

Case Study – ETC/WFP - Internews Partnership

Community Radio Rehabilitation Project

HAITI, 2017

Background

Haiti is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries and the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Hurricane Matthew made landfall on Haiti on 4 October, 2016, more than six years after an earthquake flattened its capital, Port-au-Prince, and impacted three million people. Hurricane Matthew affected 1.125 million people in rural areas along the country's southern coast, killing more than 500 and destroying livelihoods.

Communication with Communities (CwC) is centred on the notion that, especially in humanitarian crises and emergencies, local communities need access to factual, relevant, and timely information in order to make well-informed choices for themselves and their families, and as such, reduce their vulnerability. This is done effectively through two-way communication, providing crisis-affected populations with channels to humanitarian and government actors. Through a CwC model, information and feedback are on a constant loop, allowing humanitarians to adjust their interventions and programming based on gaps and needs expressed by affected communities themselves.

Several weeks after the hurricane and subsequent relief efforts, communities still struggled to recover amid ongoing extreme weather, blocked routes, and an overall underfunded humanitarian response effort. Alongside physical aid items, it became clear that there was also a need for useful, timely information and the ability to communicate. To respond to this need, shortly after the hurricane struck, Internews sent a technical team to affected areas in order to assess damage to local radio stations and equipment. Fifty-two media outlets were directly assessed, with eighteen assessed through cross-checking information about damages remotely. In the most affected areas, many local radios had their broadcasting capacity completely severed. Internews also assessed three of the private radio and television broadcasters based in Port-au-Prince who have extensive coverage throughout the country. Some of those Port-au-Prince-based stations incurred damage to some of their relays, which partially impacted their ability to reach the affected population.

Radio rehabilitation

With mobile phone access significant across Haiti but usage varying in affected areas, literacy at 61% and much of the countryside still flooded or accessible only by air, the majority of Haitians turn to local radio to access important information. Over 70% of the Haitian population listen to radio on a daily basis, which underscores the extent to which local media outlets are crucial in rebuilding efforts, as they are the best placed to provide life-saving information and a platform for affected communities to voice their concerns and engage with different stakeholders in disaster response and recovery. Also local community radios are often trusted or preferred sources of information because they are run by local people.

Internews has a long-standing relationship with local media in Haiti, and in partnership with WFP in its capacity as global lead of the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), were committed to improving the quality of timely and actionable information exchange with Haitian communities affected by Hurricane Matthew in order to reduce their vulnerability, improve protection outcomes and promote accountability in the response.

With over 35 radio outlets taken off-air due to damage incurred after Hurricane Matthew, it became clear that rehabilitating them would significantly impact efforts to bolster communication to affected communities and enable localized engagement. As these media hubs also serve as purveyors of humanitarian information, they are a key component to relief, recovery, and rebuilding efforts after an emergency.

Internews assessed damages and made projections on repairs required to ensure the stations could reach significantly more people in hurricane-affected areas. Many radio stations in the worst-affected areas were still struggling to restore their services some time after initial recovery efforts, due to a lack of basic transmission, power and ICT equipment.

Internews HIS in Haiti & the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster

Emergency Telecommunications Cluster

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) is a global network of humanitarian, private sector and governmental organisations that work together in disasters to provide vital communications services to the humanitarian community. The ETC is one of the 11 clusters designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). In 2015, ETC members adopted the ETC2020 strategy expanding ETC services to ensure that by 2020, all those responding to humanitarian emergencies – including affected communities – have access to vital communications services.

The ETC was not activated in response to Hurricane Matthew. However, as global lead of the ETC, the World Food Programme (WFP) convened the Haiti ICT Working Group, collaborating with government, private sector and humanitarian partners on the ground to ensure a coordinated response. In close collaboration with Ericsson Response, the Government of Luxembourg and WFP, the ETC provided critical Internet connectivity services and electrical support in a total of 16 sites to support the humanitarian responders.

