packaged contracts; relevant equipment, adequate transmission technology and procedures and a list of contacts. For emergencies that attract national media attention, this should be done by the communications department of the relevant National Society.
- Communications staff and operational staff should establish relationships for effective information-sharing both before and during emergencies.
- Training and media awareness skills should be given to operational people in the field.

- The secretariat should provide roster members with adequate equipment as well as equipment for transmission from the field for disasters attracting international media attention.

Tools

- For introductory reading, see **Guide for Movement communicators – News media @**
- For introductory reading, see **Guide for Movement communicators – Visual @**
- Technical guidelines brief for **photo** and **video**, as well as **video shot list example @**
- **Introductory reading – photography guidelines @**
- **Contingency communications plan template – under development**

Emergency communications roster

To have Red Cross Red Crescent communicators on the spot when a disaster strikes is vital in order to reach the media as soon as possible with updates, facts and audiovisual material. An emergency communications roster should therefore be established. The list should be constantly updated by the secretariat.

When establishing a roster list, the following points should be considered:

- basic requirements for roster member (skills, languages and availability)
- deployment process (alert system, criteria for deployment); at the secretariat level, deployment should be coordinated with existing mechanisms through Field Assessment Coordination Teams (FACTs), Emergency Response Units (ERUs) and Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRTs).
- duties for members on mission
- funding for deployment

Tools

- **Photo- and video release contract** to be signed by audio/visual freelancers/roster members
- **Consultancy contract template** and **Code of Conduct** to be signed by roster members
- **Terms of reference** template for photo missions
- **Terms of reference** template for video missions
- **Audio/Visual roster list – global**

Building relationships between National Societies and the zone offices

Building and strengthening relationships between the zone offices and the host and Participating National Societies, particularly in disaster-prone countries, is crucial for several reasons:

- It enables information flow.
- It facilitates capacity-building.
- It optimizes human and technical resources.
- It builds understanding on common goals and visions.
- It avoids unnecessary duplication or conflicting messages.
- It strengthens beneficiary communications.

Zone offices should formalize relationships with National Societies and, in coordination with the organizational development department, through a general statement of intent to be signed by all National Societies, include the following:

- roles and division of labour during a disaster between the secretariat (with a coordinating role), host and Participating National Societies
- identification of and agreement on spokespeople from the National Society and zone office for national and international media
- identification of possible scenarios and preparations for communications plans
- agreement on relevant objectives and target groups using communications in disasters strategically in order to position the host National Society

Building relationships with the national, regional and international media

National Societies should build relationships with and mobilize national media. To avoid parallel contacts, zone communications managers should be informed about and support, if necessary, National Societies network/approach to their national media (and regional/international where relevant).

The secretariat in Geneva should act as the focal point in networking with and mobilizing major international media, as well as regional media, when necessary.

Preparing advocacy statements in emergencies

While the secretariat should take the lead on global and regional issues, National Societies should take the lead in advocacy on domestic

issues. The secretariat should outline global advocacy strategies with corresponding key messages with clear objectives and target groups that are relevant in emergencies. It should be based on, but not limited to, International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent resolutions and priorities related to the local context. Preparing advocacy in emergencies requires:

- approved position papers from the Governing Board, pre-packaged for communicators during disasters
- coordination between the secretariat and the host National Society and their advocacy strategies and positions
- a good operational understanding of the context, history of disasters, constraints, logistical challenges and IFRC's leadership role under the cluster approach and engagement with operational partners – enabling more credible communications and helping to position the Red Cross Red Crescent as a knowledgeable actor with real experience
- policies on negotiating and managing Red Cross Red Crescent positioning with both other humanitarian actors, governments and other decision-making bodies.



Kenya

preparing and mobilizing volunteers



Daniel Cirio/American Red Cross



Following the outbreak of post-election violence in Kenya on 30 December 2007, over 350,000 people were displaced and sought refuge in over 300 camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) countrywide. Another 150,000 were also

displaced and accommodated by relatives, friends and strangers. The violence broke out as a result of disputed presidential election following the general election on 27 December 2007.

