



**Improving
communication
between humanitarian
aid agencies and
crisis-affected people**
Lessons from the
infoasaid project

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In brief

- The role and importance of communication with crisis-affected people have grown significantly in recent years, driven by the proliferation of accountability initiatives within the humanitarian sector, the changing role of media development organisations and the explosion in information and communication technology in crisis-affected countries.
- The growing recognition of the importance of communication in disaster response has prompted an upsurge in discussions, publications and initiatives aimed at better understanding the potential of broadcast media and new technologies to improve how agencies communicate with their beneficiaries.
- This Network Paper reports on the work of one such initiative, infoasaid. Infoasaid was established in 2010 to improve the quality of humanitarian response by maximising the amount of accurate and timely information available to humanitarian responders and crisis-affected populations through enhanced communication between them in an emergency.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The role and importance of effective communication with crisis-affected people have grown significantly in recent years, driven by the proliferation of accountability initiatives within the humanitarian sector, the changing role of media development organisations as providers of humanitarian information and the explosion in information and communication technology (ICT) in crisis-affected countries. Eight years ago, the international humanitarian response to the Indian Ocean tsunami was widely criticised for its failure to communicate adequately with affected people and national and local actors. According to the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), ‘poor information flow [was] undoubtedly the biggest source of dissatisfaction, anger and frustration among affected people’.¹ Six years later, the Haiti earthquake response marked the first large-scale application of new technologies to enable dialogue between relief agencies and crisis-affected people, including crowd-sourcing and projects combining mobile phone, digital and radio technologies, demanding new forms of collaboration between the local media, technology companies and international humanitarian organisations.²

The growing recognition of the importance of communication in disaster response has prompted an upsurge in discussions, publications and initiatives aimed at better

understanding the potential of broadcast media and new technologies to improve how agencies communicate with their beneficiaries and, ultimately, enhance the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. This Network Paper reports on the work of one such initiative, infoasaid. Operated by two media development organisations, BBC Media Action and Internews, with funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), infoasaid was established in 2010 to improve the quality of humanitarian responses by maximising the amount of accurate and timely information available to humanitarian responders and crisis-affected populations through enhanced communication between them in an emergency.

The project, which came to a close in 2012, had two main objectives:

1. To strengthen the capacity and preparedness of the humanitarian system to respond to the information and communication needs of crisis-affected populations.
2. To partner with aid agencies to help inform and support their communication response in emergencies.

Through partnerships with a wide range of actors in the humanitarian arena, including the humanitarian clusters,



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Yussuf Osman, Save the Children's Communications Officer, discusses the topics raised on a radio show with women from a mother-to-mother support group in Bawaqo. 'For some of the women, this was the first opportunity they have ever had to access information on breastfeeding, hygiene promotion and so on. Now they can assemble around a radio, listen to a programme in their language, someone speaking in Somali, explaining several cultural myths. It was eye-opening for them.'

individual aid agencies, technology providers and the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network, infoasaid sought to improve messaging to, and dialogue with, crisis-affected populations in emergencies by mainstreaming communication across the humanitarian clusters, and providing bespoke technical support to individual agencies to strengthen their capacity and preparedness for delivering a communication response, including supporting the design, implementation and evaluation of communication responses. This Network Paper examines the strategies infoasaid adopted to achieve these objectives, outlining what was done, how it was done, what the challenges were and what was learnt from the perspective of the project and its partners.

Structure of the paper

This introductory chapter is followed by Chapter 2, which charts the evolution and key features of the global trends driving the communication-as-aid agenda. Chapter 3 outlines some key reflections on the development and roll-out of infoasaid's communication tools, and Chapter 4 synthesises the findings of three learning reviews of infoasaid's communication responses in Kenya, to understand what worked, what didn't and why, as well as whether and how the pilot responses enhanced the quality of humanitarian assistance being provided to crisis-affected populations. Chapter 5 concludes the paper with a set of recommendations for the humanitarian sector.

Chapter 2

Drivers of change

Current efforts to improve communication between the providers and recipients of humanitarian aid have been fundamentally shaped by three global trends: the proliferation of humanitarian quality and accountability initiatives; the increased availability and use of ICTs in developing countries; and changes in the role of media actors in humanitarian response. This chapter maps the evolution of these trends in order to explain the emergence of the current interest in communication with crisis-affected populations.

Quality and accountability in the humanitarian sector

Since the mid-1990s there has been a proliferation of quality and accountability initiatives in the humanitarian sector. Almost all of these initiatives and policy commitments emphasise the importance of communicating with crisis-affected populations, not just as a human right and moral duty, but also as a means of improving the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. This has driven increased recognition of communication as an essential element of effective and accountable humanitarian aid, and has served to embed issues concerning communication with crisis-affected populations into wider debates about aid effectiveness. DFID's recent inclusion of 'beneficiary accountability' as a core element of its humanitarian policy, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals' adoption of commitments on accountability to affected populations as part of their 'transformative agenda', are both signs that this investment is set to continue.

While this is a positive trend, infoasaid's experience suggests that the conceptual link between accountability and communication can serve, in certain circumstances, to limit the scope of communication with crisis-affected populations. For example, it has led some organisations to focus their efforts too narrowly on communicating only with their targeted beneficiaries, rather than with the wider crisis-affected population. It can also lead agencies to underestimate the importance of information provision as an aid deliverable in itself.

The changing role of media development organisations

Over the past decade, media development organisations, whose core work is to strengthen local media, have played an increasing role in humanitarian response not just as providers of news, but also of humanitarian information of practical value to crisis-affected populations. In 2001, Media Action International, a Geneva-based international foundation which aimed to promote more effective use of media to help crisis-affected populations, published *Lifeline Media: Reaching Populations in Crisis*.³ This landmark publication signalled the emergence of a new,

Box 1

IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP)

Leadership/governance: Demonstrate a commitment to accountability to affected populations by ensuring that feedback and accountability mechanisms are integrated into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and evaluation, recruitment, staff inductions, training and performance management and partnership agreements, and highlighted in reporting.

Transparency: Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations on organisational procedures, structures and processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices, and facilitate dialogue between an organisation and its affected populations over information provision.

Feedback and complaints: Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate and robust enough to deal with (communicate, receive, process, respond to and learn from) complaints about breaches in policy and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

Participation: Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.

dynamic field of humanitarian programming in conflict and crisis situations, demanding new kinds of partnerships between media professionals and humanitarian aid organisations. *Lifeline Media* offered extensive guidance to journalists, producers, relief workers, consultants and others on how to design, implement, monitor and evaluate humanitarian information programmes. It documented examples of media programmes that sought to provide vital information on issues such as health, security and landmine awareness or basic logistical data on relief efforts to crisis-affected populations. It also highlighted the need to provide humanitarian information in a way that enhances (and does not undermine) local media capacity.

While the international humanitarian community has been slow to recognise and value the critical role of national and local media in ensuring that crisis-affected populations

have access to information, specialist communications and media development organisations have been quicker to respond. Actors such as BBC Media Action, Internews, the Thompson Reuters Foundation and International Media Support have implemented a number of activities in emergencies aimed at supporting local media and providing humanitarian information, including resuscitating local media, training local journalists, conducting audience information needs and access assessments and producing content for humanitarian information programmes.

The ICT revolution

Affected populations [now] have a voice. They're not just recipients ... they have the ability to talk back ... Humanitarian organisations have always prided themselves on being responsive to beneficiaries' needs, and being accountable to them. But there is now a different set of tools to make that happen and it is taking some organisations by surprise.⁴

The past decade has witnessed a dramatic increase in the availability and uptake of ICTs worldwide, providing unprecedented opportunities for individuals to access information, connect with one another and have their voices heard. The speed with which people in the developing world are adopting mobile phone and internet technologies and finding innovative uses for them is forcing a paradigm shift in how the aid industry uses communication tools to better understand and service crisis-affected communities.