When needs arise to support communication with affected communities, WFP partnered with Internews to support the rehabilitation of community radio stations.

Internews Humanitarian Information Service

[Internews](#) has been present in Haiti since 2006 and works closely with national media partners and in coordination with the Haitian government, as well as with national and international humanitarian and development communities. Internews believes “information is aid” and aims to support and enable two-way communication between humanitarian organizations and the communities they serve, to ensure that affected populations can make well- informed decisions, and humanitarian actors have better information to improve their services.

[Internews’ Humanitarian Information Service in Haiti](#), which ran from October 2016 to February 2017, was a [DFID](#) funded humanitarian project with the goal to improve the quality of timely and actionable information

exchanges with Haitian communities affected by Hurricane Matthew. Internews' two-way communication model relied on gathering feedback from affected populations in order to directly address the issues that concern them the most, and to help humanitarian partners integrate their concerns into their programming and interventions. Through partner coordination and training, on-the-ground teams conducted data gathering and rumor tracking to feed into feedback-based publications for the affected population and for a humanitarian audience.

The Community Radio Rehabilitation Project

After the assessment was completed by Internews, WFP and Internews decided to rehabilitate four radio stations in some of the areas most affected by Hurricane Matthew (Dame Marie & Anse d'Ainault in Grande Anse; Tiburon in the South; and Nippes) and to provide the stations with basic power and Information Technology support, which enabled them to create, receive and transmit content.

This initiative complemented humanitarian efforts in Haiti to provide information to the affected population, by giving community leaders, local authorities, and relevant NGOs the opportunity to leverage the rehabilitated radio stations to broadcast coordinated messages and encourage dialogue on pressing issues affecting local communities.

On a practical level, rehabilitating radios expanded the audience reach of local radio stations, who provide essential information and communication channels to affected communities. For example, when Dame Marie's local station did its own makeshift repairs after the hurricane, it was able to reach around 30,000 people. After rehabilitation, this station was able to reach an additional 93,000 people approximately; meaning a total of more than 120,000, considerably improving the reach of vital information in the affected communities.

Lessons learned

1. **Understanding the local media ecosystem.** It is very often the case that, at some point, a majority of radios in Haiti are used for political reasons. This may occur particularly during a period of an election, as it was in 2016, given that several candidates for political office owned radio stations. When resources are limited and it is not possible to do blanket repairs, some radios will be chosen over others, and in a polarized or tense political setting (which was the case in Jérémie), the situation can become quite sensitive. As such, it is important that there are defined criteria in order to avoid perceived favoritism of radio stations due to their affiliations.
2. **Mobilizing resources from the beginning.** One of the primary lessons learned from the Hurricane Matthew response was that core capacity funding early on is extremely important and is useful to leverage and to coordinate under ETC leadership to get broader results and optimize resources. To optimize this, it requires in-country presence and networks, and an ongoing effort to foster relationships and knowledge about the media landscape. There were some resources available in order to rehabilitate communication infrastructure, and temporary measures were put in place, but efforts would have been considerably more effective and sustainable if funds and core equipment had been mobilized sooner.
3. **Stand-by partnerships.** Once the Internews-WFP/ETC partnership was cemented, there was fast procurement, fast funding, and fast decision making on procurement and the significant at-scale logistics that the interventions at hand implicate. Deploying a Services for Communities specialist to

carry out an assessment enabled the ETC/Haiti ICT working group to first analyse how Haitians communicate and then to identify appropriate and effective projects to support them post-emergency. In this case, it was the collaboration with Internews on rehabilitating the community radio stations. During the rollout the team was able to take advantage of the Logistics Cluster trucks and warehouse facilities to distribute material to the four extremely remote sites. This service was available to all humanitarian actors, including Internews. This partnership born in Haiti is now taken up at the global level in order to explore other joint opportunities of collaboration in support of ETC activities and ETC2020 strategy implementation.