The government appointed the Kenya Red Cross Society as the lead agency to coordinate humanitarian assistance. Working closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other Movement partners, the Kenya Red Cross Society oversaw all the IDP camps and coordinated the humanitarian response by various agencies and the government.

The Kenya Red Cross Society conflict preparedness contingency plans, drawn up prior to the general election, proved useful when the violence broke out. The public relations unit trained volunteers as communications focal points in all affected branches and districts across the country, as one crucial element in the preparation of emergency communications.

Two workshops were held before the violence broke out. The first, which took place a year earlier, focused on emergency communications in

general. The second was held three months before the general election under the auspices of the National Disaster Response Team training, as experience shows that elections often trigger violence and unrest. The two training workshops included sessions on dealing with the media and media relations, reporting, photography, videography, writing articles, communications structure, communications dos and don'ts, and handling negative publicity.

When the violence broke out, around 25 volunteers, acting as communications focal points, were involved in communications work handling the following tasks:

- *informing the Kenya Red Cross Society's public relations manager about the latest developments*
- *giving interviews to the media on technical issues*
- *forwarding media enquiries on sensitive issues to the public relations manager*
- *writing the situation report from their branches and forwarding this to the headquarters*
- *producing and providing audiovisual material – the first aerial video footage about the violence shown in the local and international media was produced by the Kenya Red Cross Society*
- *monitoring the media and reporting trends*

It was vital that the communications focal points informed the public relations manager about journalists seeking interviews. Together with the media monitoring, this enabled the public relations manager to consider what angles particular media and journalists would choose.

As access to information was limited due to movement restrictions, the communications focal points played a crucial role, not only in dealing with the media, but also in providing information about the latest developments on the ground. The branches also had contact persons in the field to attend coordination meetings with other humanitarian organizations.

Despite very difficult circumstances, the volunteers stayed focused on their sole commitment to assist the needy, even though this was at great risk to their own personal safety.



2. *Early warning, early action*

Today's monitoring technology and networks enable relief organizations to foresee floods, cyclones, landslides, food crises, epidemics and droughts at an early stage and, therefore to issue early warnings and take early action.

With the new Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) in place and with its partners such as the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Red Cross Red Crescent is at the forefront of global monitoring. Using this tool to its full potential enables our emergency communications to be the first to reach the media with facts and possible scenarios, and any Red Cross Red Crescent action taken.

All staff in National Societies and the secretariat can access DMIS. The system is particularly useful for obtaining reports on disaster risk reduction steps that have been taken. For disasters attracting potential international media interest, both the media unit in Geneva and the zone communications manager act as focal points on using DMIS for emergency communications, while National Societies are the focal points for national media coverage.

Definition: *The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines early warning as “the provision, through well-known institutions, of timely and effective information that allows individuals exposed to a hazard to take action to avoid or reduce their risk and prepare for effective response”.*

With sudden-onset disasters, the following should be provided to the media:

- the type of disaster predicted, the likely scope of the disaster, the anticipated number of people at risk, potential needs, extent of vulnerability
- key data and action taken by the Red Cross Red Crescent (the number of volunteers in the field, assessments, initial plans etc.) and our estimate of the scale of the disaster
- available spokespeople, their languages and contact details
- a synopsis of our previous response that highlights our experience and expertise – as a reference use previous emergency appeals from the IFRC web site (www.ifrc.org); statistics from the Emergency

Events Database (EM-DAT) of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED); National Society self-assessments; the well-prepared National Society data; National Society profiles on the IFRC web site (number of volunteers, evacuation centres etc.)

- video footage, plus any still photos

For disasters with potential international media interest, the secretariat should also:

- prepare backgrounders and statistics for the area at risk covering the last year/five years/decade to draw attention to trends and to point out whether necessary measures have been taken before the disaster, including by the Red Cross Red Crescent
- produce holding statements in advance of operational detail in order to have a few lines on which to base an interview
- prepare advocacy plans and statements

Tools

→ **Early warning → Early action climate change-handbook**

Also see advocacy examples as well as suggestions for general statement of intent with National Societies on page 4 in the handbook. @

→ Case study: **Bridging the gap – integrating climate change and disaster risk reduction** @

→ **DMIS – Early warning diagram** @

3. *Internal communications*

Visualizing the internal information flow, the people involved, and their roles and responsibilities during an emergency is important to ensure effective information-sharing and to mobilize the organization. An information flow diagram or equivalent should therefore be drafted during an emergency. It is vital that the operational and communication teams continuously share information on the latest developments.