One of the most significant technological developments of recent years has been the uptake of mobile telephony, especially in developing countries. As the world population reached 7bn in 2011, the number of mobile phone subscriptions climbed to 5.9bn. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimates that mobile-broadband subscriptions have grown by 45% annually over the last four years. Developing countries account for a significant portion of that growth. Mobile phone use tripled in the developing world between 2005 and 2010, with the fastest growth in Africa. Subscription levels in developing countries are expected to grow further as the costs of owning a handset and placing a phone call fall (costs have dropped by over 50% in the past two years alone). The high value placed by the poor on using a mobile phone is apparent in a 2012 report by iHub, an incubator for Kenyan technology start-ups. Interviews for the report revealed that the very poor will change key spending habits, such as skipping a meal or walking instead of paying for public transport, to ensure that they have credit on their phone.⁵



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Cecilia Asibitar Ewoi, chairperson of the Epiding Relief Committee, texting to confirm the arrival of food aid

In addition to the spectacular uptake in mobile telephones, one-third of the world's people are now online. Over the last five years, developing countries have increased their share of the world's total number of internet users from 44% in 2006 to 62% in 2011, according to the ITU. Although China accounts for the majority of that growth, developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa are catching up. Again, lower prices have been a major driving force. The ITU estimates that the steepest price reductions for accessing broadband services took place in developing countries, where fixed broadband prices have dropped by 52% since 2006. Another driver behind the growth in internet access has been the advent of broadband wireless technologies, removing the need for fixed telecommunications infrastructure. These trends are reshaping business, and many corporate organisations are now providing commercial SMS- and voice-based services to people in the developing world, including animal and crop price information, mobile money for people without bank accounts and mobile-based health services.

These developments have also attracted interest among humanitarian actors in the potential of ICTs to improve emergency responses.⁶ Initially, much of the discussion

(and considerable investment) focused on using ICTs to improve data gathering, information management, analysis and coordination within and among aid agencies. However, interest in the use of ICTs to facilitate potentially life-saving communication between aid providers and recipients has been steadily growing. This was most evident in the response to the Haiti earthquake in 2010, where the international humanitarian system found itself in a maelstrom of communication activity enabled by new technologies being harnessed by survivors, as well as a spontaneous army of technical volunteers. The relief effort in Haiti has been described as ‘a living laboratory for new applications such as SMS texting, interactive online maps, and radio-cell phone hybrids’.⁷ Through SMS and social media channels, survivors appealed for help, both to the global ‘social network’ and directly to aid agencies. In addition, aid organisations received information and data from thousands of volunteers around the world, who collaborated in the collection, analysis and sharing of data.⁸

While it is important to consider how aid agencies might respond more effectively to crises using broadcast media and new technologies to communicate with crisis-affected populations, it is equally important to ask how crisis-affected populations are using those same technologies to help themselves, and what the implications of this might be for the traditional, top-down model of humanitarian assistance. By harnessing these new technologies, aid recipients are altering the traditional dynamics of aid.

Increased access to mobile phones and social media sites allows crisis-affected populations to contact humanitarian organisations directly to ask questions, make complaints or contribute to discussions about their future. In the Philippines and Indonesia, communities used Twitter to manage their responses to Typhoon Megi and the Mount Merapi volcano eruption.⁹ Following the earthquakes in Haiti and New Zealand in 2010, survivors used Facebook and Google Maps to reunite families and share vital information, bypassing aid organisations. As one forward-looking aid worker commented in 2007: ‘In the humanitarian operation of the future, beneficiaries of emergency aid will use technology to tell us what they need – cash, food or education – find out from us what to expect, and track its arrival, just as we track an order from Amazon.com now’.¹⁰

Growing recognition of communication as an essential element of accountable aid, the changing role of media development organisations in humanitarian response and the rapidly expanding range of tools available for facilitating information exchange between humanitarian responders and survivors are all significant factors shaping current approaches to communication with crisis-affected populations and, more specifically, the goal and objectives of the infoasaid project. The next chapters reflect on the strategies employed by infoasaid to effect tangible change at different levels of the humanitarian system, and the lessons learnt.

Chapter 3

Infoasaid's emergency preparedness tools

In October 2008, BBC Media Action published a Policy Briefing entitled *Left in the Dark*, highlighting key gaps and challenges in the way humanitarian agencies approached communication with disaster-affected people. Subsequently, a number of media development organisations and humanitarian agencies met to discuss their experiences of communicating with affected communities in emergencies. Three key challenges were identified in terms of emergency preparedness:

- Inadequate information provision in emergencies.
- A lack of freely available, up-to-date and comprehensive analyses of the media and telecommunications landscape in crisis-prone countries.
- A general lack of awareness and capacity amongst humanitarian staff about the key components of effective communication with crisis-affected communities and the basic knowledge and skills required to communicate in practice.

To address these shortcomings, three tools were proposed:

- A message library, providing quick and easy access to information that could be disseminated to crisis-affected populations in an emergency.
- A set of media and telecommunication guides for disaster-prone countries, providing information on which channels could be used to communicate in an emergency and where to find them.
- An e-learning course on who should communicate and how in an emergency, with an emphasis on information dissemination, dialogue and programme reorientation based on community feedback.

The tools were developed over a 21-month period by the infoasaid team, in collaboration with a wide range of partners. At the time of writing, all three infoasaid tools had been fully developed, though they had not been fully implemented.

The message library

The message library is an online searchable database (<http://www.infoasaid.org/message-library>) of messages that acts as a reference for those wanting to disseminate critical information to crisis-affected populations in an emergency. It was developed in collaboration with a number of different clusters/sectors in humanitarian response, including Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Nutrition, Food Security, Protection, Education and Camp Coordination and Management. The content went through a peer review process by field-level practitioners, and the software was developed through a process of iterative and incremental planning based on user requirements, testing and feedback.

One of the key challenges in developing the message library was securing buy-in from the major players. Key players within the Protection cluster were concerned that the message library could cause harm if misused, and it took more than six months for these concerns to be articulated and addressed. There was also inadequate understanding of the concept of community engagement. For example, there was a suggestion to include messages for donors in the library; others felt that they were already communicating with affected people perfectly well and questioned the need for such a tool. Some of the suggested content was highly technical, jargon-heavy and not suitable for affected communities.

Effecting change from the outside proved to be a real challenge. The change that the message library was intended to bring about – namely improved information provision in emergencies at the level of the humanitarian clusters – was not spearheaded from inside the system. It was driven from outside, by non-traditional humanitarian actors without a mandate to work within the existing cluster system. Garnering support for the initiative therefore involved a great deal of relationship- and trust-building, perseverance and persuasion.

The message library can be used as a reference to help identify potential risks and threats and develop appropriate, context-specific messages. Once messages have been developed they can be translated and pretested with different segments of society to ensure comprehension. Communication materials can then be developed, partnerships created and humanitarian actors trained in communication skills and message delivery. These pre-prepared messages can then be delivered in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Even before programmes and supplies have been organised, important information can be disseminated to affected populations, including information on the scale, nature and impact of the disaster, alerts about secondary threats such as aftershocks, landslides or flooding and messages about how to stay safe and mitigate risks. Once there is a more accurate picture about the actual needs of affected populations, including information needs, and specific interventions have been designed, messages can be disseminated about specific agencies and their programmes, including how, where and when communities can access services, along with messages to raise awareness about specific issues.

The library contains more than 360 messages related to the information types described above. If used effectively in emergencies, aid providers would not have to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel when developing and disseminating messages to crisis-affected communities. Being equipped with pre-prepared, pre-tested, context-



© Miranda Feles/Infoasaid

Khadija Mohamed, a member of a mother-to-mother support group, explains the impact of the Save the Children-sponsored radio show during an infoasaid focus group discussion in Kajaja 1. 'Since we started listening to the programme, we made a lot of progress. We used to give food and water to babies under six months but now we don't, we just breastfeed them. We don't give them anything else for six months, according to what they said on the radio.'

specific messages on key issues, ready for immediate dissemination when disaster strikes, can save time and ensure that populations are properly informed about the risks they face and the assistance available to them.

Although development of the message library is complete it has not yet been fully piloted in the field in an actual emergency, either by individual agencies (to improve communication with populations) or between agencies (to improve the coordination of communication with populations). Within the timeframe of the infoasaid project, it was only possible to develop the tool itself and adapt messages to the needs of aid agency partners in pilot communication projects. These projects were implemented in the context of protracted rather than rapid-onset humanitarian crises.

The development of the tool has prompted important questions from the clusters. How should information provision be coordinated in emergencies? What would OCHA's role be? Would OCHA provide the leadership and support required? Would a cross-cluster group be formed in an emergency to work on communication with crisis-affected communities, as was the case in Haiti? There remains a lack of clarity within OCHA about its mandate with regard to communication with crisis-affected communities and its role in leading and supporting coordination on this issue. In this respect the message library was perhaps ahead of its time, and the sector was not quite ready for it.