4. **Adapting to the existing local capacity and regulations.** Along with radio transmitters and antennae, Internews and WFP capitalized on the opportunity to rehabilitate the radio stations' energy equipment. Solar panels and batteries were repaired or replaced with next generation technology. There was a concerted effort to not replace equipment that station owners could replace themselves; for example, an inverter is one such item that is easy to purchase and locally maintain. With the purchase of equipment for radio rehabilitation, one dynamic became particularly apparent, which centred on telecommunication regulations in Haiti being lacking or not particularly robust.
5. **Build resilience by adjusting existing systems for longer-term impact.** Over the years many stations in Haiti were awarded certain frequencies for political reasons or through temporary financial arrangements. There are many different radio stations in Haiti, and there are some that operate on too strong a signal, due to this lack of regulation enforcement and some inconsistency in frequency allocation over the years. A widespread assumption among media owners in this domain is that a signal is better if it is more powerful, when in fact with the proper antennae reach can be increased, while simultaneously improving a signal. Accordingly, there are some radios in Haiti that are currently operating on too strong a signal. While engaging in radio rehabilitation, there was an interesting opportunity for course correction in relevant situations: this was taken into consideration during radio rehabilitation, and equipment was provided for what the signal *should* have been, rather than it what it was (if the signal was previously too strong).
6. **Preparedness.** Additionally, provision of new equipment took into account the possibility of radio stations reselling equipment on the market, which was why there are so many criteria for the selection of radios themselves. Considering there was over US\$100,000 of material and services procured, from multiple supplier within Haiti and outside, procurement and customs clearance was relatively quick. In future, time could be saved on procurement by identifying some key suppliers and running a competitive procurement process in advance, establishing long-term agreements (LTAs). An another option could be to pre-position equipment in Dubai where the Global ETC maintains a stock or in-country taking into account constraints such as potential loss and equipment becoming obsolete before the next emergency strikes.
7. **Long-term local media support.** Media organizations, especially small local community radios, need resources in order to survive. Some stations, especially community radio stations, have a strong commitment to public service and are happy to broadcast content produced by humanitarian organizations if the content can serve the local populations. Others may not have the luxury to do free programs for humanitarian organizations and they may need money for airtime and to pay their staff. Most of the people operating community radios in isolated or rural areas are not profiting from it, and when a natural disaster occurs, it very often means that their livelihoods are directly affected. Providing local media outlets with financial support alleviates this common scenario, and

accordingly, the possibility that station operators and journalists will need to seek other means of employment or support. Financial agreements, reporting, or legal arrangements for the purpose of producing and disseminating humanitarian programming should be specified clearly in advance. This type of support does not necessarily have to come in the form of cash: some support can take the form of in-kind contributions for fuel or telecommunications operation costs. Regardless, keeping this in mind also allows for longer term (i.e. six month) planning for humanitarian information initiatives.

Conclusions

Rehabilitation of radios in hurricane-affected areas is an effective entry point to working with local media and local ICT working groups.

Local and national broadcasters in Haiti play a critical role in assisting populations in humanitarian emergencies. Generally speaking, they can:

- Reach thousands of people very quickly;
- Reach areas that are remote or difficult to access and where literacy rates are low;
- Provide life-saving information to help people help themselves;
- Restore calm in tense situations;
- Inspire hope and give people the space to express themselves, sharing their solutions to the new problems they face, asking questions, encouraging resilience;
- Create a collaborative and open environment where communities feel that they have a voice;
- Inform communities about services available to them but also about how humanitarian emergencies operate and make decisions.

For media outlets to play this role, they need accurate information from aid agencies on vulnerabilities, risks, what communities can do to help themselves, and services available to them. As the situation evolves, media can play a key role in facilitating two-way communication with the affected communities through call-in shows, interviews, mobile phones, or via online platforms. With this project Internews and WFP enabled communities in the most affected areas to receive the information they most needed, and to engage with the humanitarian community openly.

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