For major or high-profile disasters generating international media attention, the secretariat should devise a plan that outlines what needs to be communicated and to whom, how frequently, and what type of support can be given to the affected National Society or zone office to coordinate international media requests.

The appointed communications focal point should always be invited to and attend operational task force meetings and teleconferences.

The internal communications focal point may also:

- identify relevant internal communications material and channels
- identify and support the fund-raising department with necessary information to donors, partners and stakeholders (the public, governments, the corporate sector, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) and other funding bodies) as well as relevant campaigns
- issue regular briefing notes with operational updates and other relevant information (i.e., fund-raising results, media coverage) to all departments and branches
- consider every member of staff and volunteer as a potential spokesperson and, therefore, an important target audience to keep informed

The secretariat (Geneva, zone offices) should facilitate and chair teleconferences both for internal information-sharing and in order to inform donor and Participating National Societies and obtain their input and needs on communications. A teleconference agenda should contain the following key elements:

- latest developments on operations
- communications plans and strategies
- clarification of communications procedures
- communications and audiovisual activities – staff, distribution and broadcast information

4. *When disaster strikes*

With sudden onset disasters, the main objective during the first phase is to establish the Red Cross Red Crescent as the authoritative voice of the response operation in the national and international media. The media should be provided with facts and figures, footage of the humanitarian situation, humanitarian needs, Red Cross Red Crescent action, latest developments and possible short-term scenarios. The disaster may also be used strategically to strengthen the host National Society's position and its relationships.

12-24 hours

For disasters with potential international media attention (to be considered for each disaster), the secretariat should have in place the following within the first 12–24 hours:

- Send key data to the media and National Societies.
- Develop and send talking points to National Societies.
- Send footage and pictures to the media and National Societies.
- Ensure that still photos are either IPTC- or XMP-tagged in the field. Both IPTC (International Press Telecommunications Council) and XMP (Extensible Metadata Platform) are compatible.
- Ensure that footage is rough-edited in the field, and a shot list produced, in order to reach the media with the shortest delay possible. The footage and shot list should be sent to the media and National Societies at the same time. If rough editing in the field is not possible, the footage should be sent to Geneva for approval only and then distributed to the media and National Societies. Given the urgent need for footage during emergencies, the media will usually accept compressed video files and they may accept mobile phone footage.
- Identify spokespeople and deploy them as soon as disaster strikes (or beforehand if possible) and provide their contact details and languages spoken to the media.
- Send a press release or media advisory to the media and National Societies.
- Establish media relations in the field and with international media outlets.
- Publish a news story on the IFRC web site (www.ifrc.org).
- Synthesize and circulate key messages and statistical data.

- Establish a relationship with and support the communications coordinator of the host National Society.
- Develop a common understanding of what communications resources are available or are needed in the field.
- Consider advocacy positions and opportunities.
- Establish a communications coordinator and contact with ICRC media services if relevant.

Requirements

- Draw up a list of contact people in the National Society or zone office who have access to the latest information.
- Draw up a roster of communicators and audiovisual professionals in the region with the necessary equipment.
- Ensure roster members are included in the information loop from day one (they must provide their current e-mail address and mobile phone number before leaving).
- Set up a dedicated web server so that communicators in the field can upload high-resolution photos and video footage. If a communicator in the field has a laptop with a camera and an internet connection, consider distributing eye witness reports to online newspapers, YouTube, Facebook etc.
- Use DMIS for information-sharing and information-gathering.
- Establish a clear division of labour between communications staff in the field, the host National Society, participating National Societies, the zone office and Geneva.
- Use the Reuters agreement to its full potential for both receiving Reuters' photos as well as feeding Red Cross Red Crescent photos to Reuters. Photos should be sent directly to Reuters from the field.