The media and telecoms landscape guides

The online guides (<http://infoasaid.org/media-and-telecoms-landscape-guides>) were developed in partnership with MapAction and Internews, using data compiled by field researchers in-country. This allowed for a high degree of accuracy and factual consistency. The guides provide comprehensive and detailed information on the media and telecommunications landscape in 20 low- and middle-income countries prone to humanitarian crises. In countries where there is little systematic media audience research, they constitute the only up-to-date guidance on existing media and telecommunications channels. Niger, Chad, Somalia, Mozambique and South Sudan are cases in point. The guides contain interactive broadcast coverage maps showing where all the known AM and FM radio stations and terrestrial TV stations are located. Wherever possible, they also show transmitter locations and give an approximate idea of broadcast reach, though obtaining this information is extremely difficult and complete range data is only available for three-quarters of the guides. The guides were not one-off reports, but were intended to be revised to reflect the current situation on the ground. For example, the Côte d'Ivoire guide, which was first published in December 2010, was extensively updated in March 2011, as the country relapsed into civil war, and again in August 2011, to take account of the change of regime. However, such regular updating is labour-intensive and costly, and so infoasaid decided only to update the guides annually unless there was a major change in the country context.

If used effectively in emergencies, these guides could help aid agencies to select channels and sources that affected communities prefer and trust. Providing relevant information through the right channels increases the effectiveness of a communication campaign. Secondly, aid agencies could use the guides as a baseline against which to compare functioning channels after an emergency. This would save valuable time that is otherwise spent on putting together an analysis of the media environment from scratch.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the media guides were used by a wide variety of individuals involved in planning communication initiatives in the countries they covered. These included the intended target audience – aid agency staff working in crisis contexts – as well as donors, media professionals and project managers involved in long-term ‘communication for development’ campaigns and public relations activities. Diplomats and advocacy experts seeking to gain a better understanding of the local media also found the guides useful.

The e-learning course

The e-learning course (<http://infoasaid.org/e-learning>) aims to raise awareness among humanitarian practitioners about the key components of effective communication with crisis-affected communities and to build knowledge and skills on how to communicate in practice. The course is divided into five modules. The first two introduce users to the course and the key concepts it covers. The remaining three modules are interactive, scenario-based challenges requiring users to make decisions related to communication with affected populations during an earthquake, a post-conflict situation and a hurricane/flood.

The content for the e-learning course was developed by the infoasaid team and peer reviewed by expert training organisations such as RedR UK, and independent communication experts. The course content was enhanced with case studies, assessment tools and information sheets provided by agencies including ICRC, IFRC, UNHCR, UNICEF, FAO, Handicap International, World Vision, ActionAid, the Sphere Project and FrontlineSMS. These contributions helped to improve the content and lend credibility to the course. The platform was designed by a company that specialises in the development of e-learning courses, resulting in a professional, high-end interactive and robust product.

The course challenges aid agency staff to think about what effective community engagement entails. With the knowledge and basic skills in hand, staff in an emergency should ideally be able to provide information to crisis-affected communities, resulting in greater knowledge and awareness in those communities; engage in dialogue with crisis-affected communities, resulting in more meaningful participation by them; analyse feedback; and reorient programmes based on feedback, resulting in community-driven programme outputs. Although the course received positive feedback from its target audience, there is no way of tracking exactly how many users have accessed and used it as the tool is publicly available without restriction or pre-registration on infoasaid's website.

The tools were developed but not fully implemented within the timescale of infoasaid's existence, and their sustainability remains questionable. To enable innovative products that have been developed successfully to be used in emergencies and adopted widely, sustained investment is required, from invention through to diffusion.

Chapter 4

Lessons from the pilot projects

When the infoasaid project proposal was initially drafted in 2009, there was a sense that, while many humanitarian aid organisations supported the concept of communicating with affected populations using broadcast media and new technologies, practice lagged behind the ideal. For many, it remained unclear how to translate this concept into reality during a crisis. Furthermore, there was little if any evidence that communication with affected populations could positively influence the overall humanitarian aid effort. Infoasaid therefore aimed to support aid agencies to pilot innovative communications initiatives *and* assess their impact on the quality of aid programmes.

This chapter outlines the main features of the five pilot projects conducted by infoasaid, and the key findings from three Learning Reviews. The Reviews were conducted six to nine months following the implementation of the pilot projects. They were not external evaluations, but rather internal reviews aimed at identifying and documenting lessons from the communication projects to contribute to the sector's understanding of whether or how communicating with crisis-affected communities can enhance the quality of humanitarian assistance.

The pilot projects

Five pilot projects were implemented (see Table 1), all in East Africa and all in response to a protracted drought emergency. The projects were conducted under partnership agreements with ActionAid, IRC, Save the Children and World Vision, according to which infoasaid deployed a team during an emergency to provide the organisation in question with various communication-related services. Although the communication challenges varied across the five projects, in all cases communication mechanisms were slow and labour-intensive; systematic, timely mechanisms to relay urgent information to communities were lacking; mechanisms for soliciting feedback from recipient communities were underutilised; there was limited engagement with communities, with communication focused on extracting data on project outputs rather than listening to needs or concerns; and there was a general lack of access to information, particularly among women.

To address these challenges, infoasaid developed customised communications projects based on detailed assessments of the population's information needs and communication preferences, the local media environment and the partner organisation's programme objectives. While the specific interventions proposed differed across projects, the 'standard' model consisted of two pillars: a mass communication channel to disseminate information to, and receive information from, affected populations, whether or not they were beneficiaries of the partner organisation; and a centralised hub designed to communicate with community focal points to increase the

frequency and speed of information exchange between the aid agency and aid recipients. Details of the communication tools deployed are given below.

Mobile telephony, solar chargers and a FrontlineSMS hub

In all of the pilot projects, the information hub was located in the aid organisation's regional office and managed by a communications officer. The FrontlineSMS information hub enabled the aid organisation to send out targeted SMS messages, via phone or modem, to defined contact groups and to centrally store and analyse incoming SMS messages from key contacts. Community focal points, typically relief committee members or community health workers, received a mobile phone and a solar charger, and were trained in how to use these devices. These focal points were expected to communicate, by text or voice calls, either directly back to the hub or with the aid organisation's field representatives.

An interesting feature of FrontlineSMS is the option of creating FrontlineForms – electronic data collection forms which can be downloaded onto java-enabled mobile phones and sent via SMS to the FrontlineSMS information hub. Forms can be customised and allow for the collection of up to ten separate items of data and a small amount of free text. Once received by the hub, the form data can be displayed on a computer screen in table form and exported into Excel, facilitating the collection and analysis of data.

Community radio

Wherever possible, the pilots made use of community radio stations, and specifically developed interactive radio shows to reach large audiences with critical information, and facilitating feedback to aid organisations.

Freedom Fone

The Freedom Fone software allows a computer linked to one or more mobile phone lines to operate a telephone information service whereby callers hear a welcome message that gives access to a menu of recorded messages. The welcome message also allows callers to leave their own recorded message. Based on an analysis of information needs, the infoasaid proposal suggested that ActionAid record livestock and commodity price information, along with any other humanitarian information the agency wished to pass along to the communities it served. The recordings would be updated on a weekly basis and the phone number to call would be advertised on bulletins posted in public places.

Hotlines

Staffed hotlines were set up for projects implemented with Save the Children and IRC in Somalia. Hotline operators were trained, FAQs developed, referral lists drawn up and data collection, analysis and storage systems set up.

Table 1: The pilot projects

Partner organisation	ActionAid	World Vision	Save the Children Kenya	Save the Children Somalia	IRC Somalia
Location	Isiolo County, Kenya	Taita Taveta County, Voi, Kenya	Wajir County, Kenya	Bossaso, Somalia	Galkayo, Somalia
Type of crisis	Drought	Drought	Drought	Drought, IDPs	Drought, IDPs
Humanitarian programmes	<p>Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) targeting 90,000 people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Food Distribution (GFD) • Food for Assets (FFA) • Supplementary Feeding Programme (SFP) 	<p>Protracted Relief and Rehabilitation Operation (PRRO) targeting 119,000 people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Food Distribution (GFD) • Food for Assets (FFA) • Cash for Assets (CFA)¹¹ 	<p>Multi-sectoral programme targeting 239,000 people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition • Health • Education • Protection • Food security and livelihoods (FSL) • Water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) 	<p>Multi-sectoral programme targeting 100,000 people in IDP camps in Bossaso</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition • Health • Water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) 	<p>Multi-sector programme providing assistance to approx. 160,000 people comprising a mix of IDPs and host communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) • Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL)
Problems identified through baseline study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow and labour-intensive communication due to poor roads; security incidents; and large distances between distribution sites • Community engagement extractive rather than interactive • Communities lacking information on market prices and often underselling livestock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow, labour-intensive communication due to poor roads and large distances between distribution sites • Community engagement extractive rather than interactive • Inadequate feedback mechanisms • Lack of access among communities to practical livelihood information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow and labour intensive, face-to-face communication • Inadequate feedback mechanisms • Communities lacked access to critical information to help them improve their wellbeing • Women particularly excluded from mass communication tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow and labour-intensive, face-to-face communication • Inadequate feedback mechanisms • IDP residents, especially women, lack access to critical information • Lack of coordination of key messages among programme staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow and labour-intensive, face-to-face communication • Lack of systematic collection and analysis of feedback • Target population in the livelihoods programme often widely dispersed over a large area and isolated
Pilot project objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the effectiveness of ActionAid’s humanitarian assistance by increasing the speed and frequency of dialogue between the organisation and the communities it serves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the delivery of WVK’s food and cash assistance by increasing the speed and frequency of dialogue between the organisation and the communities it serves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the delivery of Save the Children’s food, health and water assistance by increasing the speed, frequency and reliability of dialogue between the organisation and the community it serves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the delivery of Save the Children’s nutrition, health and water assistance by increasing the speed, frequency and reliability of dialogue between the organisation and IDPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the delivery of IRC’s health, water and food and livelihoods assistance by improving community feedback through a staffed hotline

Table 1: The pilot projects (continued)

Pilot project objectives (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide communities with critical information that could improve their livelihoods • To enhance ActionAid's monitoring and reporting by means of increased speed and efficiency of data collection from the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase access of community members, in particular women, to practical information in order to help them to improve their food and livelihood security • To enhance WVK's monitoring and reporting by means of increased speed and efficiency of data collection from the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide communities with information that could improve their wellbeing and livelihoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide IDPs with information to support their health and well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase pastoralists' access to critical information regarding food security and livelihoods via an Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) • To improve the speed and efficiency of data collection from the field for the WASH and FSL programmes
Pilot project interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile telephony, coupled with solar chargers and a FrontlineSMS information hub to improve speed and frequency of dialogue • Freedom Fone, FrontlineSMS and price bulletins (posted on notice-boards) to disseminate weekly livestock and commodity pricing information • FrontlineForms to increase speed and efficiency of data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile telephony, coupled with solar chargers and a FrontlineSMS information hub to improve the speed and frequency of dialogue between RCs and WVK • Sponsorship of a weekly interactive radio programme targeting women aged 15–40 • FrontlineForms to improve speed and efficiency of field data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile telephony coupled with a FrontlineSMS information hub, to improve the speed and frequency of dialogue between SC and recipients of food, health and water services • Sponsorship of a weekly interactive radio programme including broadcast of a weekly livestock price bulletin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship of a weekly magazine and interactive phone-in programme for women related to health, nutrition and child welfare • Creation of a staffed hotline providing advice on nutrition and maternal and child health issues for IDPs • Training of community health workers in key message development and systematic use of feedback forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A staffed hotline • An IVR service • Mobile telephony, coupled with solar chargers and FrontlineSMS software, including Frontline Forms



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Emily Mwang'ombe (in front) and Catherine Mwadime (behind), Relief Committee members, Mwachabo

The Learning Reviews

Although infoasaid supported the design and implementation of five pilot projects, only three of the five were subject to a Learning Review during the course of the project because security and time constraints did not allow the infoasaid team to conduct Learning Reviews for the two pilots in Somalia. The three projects reviewed were accordingly ActionAid's Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) in Isiolo County, Kenya, World Vision's PRRO in Taita Taveta County, Voi, Kenya, and Save the Children's multisectoral programme in Wajir County, Kenya.

Methodology and approach

The Learning Reviews sought to examine both the implementation and the results of the pilot communication projects. In terms of implementation, the Reviews compared what was planned with what actually happened, and tried to explain any differences. They also aimed to understand, from the perspectives of staff in the aid organisations concerned and crisis-affected people themselves, what worked well, what did not and why. In terms of results, the principal objective of the Learning Reviews was to understand whether the pilot communication projects improved the quality of humanitarian aid provided by infoasaid's partner organisations. Pursuant to this objective, the two overarching questions guiding the Learning Reviews were:

- Did the pilot communication project improve affected communities' access to information, as well as dialogue with the aid organisation?
- If yes, did this improved communication increase the

quality of humanitarian aid being provided by the aid organisation?

In assessing the impact of the communication projects on the overall aid delivered, there was no ready-made framework to turn to. Instead, the infoasaid team developed its own framework of assessment, based on an adaptation of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria.¹² Five of these criteria – relevance/appropriateness, coverage, efficiency, effectiveness and impact – were considered particularly useful for understanding the influence of the communication pilots on access to information, dialogue between aid agencies and crisis-affected communities and the broader programmes of humanitarian assistance being provided.

Relevance/appropriateness:

- To what extent did the communication project correctly address the information problems and needs of the target groups?
- To what extent has the communication project enabled the organisation to better align its aid activities with the needs and priorities of the target group?

Coverage:

- To what extent has the communication project enhanced the organisation's ability to reach population groups in need with critical information?

Efficiency:

- To what extent has the communication project influenced the cost-efficiency of the organisation's programme?

Effectiveness:

- How, and to what extent, has the communication project influenced the achievement of the organisation's broader humanitarian assistance programmes?

Impact:

- What are the wider, positive or negative, intended and unintended effects of the project on the target community? What real difference has the project made in the lives of community members?

Infoasaid adopted qualitative methods for assessing the results of the communication projects as these were considered to best fit the specific circumstances of the Learning Reviews, taking into account their purpose, questions, context and available resources. Given the complex nature of communication, it was essential to use methods which could provide information about participants' information needs, behaviours and perceptions of a given message, product or service. The qualitative tools also had the advantage of being iterative, enabling research questions to be adjusted or added according to what was learned during the research. The weakness was the lack of triangulation of data provided by aid organisation staff and beneficiaries against other quantitative sources of data, although some quantitative monitoring data was collected and was useful for this purpose.

The methodology for a Learning Review typically consisted of a review of literature on humanitarian response activities, including programme reports and monitoring reports; focus group discussions with targeted communities and aid staff; and key informant interviews with aid staff in the field and in Nairobi, community radio workers and partner NGO staff. The sampling frame for the aid organisation usually included staff who had participated directly or indirectly in the pilot communication project. For the community, the sampling frame was based on the geographic and urban/rural spread of an organisation's programme, travelling distance to and from the main town and the ethnic and linguistic diversity of community members. While most focus group discussions had male and female participants, a few consisted solely of female respondents.

Research limitations

The Learning Reviews were limited by a number of factors. Firstly, tight timeframes had an impact on the scale and scope of the research that could be undertaken. Infoasaid staff, sometimes accompanied by a local researcher, were typically in the field for a maximum of eight days. Coupled with rules and regulations governing travel during periods of heightened insecurity, this usually limited the research to sites that could be reached within a day's drive from the main town. Accordingly, the fieldwork is not representative of all the communities participating in the pilot projects.

Secondly, infoasaid relied on partner organisations to select focus group participants, moderate the focus group discussions and, sometimes, translate and transcribe tape recordings. It is therefore possible that the selection of

participants was biased towards those with knowledge about or a favourable attitude towards the project, and participants might have felt uncomfortable criticising the project. On the whole, these issues were dealt with during the discussion and questioning, and in most cases the review team was confident that the truth had emerged, but it is worth mentioning here as an issue that may have implications for the reliability of some of the data provided.

Thirdly, each pilot suffered from weak Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems, which made it difficult for infoasaid to collect quantitative data and measure and analyse some of the criteria under review, such as efficiency, since none of the organisations monitored the project's financial impact.

Fourthly, limited resources meant that infoasaid could not undertake quantitative studies to measure, for example, the reach of a radio programme or how often livestock price bulletins were used. Ideally, the qualitative research would have been complemented with quantitative research to give an idea of the number of people reached by the communications project, and who was using the tools available to them.