Tools

→ **The Reuters Agreement**

From 24 hours onwards

In order to maintain the media's attention during the next three to six days, it is crucial to constantly feed the media with updates, accessible spokespeople, video footage and news angles. At this stage, it is also necessary to make use of case studies and diversify the use of audiovisual material, target groups, objectives and the type of media approached. It is particularly important to get the most out of audiovisual material through online newspapers and other electronic media. When necessary, support to Participating National Societies communications should also be provided.

The secretariat should give updated information and audiovisual material to National Societies. National Societies involved in the operation should also share their audiovisual material with other National Societies. This should be facilitated by the secretariat.

One week after a disaster strikes, it is likely that the media's attention has shifted, but it is important to continue communications efforts. At this stage, advocacy communications should be further considered (in coordination with the host National Society and Geneva) both through interviews and opinion pieces.

Another important issue to consider, at this stage, is the potential of using the disaster strategically to strengthen the National Society's position towards its government, public and donors, and to recruit members and volunteers. These considerations should build on the general statement of intent made between the zone office and the host National Society.

Tools

- For introductory reading, see ***Guide for Movement communicators – Setting the agenda***
- ***Link to free download of IPTC tagging*** @
- ***Seville agreement*** with ***Supplementary measures*** @
- See ***Social Media Toolkit*** – “Ourworld. Yourmove.” @
- ***Communication plan template*** – under development



Hurricane Felix

early action during Hurricane Felix in 2007



This example shows the benefit of having a communicator on the ground at an early stage in an emergency.

Hurricane Felix, the second hurricane of the 2007 Atlantic hurricane season, made landfall in north-eastern Nicaragua

on the morning of 4 September as a dangerous category five hurricane.

On 5 September 2007, heavy rains severely affected Nicaragua, specifically in the communities of Puerto Cabezas (500 kilometres north-west of Managua), Waspam, Siuna, Bonaza and Rosita in the Northern Atlantic region. The region is periodically affected by hurricanes. Some communities are very difficult to reach as they have no roads

and can only be accessed by plane or boat. Some 151,834 people were affected.

The communications delegate arrived in Nicaragua the day before Hurricane Felix made landfall, and in the disaster zone itself (the Mosquito Coast) the day after. This gave the following result:

- One IFRC still photo was syndicated by Reuters showing Nicaraguan Red Cross volunteers in action in the disaster zone.
- A photo gallery was published on the IFRC web site (www.ifrc.org).
- The communications delegate distributed still photos to the Managua embassies of Italy and the Netherlands, who donated 330,000 Swiss francs and 326,000 Swiss francs respectively, about two-thirds of the total preliminary appeal.
- Four web stories were produced in almost as many days, starting on 5 September, the day after the disaster struck.
- Professional still photos and video were produced for the International Conference.
- The Hurricane Felix appeal was 95 per cent covered in less than three weeks.

Though many factors influenced the mobilization of funds – such as the presence of National Society delegations in the countries affected and their contacts with their respective embassies, and the proactivity of ECHO and other EU representatives – the communications effort also contributed to the successful coverage of the appeal.



Alex Wintzer/International Federation



Tricks of the trade

how to 'sell' forgotten emergencies

According to analysis of 200 English-language newspapers worldwide, the tsunami generated more column inches in six weeks than the world's top ten 'forgotten' emergencies combined over the previous year.

The media blitz prompted unprecedented generosity. By February 2005, the international community had donated 500 US dollars per person affected by the tsunami, compared to just 50 cents for each person affected by Uganda's 18-year war.

How can aid agencies boost the media visibility of long-term, complex emergencies? Here are some practical tips:

Invest in media relations, communications training and expertise, down to the local level.

Keep up a dialogue with the media: Provide background material on complex emergencies, but not 15 minutes before deadline.

Put a number on it: Death tolls give journalists pegs to hang their stories on. And they go some way towards quantifying the unimaginable.

Bring in the big names: It's controversial, but enlisting celebrities can work. The press follows the famous face and ends up reporting on the cause.

Make it visual: Nothing sells a story like a good picture. In disasters, aid agencies may have the only photos available.

Be creative and proactive: Tell the bigger story through the eyes of individuals. Fit what you're

doing into the news agenda. Organize trips for reporters.