Results of the Learning Reviews**Relevance/appropriateness**

Findings for all three Learning Reviews indicate that community members thought that the communication projects were highly relevant to their information needs, suggesting that the information needs assessments, coupled with an organisation's in-depth knowledge of communities served, had for the most part successfully identified key issues of concern for drought-affected communities. This was most evident in Voi, where WVK produced a series of radio programmes specifically designed to address information needs identified during the infoasaid scoping and baseline research. Programmes shared information on income-generating projects, new farming methods and livelihood strategies. Community members valued the educational approach and several respondents mentioned that they had encouraged others to listen to the programme and implement the farming and other income-generation methods discussed. Others said that they encouraged their children to listen, so that they too could benefit from the information shared. While men listened more than women, the topics were of interest to both sexes.

By contrast, there was little consultation of community members in Wajir regarding the topics that should be aired on the radio programme. Due to security constraints, infoasaid was not able to undertake an in-depth information needs assessment or undertake formative research in Wajir. Instead, SC's radio programmes were developed with programme staff on the humanitarian and development issues they thought were relevant to the communities served and the SC programmes being implemented.

Comments from focus group discussions with community members suggest that this approach worked well with some topics, notably related to health, nutrition and

hygiene. Participants spontaneously recalled these shows in all group discussions, even months after they had aired (these shows also received the most phone calls during the phone-in segments). However, other shows, such as those dedicated to child labour, education and Islam or a rise in new-born infanticides, did not seem to register with listeners. It was not possible to know whether these differences were due to the subject matter or the speaker on a particular show, or whether the greater success of other messages was due to their repetition through other channels as well (community health workers regularly engage with community members on issues related to health, nutrition and hygiene).

Overall, the educational value of the SC-sponsored radio shows was highly praised by listeners in Wajir, with several female respondents describing the programmes as the 'school teacher they had never met'. The interactive call-in feature of the radio programmes was also extremely popular. Listeners appreciated being able to communicate directly with the expert guest, receiving an instant response to their questions, sharing their personal stories with the rest of the community and being able to publicly thank the organisation for the information received.

Weekly market price information about goods that community members planned to sell (or buy) was also highly valued by all stakeholders in the two projects where this information was provided. The infoasaid scoping trips revealed that a common information need across Isiolo and Wajir was access to local market price information. In Wajir, for instance, where an estimated 70% of the population depends on livestock for their livelihood, pastoralists relied on information from traders to determine whether, when and what to sell, without knowing whether they were receiving a fair price. Pastoralists sometimes endured a long journey with their animals to the Habaswein or Wajir markets, only to learn that prices were low. At that point, they might still be forced to sell because the animals were too weak to make the return trip, or they might stay several days in Wajir town, incurring expenses as they waited for prices to rise. For pastoralists, this lack of information substantially increases the risk that they will undersell their products. Based on these findings, the infoasaid project proposals recommended the broadcast of four weekly market price bulletins on community radio in Wajir, and the use of SMS messages and paper bulletins in Isiolo.

Pastoralists in Wajir recounted how the livestock price information had enabled them to decide what type of animal to sell based on the prices that week. In Isiolo, where some communities are increasingly cultivating agricultural produce as part of Food for Assets (FFA) activities, community members recounted how they had used the market price information to decide whether to sell or store their produce.

In both Isiolo and Wajir, participants noted that the market price information had enabled community members to bypass middlemen when attempting to sell their livestock.

In Isiolo, some community members were using the information to engage in market arbitrage, buying livestock in one market to resell them in another market with a higher buying price. While it was not possible during the course of this review to measure, in quantitative terms, the impact of the interventions on household income, it was clear from communities' own accounts that they felt the objective of providing them with critical information to reduce the risk of them underselling one of their main sources of income had been achieved.

Findings from all three reviews suggest that increased interaction with drought-affected communities, enabled by the community radio show and mobile phones, not only improved each organisation's understanding of communities' needs and priorities but also led them to make changes to their assistance. In Voi and Wajir, staff from the humanitarian organisations explained how the interactive radio shows highlighted communities' needs and concerns, which were often different to those raised in agency-led meetings. In Wajir, SC was made aware of very poor sanitation conditions affecting specific schools, and refocused its efforts to address problems in those establishments. Staff also described instances where listeners called the show with medical questions, in some cases alerting SC and the local government health authorities to potential disease outbreaks.

WVK staff in Voi considered the radio programme to be a more successful channel for feedback than the community phones due to its anonymity. Through the radio programme, for instance, they heard from a caller that the Cash for Assets (CFA) targeting process was perceived to have been unfair, with elites receiving assistance instead of the most vulnerable. WVK carried out retargeting in the relevant areas. The agency also adjusted its planning and proposal writing for the financial year 2012/13 to include a greater focus on individual rather than communal asset-building after hearing via SMS and radio that communities had a preference for working on their individual farms, as it benefited them more directly.

ActionAid staff also stated that they had become more aware of, and able to respond to, aid recipients' needs since the start of the communication project. They attributed this to the direct, frequent and 'friendlier' communication that took place between community focal points and ActionAid's field representatives, which enabled problems to be resolved quickly. One staff member highlighted the importance of mobile phones during raids in Isiolo, which forced communities to flee their villages. When the staff member was made aware of this displacement, he ensured that food aid was redirected to a safe distribution point nearby. In another example, several community members proudly recounted the time the focal point had called ActionAid staff in the Isiolo office to refute a claim that the community had not completed its FFA activities for the month and was therefore not eligible for the monthly food distribution. ActionAid staff from the office agreed to visit the FFA to see for themselves the progress of activities, and food distributions were reinstated.



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Catherine Mwaiseghe (on the right), Chairperson of Mengo sub-location, Mengo. 'Before, we used to receive the food late because the information came late. The vehicle carrying food would arrive but the community wasn't ready. But nowadays, we get information in advance. We prepare ourselves to receive the food, store it and it is distributed to us the following day in good time.'

The degree to which community feedback prompted the organisation to adjust its activities accordingly depended on the system and resources in place to collect, verify and analyse the feedback received. In Wajir, SC programme staff were tasked with listening to 'their' programmes, taking notes of callers' questions and comments, discussing issues raised with colleagues and responding either on air or in community meetings, or directly contacting the caller. In Voi, the M&E Officer analysed community feedback and complaints received through all communication channels and shared a Complaints and Response Mechanism (CRM) report with relevant stakeholders during monthly operations meetings involving WFP, WV, Equity Bank, the Arid Lands Management Authority and the District Nutrition office. Suggested solutions and actions were then shared with the WVK national office on a monthly basis. In Isiolo, it was noted that ActionAid's capacity to process and respond to information sent from communities was limited: when the information received did not directly concern ActionAid's own project activities, there was no formal procedure for sharing the information with other stakeholders or for ensuring that community members received a response to their questions, concerns or requests for assistance. Several factors contributed to this, including the lack of a dedicated communications officer with the time and resources to verify, analyse, respond to and share information coming in from communities.

Coverage

There was unequivocal recognition from SC staff in Wajir that the radio programme reached a larger section of the population than was possible through community mobilisers, whose face-to-face meetings were limited due to vast distances between villages, insecurity and a lack of resources.

WVK staff in Voi also remarked that the radio programme seemed to have increased WVK's reach, including to non-beneficiaries who also called into the programme, some asking how they could receive assistance or benefit from WVK's activities. In more ethnically diverse areas, community members reported that some of the locals did not speak Taita and were therefore unable to understand or benefit from the programmes, though there was some disagreement among agency staff and communities over whether the programme should be broadcast in Taita or Swahili.

The FrontlineSMS information hub was also thought to have improved coverage of messages among people who owned mobile phones. In Voi, in addition to community focal points, other contact groups had been created on the information hub, including local leaders, farmers' groups, government officials, WVK staff and so on, all of whom were receiving updates from the hub.

The findings of the impact of all three projects on coverage of both information and other types of assistance would

have been enhanced by quantitative survey data, but this was not feasible within the scope of the pilot projects.