Never give up: In this game, persistence really does pay off.

This box was contributed by Tim Large, deputy editor of Reuters AlertNet, and originally appeared in the World Disasters Report 2005.



5. *Developing key messages*

Red Cross Red Crescent messages have several target audiences and objectives. As a general rule, key messages should contain the following:

- Outline the humanitarian situation, the humanitarian needs and any Red Cross Red Crescent action taken.
- Highlight volunteers' work, the host National Society's auxiliary role, and Red Cross Red Crescent core activities and expertise.
- Provide a brief history of the Red Cross Red Crescent to highlight the experience of both the host National Society and the secretariat (number of appeals for similar emergencies, when the National Society and/or IFRC was established).
- Build advocacy messages into the statements using the emergency to highlight humanitarian concerns and any measures that need to be taken.
- Include messages about the need for funds, if appropriate.

Characteristics of a strong message

New information. If it's not new, it's not news. At the scene of an emergency we need to have a new message each day to provide to reporters, but it needs to be something that the reporter has not heard before from the Red Cross Red Crescent or from other organizations.

Clear and unambiguous. Spokespeople have just a few seconds to get the message across, so make it count.

People focused. People care about people, not things or organizations. All Red Cross Red Crescent messages must be people based. Use words like 'people', 'families', 'mothers' etc. as often as possible instead of more bureaucratic sounding labels like 'beneficiaries' or 'households'. Also, do not use abbreviations.

Passionate. The message must have feeling and not sound like it comes from a cold detached robot. This is true not only in the development of messages, but also for delivery in an interview.

Memorable words and phrasing. Use language that will stick in people's minds.

6. *Advocacy in emergencies*

Emergencies represent a unique opportunity for advocacy communications. In general, advocacy is to:

- make states, the UN, other global and regional decision-making bodies, and the public aware of problems and issues of humanitarian concern
- plead in support or speak in favour of vulnerable people
- pursue influencing outcomes – including public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions – that directly affects vulnerable people's lives and expands the scope for humanitarian intervention

Advocacy communications in emergencies

The following should be taken into consideration:

- Preparation is required in order to reach out with advocacy statements at short notice during an emergency.
- Identify how and to what extent the Red Cross Red Crescent can commit and follow up.
- Consider the timing and appropriateness, given the tragedy for those affected.
- Advocacy efforts should be coordinated and should reflect any bilateral efforts at the global or senior management level in order to have coherence and consistency.
- The secretariat should take the lead on global advocacy communications. Advocacy initiatives taken by the zone offices should be at regional level and coordinated with the National Societies concerned.
- National Societies should take the lead on advocacy communications nationally.

Tools

→ For introductory reading, see *Guide for Movement communicators – Advocacy @*



Best practice

Bulgaria

Strategic communications



Ivo Minchev/Bulgarian Red Cross



The 2005 floods in Bulgaria and subsequent heat wave in 2007 are a good example of how a National Society can strengthen its capacity and position during an emergency.

Heavy rains and storms hit Bulgaria at the end of May 2005 and continued until November, affecting a total of 25 municipalities. Several people were reported dead, arable land was flooded, crops destroyed, cattle drowned, and basements and gardens were submerged.

It caused severe damage to public and private buildings, destroyed and damaged bridges, disrupted the water supply, triggered landslides and damaged dykes and dams.



The Bulgarian Red Cross response to the disaster meant it was closely involved with the emergency services. It delivered immediate emergency aid to the affected people from its own disaster reserves. The Bulgarian Red Cross mobilized its staff and volunteers, and delivered more than 100 trucks of emergency items to

cover the most urgent needs including food, water, clothing, blankets, bedding sets, mattresses, pillows, disinfectants and insecticides.

Before 2005, the Bulgarian Red Cross was not very well known by the public in general, nor by the government or the corporate sector.

With support from IFRC, the Bulgarian Red Cross decided to proactively approach domestic media, to build relations with local and national government as well as with the corporate sector. The aim was to highlight and showcase the work undertaken by Red Cross volunteers, to emphasize the society's auxiliary role to government and to raise funds.