In both Voi and Wajir, comments from focus group participants and data from calls to the radio shows indicated that more men were listening to the radio shows than women. This was particularly interesting given that, during the project design process, both WVK and SC had decided that the radio programme should emphasise women and address key issues in their lives. In Voi and Wajir, the main reason provided by communities for women not listening was that they were busy in the kitchen cooking or putting the children to sleep when the radio programme was broadcast in the evening hours. In Voi, of the 30 women who participated in the community focus groups, fewer than half (11) had ever heard the programme; of those, most had listened only once or twice.

However, women were not in favour of changing the timing of the radio programme, stating that they were busy all the time. Some who did not listen to the programme were still made aware of the topics through discussions about them in their families and communities. In Wajir, this problem was attenuated a little with the purchase of 46

recordable radios, which were distributed to SC women's groups so that group members could listen to the show at a more convenient time and discuss the topics amongst themselves.

Efficiency

One of the key expectations of the pilot communication projects was that the introduction of mobile phones, solar phone chargers and FrontlineSMS software would reduce the amount of travel to and from affected communities involved in delivering and collecting routine information. Unfortunately, it was difficult to obtain data from any of the pilot projects reviewed to analyse whether this expectation was realised. Anecdotal evidence suggests that agency field representatives in Isiolo and Wajir were able to reduce the number of trips they made to the field to pass on routine or uncomplicated information. In Voi, using FrontlineSMS messages to inform community focal points of upcoming food distribution dates did not reduce the amount of travel because agency guidelines required that formal notification letters were still sent by vehicle. There are indications, however, that FrontlineSMS reduced the number of follow-up phone calls that Field Monitors were making to communities to remind them about and

Box 2

Stories of change from Voi

'On my part ... the first time I heard about it [the radio programme] I didn't really care that much. But when I continued listening to it I realised its benefits because it talked about livestock keeping. I am happy I listened to the programme on Anguo FM because I did not know how to build a poultry house and now, through it, I have built one. I am also very happy because I learnt how to feed them. Previously I used to feed and water the chickens once a day. But through listening to the radio programme, now I feed them four times a day and give them water three times a day. When a chicken lays an egg I take it and number it so that I know when it was laid. When it [the chicken] sits on the eggs, I replace the new eggs with the old eggs so that when it starts to hatch the eggs, it hatches all of them.'

Community member, Mwachabo

'This programme has educated us. It is important because through it we have learnt a lot of things like hay preservation ... We get the grass from the bush and I bring it here, tie it up and store it and it helps us when it is dry. I give it to my cattle and I also generate some income through selling it, which helps to cater for household needs such as food ... All this we learnt through the radio programme.'

Community member, Mwachabo

'By listening to the radio station, they talked about trenches, and we dug the trenches and we saw they were

of great importance, because when it rains, the trenches fill with water, and the water helps banana trees and cassava plants. So we see the trenches are very important, and if they fill with soil we remove it so that when it rains again water fills up again.'

Community member, Choke



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Florah Kipee stands in front of her chicken coop in Madangonyi.

mobilise them for food distributions, as these are now done using SMS via the hub at lower cost. While it was difficult to assess any cost savings associated with the pilot projects as designed, the majority of aid agency staff interviewed felt that using mobile phones had increased their productivity. Field representatives in particular commented on their new-found ability to execute several projects at once in more than one location.

Effectiveness

In addition to providing access to critical information as a form of aid in and of itself, the pilot communication projects were also designed to support broader assistance programmes. In Isiolo, Voi and Wajir, interventions addressed the lack of regular, timely communication between aid organisations and drought-affected populations. Findings from all three Learning Reviews indicate that the introduction of the FrontlineSMS information hubs, combined with the distribution of mobile phones, increased the speed and frequency of information dissemination as well as dialogue between aid organisations and drought-affected communities. The research findings from Isiolo and Wajir also indicate that increased communication noticeably improved food aid operations.

Relief committees and community members in Isiolo reported that they now received information about upcoming food distributions via SMS usually two days prior to the event, enabling them to mobilise community members and prepare registrars and containers. Some relief committees used the phones to communicate information to ActionAid about the state of the roads or security incidents in the area in order to facilitate the arrival of food trucks at the distribution points. They also used the phones to pass on any questions or potential problems. For ActionAid staff in the Isiolo office, the communications project offered a direct link to the relief committees which did not exist before, enabling them to hear first-hand from communities.

Similar findings were recorded in Wajir, where relief committees with access to a mobile phone network reported being in more regular contact with ALDEF, SC's local implementing partner for General Food Distributions (GFD) than was the case before the project began. All stakeholders interviewed stated that the distribution of mobile phones to relief committee members had improved food distributions, as well as enhancing relations between SC and the community. They valued receiving information about upcoming deliveries on time, and the ability to



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Noor Mohamed Omar, Community Health Worker, Dasheeg village. Noor is one of 63 Community Health Workers given a mobile phone and solar charger to improve two-way communication between Save the Children and affected communities.

call and ask questions and have issues quickly resolved. According to Field Monitors, since routine questions or problems can now be addressed by mobile phone, relief committees and community members visit the ALDEF office less frequently than in the past.

In Voi, the FrontlineSMS information hub, enabling 'bulk' SMS messages to be sent, was also perceived to have increased the speed of information dissemination to communities. However, due to the challenges experienced by WVK's PRRO during the communication project period, including the scaling back of its food assistance activities and severe delays in cash payments to CFA recipients, it was not possible to assess the effect that this speedier communication had on the quality of food or cash assistance being provided.

Whilst food aid remains the principal tool for meeting basic food needs in a protracted drought, humanitarian organisations are increasingly implementing a range of livelihoods interventions to help build resilience. The findings of the learning review suggest that the communication pilots, in particular the radio shows, also contributed to this goal. In Voi, the radio programme served as a useful channel to raise awareness of improved farming techniques and drought-tolerant crops, as a way of coping with long dry spells. Information was also provided on the radio on livelihoods diversification through poultry rearing, which provided alternative sources of income during dry spells. The radio programme therefore contributed to achieving WV's overall goal of improving community resilience to the adverse effects of drought on local livelihoods.

In Wajir County, both community health workers and SC staff felt that the mobile phones and radio programme were instrumental in programmes aimed at reducing mother and child mortality. Prior to the communications project, the majority of community health workers did not own phones and had to travel to the nearest health facility to request assistance, wasting valuable time. In some cases, if the medical emergency occurred at night or during a period of heightened insecurity, health workers were unable to reach the health facility at all. With the distribution of mobile phones community health workers are now able to call for assistance immediately. In all of the sites visited, community members recounted stories of a child or pregnant mother quickly receiving medical assistance following a phone call by the community health worker to SC or the Ministry of Health. One SC staff member highlighted that the training community health workers received alongside the distribution of mobile phones was a key factor in achieving an improved referral system. The research also came across an interesting example of an SC staff member using the mobile phones and FrontlineSMS to improve the training of community health workers by texting all community health workers asking them how they handled the umbilical cord. The answers she received enabled her to cater her training to the knowledge and existing practices of the community health workers.

While the mobile phones were used to request assistance during medical emergencies for mothers and young children, the radio show reinforced key health messages promoted by SC staff and health workers for the community more broadly. Many SC staff commented on the perceived impact of the radio show in changing behaviour, notably with regard to breast-feeding. One show which was mentioned by all stakeholders as having had an impact on the health of new-borns was dedicated to exclusive breastfeeding, a practice not prevalent in Somali society. The radio show also supported SC's WASH programme in Wajir by promoting hygiene practices and enabling SC staff to better understand the WASH needs of the community. One SC manager remarked that WASH programmes on the radio were used to educate communities about an ongoing water purification programme. The WASH Programme Officer stated that they had received fewer questions and complaints following the programme than during a previous campaign, which had not included a communication element.

Impact

Community members became active consumers of aid rather than passive recipients, and were able to make informed decisions and choices. Community members, focal points and organisation staff involved in all three pilot projects felt that the mobile phones, SMS messages and radio shows empowered affected populations to request information from the aid agency and have their voices heard. Staff recounted examples of community representatives directly calling the organisation or the radio show to inquire about a distribution delay; to report a discrepancy between the aid off-loaded and the way-bill description; to recommend a more secure transport route; or to complain about the selection process for beneficiaries of a specific aid

programme. According to ActionAid field staff in Isiolo, the market price information was used by community members to determine when to sell their livestock or commodities. In Wajir, findings indicate that the information was often used to decide which animal to sell. Pastoralists indicated that the pricing information gave them the choice either to bargain with or bypass middlemen.

Working relations markedly improved. The Learning Reviews came across many respondents who spontaneously remarked that working relations between various stakeholders had improved since the introduction of the communications pilot. In particular, the distribution of mobile phones to community representatives, enabling more frequent and timely communication, seemingly reduced frustrations and created a 'friendlier' working environment. Not surprisingly, this result was most apparent in Wajir and Isiolo, where very few community representatives owned a phone prior to the project. Community representatives in Wajir and Isiolo also felt that they had acquired greater status among their peers and with aid agency staff, who regarded them as having the necessary tools to fulfil their roles as key liaison figures. Comments suggest that the mobile handsets are perceived to have redressed power imbalances between communities and aid agency staff, the latter of which were described as regarding members of relief committees as 'colleagues working in the same situation'.

Field representatives from aid organisations concurred that working relations had improved, and noted that increased communication with community representatives had rendered the working relationship 'very strong'. ALDEF field representatives noted a difference in their working relationship between relief committees that had received a mobile phone and had regular access to the network, compared to those who had not.

In addition to increased communication, several field representatives in Isiolo also highlighted how the increased transparency afforded by the mobile phones and FrontlineSMS had improved working relations. They noted that the weekly market price bulletins had helped them build trust with community members, which had in turn facilitated planning sessions regarding the sale of FFA produce. They attributed this to all stakeholders receiving the same information at the same time, increasing transparency and helping to address power imbalances, at least with regard to information.

The Learning Review did not come across similar comments from community members or focal points in Voi, perhaps because an estimated 70% of community representatives owned a phone prior to the communication project. Furthermore, because of problems with the solar chargers, the frequency of communication does not seem to have noticeably increased. However, some community members did state that relations with WVK were more 'open' thanks to the communication project. Community members from Mwachabo felt that the radio programme had brought WVK closer to them. Others said that they had not noticed any

changes or that it was too early to tell, but that over time they expected the relationship to improve.

For isolated communities, the communication tools serve as a lifeline to the outside world. Focus group discussions with community members in Isiolo and Voi suggest that one of the most important and unintended effects of the communication project has been the psychosocial support provided by the mobile phones. Residents in these areas typically feel excluded from outside sources of information and powerless to rapidly access assistance. The introduction of mobile phones and solar chargers appears to have alleviated some of this isolation. In Isiolo, community members described the importance of being able to contact family members, request assistance for a member of the community, inform the police of acts of banditry or simply share information with other communities about important events in the area. Their comments suggest that they generally felt safer and more informed, and valued being able to connect to family and friends.

In Wajir, access to medical assistance was seen as the overwhelming benefit associated with mobile phones. In all focus groups visited community members explained how the mobile phones had improved SC's medical referral system for pregnant women and children under five. As for the radio show, it was perceived as an essential source of information, a lifeline to the outside world providing critical information for the community.

Contextual factors

Technical issues

Increased engagement with aid recipients is potentially greatly facilitated by new information and communication technologies. However, the pilot projects showed that newly installed technologies will typically experience technical difficulties and require outside support to resolve problems. Accordingly, it is essential to field-test the technology and, once it is implemented, to ensure consistent monitoring and resources to address problems as early as possible.

In every focus group discussion in all three projects, participants complained that the solar charger was either not working or that its charging capacity had declined over time. Although the FrontlineSMS hub was working well at the time of the Learning Reviews, in each case the hub had experienced a range of technical problems in the first few weeks. In Voi, for example, the hub experienced a serious technical failure which lasted for two weeks, during which time neither SMS messages nor forms could be received. In Wajir, the software often failed to receive or send messages, which appeared to be stuck on the SIM card of the computer modem. Freedom Fone was plagued by technical problems, vulnerable to power outages and often needed technical assistance from ActionAid's Nairobi office to restart the connection.

Assessing information needs and channels

The first step in devising a communications strategy is conducting an information needs and access assessment

to understand, at the very least, which communication channels people typically use, what sources of information are trusted and which information needs the community considers critical. Findings from the Learning Review suggest that the information collected by infoasaid as part of these assessments was generally useful and identified appropriate communication channels. Through these assessments, for instance, the team discovered which radio stations had the largest following, and which mobile service providers served a specific region.

These assessments were often conducted within short timeframes and with a small number of community representatives, leading to important gaps in information. In some cases insecurity precluded assessments altogether. For instance, when considering the use of mobile networks, it is imperative to obtain up-to-date information about network coverage directly from network operators, as well as conducting detailed surveys on the ground to check coverage areas. Infoasaid did not conduct a detailed mobile coverage assessment in Wajir due to insecurity, and in some sites mobile coverage was much less comprehensive than expected, and 27 of the 52 people who received mobile phones as part of the communications project did not have direct access to a mobile network. While many interviewees noted that people found ways to circumvent this problem, for instance by walking to sites where they could receive SMS messages sent by the hub, this undoubtedly reduced the effectiveness of the communication project.

Cultural issues

Even if a communication tool is technically feasible, it may not be culturally acceptable. This was the case with the Freedom Fone hotline service in Isiolo, which was very little used due to strong cultural resistance to recorded voice messages. In focus group discussions, community members explained that they distrusted information received from a recorded message, with one discussant even wondering if a 'ghost' was speaking. The few messages left on the ActionAid voicemail clearly indicated that the caller was not aware of how the service functioned. Moreover, because callers are not familiar with the recorded message system, many will wait for long periods of time before hanging up, wasting substantial amounts of phone credit.

Targeting recipients

Findings from the Learning Reviews reveal that the use and perceived benefits of FrontlineForms differed substantially in the two projects where it was implemented, highlighting the importance of targeting appropriate users. The Forms were most successful in Isiolo, where ActionAid field representatives reported no difficulties filling in and sending the Forms via SMS to the hub. They all valued the Forms, which enabled the collection of field data in a timely and secure process, compared to completing forms on paper, which were sometimes lost.

The Forms were less successful in Voi, where community focal points were tasked with sending them to the hub. During March and April 2012, only 14 out of 75 relief

committee focal points sent any forms to the hub, and most only sent one or two. In theory, over the six-month project period, there was potential for the hub to receive 900 FrontlineForms. Although monitoring data did not provide the complete picture, it is evident that the FrontlineForm intervention was not working according to plan. WVK staff interviewed suggested that the training received by community focal points, who generally have low levels of basic and/or technical literacy, was insufficient. This suggests that Frontline Forms will be more effective when put in the hands of agency staff rather than members of the recipient community, or the aid agency has to guarantee good and regular training for community focal points.

Adopting a multi-channel approach

Findings from the Learning Review in Voi and Wajir suggest that using a multi-channel communications approach can enable communities to engage in different ways with aid providers, as well as amplifying and reinforcing messages. WV staff in Voi and Wajir noted that the interactive radio programme seemed to reach a population that went beyond beneficiaries. During the call-in segments of the show, the aid agency might hear something that is not traditionally discussed during community meetings or through the mobile phones distributed to community focal points. In addition, the radio programmes seemed very effective in reinforcing messages that community members would hear via focal points. Nearly all of the stakeholders in Wajir remarked that having experts speak on the radio lent credibility to issues aid agency staff regularly discussed with affected populations.

Organisational issues

Findings from the Learning Review suggest that where the pilot project was housed within the agency did not seem to have a significant influence on the success of the intervention; more important was the amount of time and resources available to the focal person to implement the communication project. The degree to which that person could fulfil their tasks depended on whether or not communicating with affected populations was their principal duty. For each of the pilot projects, infoasaid recommended the recruitment of dedicated staff to manage the pilot projects. This recommendation was only taken up in Wajir; in the other two projects, the role was added onto another job, and individuals became overloaded. In Isiolo, for example, the staff member responsible for managing the communication project also had administrative duties linked to PRRO activities. In Voi, the role was attached to the existing Accountability, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. Almost all staff stated that the projects required a full-time communications officer.

The pilots were not meant to be isolated and stand-alone, but rather a set of tools and platforms that would be integrated into an aid agency's programmes and geared towards supporting multiple objectives. Such integration appears to have worked best in Wajir, where a dedicated communications officer was tasked with relaying information from community members to

programme managers and ensuring that the organisation responded to this feedback.