A national media campaign was launched: regular briefings and press conferences informed the public of the Bulgarian Red Cross's actions and remaining needs. Information about the operation was also published on the Bulgarian Red Cross web site.

Bulgarian Red Cross regional branches in the affected regions improved their working relationships with government and local authorities. They also improved their coordination and cooperation with ministries, agencies and other NGOs, who were working on the emergency operation and assisting affected people.

The 2005 floods caused tremendous damage. Then in spring 2006, the Danube River flooded. This time, the Bulgarian Red Cross was able to respond to the emergency with its own resources and with bilateral assistance. The Bulgarian Red Cross did not request funding from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) or assistance from IFRC.

In July 2007, Central Europe was hit by an intense heat wave. High temperatures combined with high UV radiation led to a health crisis and deaths in several countries. The heat and dry conditions sparked an outbreak of fires.

The floods in 2005 and 2006 positioned the Bulgarian Red Cross in relation to the government, the media and the public. The Bulgarian Red Cross was now a key government partner in dealing with the emergency. In addition, domestic media gave the Bulgarian Red Cross free adverts to inform the public about health and prevention measures. Moreover, the number of volunteers increased considerably over the two years and it became significantly easier to raise funds.



7.

Capacity building in National Societies

Emergencies should be used to build the communications capacity of the host National Society, particularly in disaster-prone countries. Capacity-building should be part of the communications effort during the disaster. IFRC and Participating National Society communicators should partner with the host National Society so that everyone involved has the opportunity to learn. Lessons learnt from the disaster should also feed into the capacity-building programme after the disaster.

Developing a capacity-building programme

- Coordinate a communications capacity-building plan with the organizational development department and integrate it into existing capacity-building programmes.
- Use the *Emergency communications guidelines* as a foundation for a capacity-building programme.
- Provide training to communications staff on media relations.
- Provide training in shooting and distributing audiovisual material. Assess audiovisual resources and equipment – and set realistic goals.
- Raise the value and profile of proactive communication planning within a reactive operational culture.
- Assess the host National Society's position within its country and develop a communications strategy that can be implemented during the next disaster.
- Consider how to strengthen regional cooperation among other National Societies in the region.
- Provide training in advocacy or humanitarian diplomacy.
- Identify any emergency communications gaps that arose during the disaster.
- Make recommendations on what improvements need to be made.
- Consider and draft a plan for capacity-building activities on emergency communications with budgets and a resource mobilization plan (secretariat, donor National Societies, National Societies in the region, external)
- Consider how to make use of the Thomson Reuters Emergency Information Agency agreement on capacity-building.

8. *Beneficiary communications*

People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources – or even diffuse potentially insecure situations. It may be the only form of disaster preparedness that the most vulnerable can afford. Lack of information can make people victims of disasters. At the same time, affected people's contextual knowledge is crucial in order for the relief to reach those most in need. Therefore, beneficiary communications is a two-way exchange of vital information.

The host National Society is best placed to communicate with beneficiaries. Not only do they speak the same language, but the beneficiaries may also be less intimidated and more willing to talk to them.

In situations where the host National Society needs support to undertake this, beneficiary communications should be supported by the IFRC communicator and coordinated with the operational programmes. It is crucial to understand the different roles between the host National Society and IFRC on beneficiary communications, specifically regarding the host National Society's relationship with their government.

The zone offices should find out, in collaboration with the host National Society, how to disseminate information in ways that will reach people through a variety of locally appropriate communication channels.

Tools

→ Also read: [The role of information in disasters \(WDR 2005\)](#) @

Developing a beneficiary communications plan

- Develop a programme with identified goals and target groups, and identify communicators to conduct beneficiary communications. The programme should be developed by the host National Society in coordination with IFRC, ICRC or other Participating National Societies.
- Use local media: television, radio and newspapers. Depending on the context of the disaster, the widest distribution will probably be through radio or mobile phones (SMS). Developing a relationship with telecommunications companies is essential if SMS messaging is going to be used. Other forms of electronic communication such as Twitter or MSN should also be considered.