Despite general staff enthusiasm for the projects, and initial evidence of results, an immediate strategy for building on the pilots and scaling up the work was generally lacking. The Kenya country offices of ActionAid, World Vision and Save the Children have committed to discussing the findings from the Learning Review to see how activities could be continued and scaled up. Furthermore, World Vision will be circulating the pilot project as a piece of best practice within the organisation, and ActionAid is keen to implement pilot projects in Bangladesh and Cambodia. However, scaling up and replicating pockets of good practice requires institutional change and support at multiple levels within an agency. This remains the greatest challenge.

Conclusions

In terms of coverage, the communication projects with a community radio component enabled WVK and SC to reach more people, beneficiaries as well as non-beneficiaries. However, women, the target audience in Wajir and Voi, were often too busy to listen to the radio shows. The radio programme in Voi has also raised an interesting point regarding the choice of language in mixed communities.

Stakeholders in all three pilots felt that the communication projects had successfully facilitated the provision of feedback from communities and enabled the organisation to better align its programmes and activities with communities' needs and priorities. However, the degree to which this happened depended on the system and resources in place to collect, verify and analyse the feedback received. For instance, in Isiolo ActionAid's capacity to process and respond to information sent from communities was limited, especially when the information received did not directly concern ActionAid's own project activities, as there was no formal procedure for sharing the information with other stakeholders.

In Isiolo and Wajir, community members and agency staff alike asserted that food distributions had noticeably improved as community members received timely and regular text messages from the FrontlineSMS hub informing them of upcoming food distribution dates, providing enough lead time to mobilise aid recipients, update registrars and prepare containers. Community members also valued being able to call the aid organisation to quickly resolve problems arising from the food distributions. Similarly in Wajir, where the pilot programmes also supported the health and nutrition and WASH sectors, community members strongly felt that the radio show and mobile phones had improved service delivery. They specifically highlighted the use of mobile phones to improve SC's referral service for medical emergencies – perhaps even saving the lives of pregnant women and children – and the radio programme, which amplified health messages disseminated by community health workers.

In Voi, while the speed of information dissemination to focal points increased, the impact of this on operational

effectiveness could not be assessed due to challenges experienced by WVK's PRRO during the communication project period, including the scaling back of its food assistance activities and severe delays in cash payments to CFA recipients.

The pilot projects also improved relationships between aid agency staff, volunteers and communities. In particular, the distribution of mobile phones to community representatives, enabling more frequent and timely communication, reduced longstanding frustrations regarding delayed food distributions or service delivery problems. Community representatives in Wajir and Isiolo also felt that they had acquired greater status among their peers, as well as aid agency staff, who regarded them as having the tools necessary to fulfil their roles as key liaison figures. Their comments suggest that the mobile handsets had improved power imbalances with field staff, whom they now described as 'colleagues working in the same situation'.

In addition to increased communication, agency staff in Isiolo also highlighted the critical role of increased transparency afforded by the mobile phones and FrontlineSMS in improving working relations. They noted that the weekly market price bulletins – whereby all stakeholders received the same information at the same time – had helped build trust and improve power imbalances in aid relief, at least with regard to information.

A key assumption of all the pilot projects – that they would save the humanitarian organisation time and money – could not be measured during the Learning Review due to a lack of data. Anecdotal evidence in Isiolo and Wajir suggests that, following the distribution of mobile phones to community representatives, agency staff are traveling less to deliver routine and uncomplicated information, and that their productivity has increased as they can reach several community members within a day. However, this was not the case in Voi, where the Learning Review noted that the pilot project complemented rather than substituted

for existing communication processes. Furthermore, a central component of the pilot project, the implementation of FrontlineForms to increase the speed and efficiency of data collection and reduce travel to collect data from community members did not function well. Despite this, many World Vision staff recognise the potential value of the Forms for increasing the timeliness and efficiency of their work.

The Learning Reviews provide interesting insights into the implementation and results of the communication project. Despite a variety of technical and organisational problems, all three pilots were successfully implemented in line with the project proposals. They were well received by community members, community representatives and aid agency staff, and were widely considered to be relevant to communities' information needs. They increased access to practical information to help people improve their health, food and livelihood security, as well as enabling them to make more informed market decisions. For many community members in Wajir and Isiolo, the mobile phones also provided psychosocial support by enabling access to assistance in medical emergencies, and linking people to friends and family. Coverage increased and working relations among stakeholders seemed to improve thanks to the greater transparency afforded by the new technologies and the greater sense of dignity and self-respect they imparted. Although the operational impact of the pilots in Voi could not be assessed, in Isiolo and Wajir community members and agency staff alike asserted that service delivery had noticeably improved.

To improve the review process in the future, infoasaid has recommended more robust monitoring systems, especially with regard to financial data, to analyse the cost-effectiveness of communications projects and their impact on operations. To improve the monitoring and evaluation of communications projects more generally infoasaid has developed a generic M&E framework in collaboration with IFRC, which may help aid agencies better assess the impacts of communication projects.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Several of the lessons gleaned through infoasaid's experience of developing innovative emergency preparedness tools and piloting communication projects have relevance for the humanitarian sector. The first is that delivering a communication response in an emergency requires advance planning and readiness to respond. Communication with affected populations requires experts in communication for development within an agency at HQ and field levels, who can draw on technical ICT expertise, programme specialists and monitoring, evaluation and accountability specialists to ensure that communication serves programme delivery and promotes accountability. At the same time, awareness needs to be increased among programme staff about how communication can serve as a support service to their programmes. Strong partnerships with equipment manufacturers need to be developed and their capacity and willingness to respond to technical problems in the field should be tested prior to an emergency. Although monitoring ultimately depends on each intervention's unique context, understanding whether communication projects are on track could be facilitated by the development of a generic menu of potential qualitative and quantitative, output and outcome indicators covering information provision, dialogue, analysis and verification of feedback and reorientation of programmes, from which selections could be made according to the requirements of a particular communication intervention. Some of this work has already been done by infoasaid in partnership with IFRC, but could be further developed.

In an emergency response the first step should be an information needs and access assessment. A set of generic information needs and access questions have been included in the question bank of the IASC multicluster initial rapid needs assessment. Once a target population has been identified, and if time permits, it is very useful to conduct research into the communication habits of the target population and any potential cultural, social or economic constraints which might limit the uptake



Sheikh Abbas Mohamed, Chairman of Waqberi Village Relief Committee, with his mobile phone and solar charger. 'It is very different from before ... I represent about six zones for the food distribution and can you imagine moving from one zone to another just to pass simple information like when the next food distribution is taking place? Now I can just make a call and I am done.'

of a communication tool. Based on the results of the assessment, a communication strategy with a multichannel approach should be adopted.

Findings from studies in Haiti and Indonesia, as well as the infoasaid pilots, reveal the added value of multiple communication channels in facilitating community engagement and amplifying and reinforcing messages. However, community engagement will only be effective if aid recipients believe that they are being listened to and that their questions, concerns and problems are being addressed. This necessitates that aid agencies create a system to collect community feedback and have staff responsible for verifying, analysing and responding to it.

There is no question that implementing M&E in a crisis is extremely challenging. Research reveals that, in general, projects aimed at increasing communication with affected populations are very rarely evaluated. Yet this is critically important to assess the impact of such projects on the humanitarian aid effort, as well to develop a strong evidence base for lobbying within aid organisations and with donors, to prioritise and resource communication with crisis-affected populations.

Notes

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- 12 For further information on these see T. Beck, *Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*, ALNAP, 2006.

Network Papers 2001–2012

Network Papers are contributions on specific experiences or issues prepared either by HPN members or contributing specialists.

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Good Practice Reviews

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- 1 *Water and Sanitation in Emergencies* by A. Chalinder (1994)
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- 3 *General Food Distribution in Emergencies: from Nutritional Needs to Political Priorities* by S. Jaspars and H. Young (1996)
- 4 *Seed Provision During and After Emergencies* by the ODI Seeds and Biodiversity Programme (1996)
- 5 *Counting and Identification of Beneficiary Populations in Emergency Operations: Registration and its Alternatives* by J. Telford (1997)
- 6 *Temporary Human Settlement Planning for Displaced Populations in Emergencies* by A. Chalinder (1998)
- 7 *The Evaluation of Humanitarian Assistance Programmes in Complex Emergencies* by A. Hallam (1998)
- 8 *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* by K. Van Brabant (2000)
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- 10 *Emergency food security interventions* by Daniel Maxwell, Kate Sadler, Amanda Sim, Mercy Mutonyi, Rebecca Egan and Mackinnon Webster (2008)
- 8 **Revised edition** *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* (2010)
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