- Don't only use news programmes, but also take advantage of spot announcements and material given to on-air announcers and hosts. If possible, consider creating a radio show on a popular station.
- Use low-tech solutions such as signs, posters, megaphones, songs, games and other culturally appropriate forms of communication.
- Volunteers from the host National Society – in addition to being useful information distributors – could help by distributing flyers or talking to people on a one-to-one basis. However, remember that in the early days of a disaster, the host National Society's staff and volunteers will probably be stretched to the limit.
- Look at particular segments of the population – women, children, minorities and livelihood groups – and think of ways to reach each target group to ensure their needs are not overlooked.
- The people most affected by the disaster may have poor literacy skills or not be able to read at all. Work closely with the host National Society and through local volunteers to devise effective ways to get the necessary information to low-literate groups, and to avoid marginalizing them in the relief operation.



Best practice

Radio

A radio programme in Aceh, Indonesia used the call-in format for people to talk to a psychologist from the Indonesian Red Cross about dealing with the psychological aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami, especially the loss of loved ones.

It also included a singing competition among the residents of displaced persons shelters with listeners voting on their favourite boy and girl singers. This was helpful in giving both children and adults a fun outlet in the midst of a very difficult situation.

Following the Rwandan genocide, a radio programme was created by the United Nations to counter the violent and inciting messages of the 'Hate' Radio that played a key role in the calamity. The UN programme broadcast important recovery information as well as messages of peace and tolerance.

Tools

→ *Radio in Afghanistan – challenging perceptions, changing behaviour @*

Oliv Solibanes / International Federation



Phil Vine / International Federation

9. *Monitoring and evaluation*

Monitoring and evaluation should be results based and focused on defining realistic expected results, monitoring progress towards the expected results, utilizing results for management decisions and reporting on performance. Monitoring and evaluation aims at accountability, improving performance, improving quality and promoting learning.

In disasters with international media attention, it is the secretariat's responsibility to carry out and coordinate monitoring and evaluation. The host National Society, on the other hand, should undertake monitoring and evaluation of disasters that have a purely domestic media interest.

The four-day window is generally recognized by news agencies as the time-frame when emergencies have news interest. Monitoring and evaluation should also include the 48-hour window before a disaster strikes in order to capture the performance on early warning or early action. Depending on the emergency, monitoring and evaluation should be carried out for as long as is necessary.

The four core areas of monitoring and evaluation are:

1. Media coverage: what type of media and at what stage of the disaster
2. Media products developed and used: what type of media and at what stage of the disaster
3. Content and quality: press releases, key messages, background information and audiovisual material
4. Organizational efficiency: timing and availability of information, spokespeople and communicators in the field

The above represent core areas for monitoring and evaluation. However, the following areas may also be considered for improvement.

These are:

- preparations made to communicate in disasters
- information flow or internal communications
- advocacy communications
- capacity-building in National Societies

Tools

→ *Template for monitoring and evaluation in emergency communications – under development*

10. Budget

An essential part of emergency communications is ensuring that costs are included in budgets.

These costs are related to funding for information officers or delegates in the field (hired by a National Society or the secretariat), who will be vital in showing the human face of the operation with stories, photographs and video footage that can be distributed to local or international media, to donors and the secretariat and National Societies. The costs also include training and capacity-building for the host National Society, monitoring and evaluation, and field consultations in beneficiary communications.

The secretariat recommends an allocation of 2 per cent of each appeal, although this amount should be reduced for large appeals.

Elements of the emergency communications budget

An emergency communications budget should contain the following:

- photographer and/or information delegate (salary, travel, accommodation, insurance and per diem)
- costs to film, edit and distribute a video news release
- digital transmission of photos and video footage
- translating scripts, sending the video to broadcasters and making copies for National Societies (secretariat)
- costs to translate web stories and/or press releases into the four official Red Cross Red Crescent languages (secretariat)
- audiovisual equipment for the information delegate that can also be used to train the host National Society's communications staff
- National Society capacity-building (audiovisual equipment for the host National Society should be considered as part of capacity-building).
- contingency funds

11. Other relevant tools

→ *Exercise on emergency communications – under development*

→ Also read: *“The Fritz Report”* – Journalists and Humanitarian Relief Coverage @

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