

Local Media and Community Engagement in Humanitarian Settings



In an information climate as complex as that surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, local information plays a vital role in determining how communities respond to public health orders and guidance.

Alongside the current restrictions we are all subject to, the need for information - especially amongst vulnerable and marginalized groups - is greater than ever before. Currently, humanitarians are grappling with how to continue engaging with communities in a meaningful way - and particularly with harder to reach people who have limited or no access to information channels conducive to social distancing. People need simple, practical information to protect themselves, their families, and communities. They also need ways to elevate their voices and concerns.

Internews' approach to community engagement usually involves a range of mechanisms, many of which are face-to-face. Given the current pandemic context, we are required to adapt our trusted Communicating with Communities methodologies to ensure people have access to information that responds directly to their questions and concerns, thus tackling misinformation and dispelling rumors.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THE INTERNEWS WAY

During this pandemic, when face-to-face interaction is difficult, **trusted and familiar local media outlets and social media influencers are Internews' partners of choice** in facilitating the important two-way communication that communities need to have with their health service providers, aid agencies, and local and national governments - especially in local languages. These trusted local sources and channels have proven in crisis after crisis to be the most effective conduits for the mainstreaming and amplifying of fact-checked information in ways that are appropriately contextualized for vulnerable communities. They are also an invaluable way for communities to provide feedback and ensure their voices are heard.

Internews has always recognized the power of trusted local media as first responders in their communities in times of crisis, and we are already working with hundreds of media outlets and reporters to boost their ability to provide timely and accurate information about COVID19 and its many impacts.

How Media Can Drive Community Engagement In The Era Of Social Distancing



Move Beyond Messaging

In times of health crisis, many government and humanitarian agencies are quick to turn to local media to pump out Public Service Messages, for instance about handwashing, wearing masks, social distancing or reporting Gender Based Violence. While important, these messages do not always cover the full spectrum of what people need to know, and often elicit questions in the audience about how healthy practices can be adopted in difficult situations, for instance where water and masks are in short supply, or where people are living in crowded conditions. We believe that messaging and other informational content is just the first step in developing a two-way communication relationship with their audience. We help local media outlets to identify and manage channels for these questions to be asked and concerns to be raised, discussed, referred to experts and answered.



Experts Need Not be Boring

Internews helps local media to tap into reliable experts in local languages and to make interesting content and program formats from their expertise. Experts can sometimes speak in technical language that is not appealing to a broader audience. On-air hosts and reporters alike can be trained and mentored in how to keep expert content lively and relatable.



Start with Listening

We help local media to adopt formats that actively encourage audience involvement and use these to organise conversations on relevant topics, with an explicit effort to involve less vocal members of the community. Whether audiences call in or send messages, it's important that the media outlet not only calls on their audience to communicate with them, but also shows that they are listening by highlighting and responding to the ideas and contributions they have received.



Get Creative with Social Media

We train local media to increase and diversify all their social media engagement, paying special attention to developing social media outreach on platforms that are favoured by the local community. This could involve training in creative use of Whatsapp or Facebook Live.



Connect Refugees with their Homes

Help local media serving refugees to tap into sources and voices from the home countries of the refugees, or to form relationships with local media outlets in their home countries, or to facilitate information flows and conversations between refugees and their home communities.



Let the audience shape the content

Internews supports partner radio stations to produce dedicated programs that are based on the community perspectives they've collected. This can involve adjustments to editorial meetings and newsroom planning so that editors and reporters become more agile in using ideas and feedback from their audiences to create new content. Allowing the audience to play an active role in shaping the coverage builds trust and grows the audience.



Building Trust is Good for Business

Internews works with local media management to see the potential that the crisis offers to gain trust in the audience and translate that into market share and revenue for the outlet. Whether aid agencies and local authorities are looking to get messages on air, or local vendors wish to communicate their status or sell necessary items, the content needs to remain lively, relevant and engaging for the audience. Media management can be supported to make smart business decisions at this time that can benefit them in the long run.



Develop New Audiences

We support local media in making pro-active efforts to engage people beyond the most vocal members of the community, and to develop formats for and conversations with a variety of groups (e.g. teenage girls, the elderly, youth in and out of school)



Be a Bridge-BUILDER in Crisis Response

Internews builds the capacity and willingness of local media to be able to document community perspectives so they can be logged, analyzed and shared with humanitarian actors (or even local service providers in non-humanitarian settings) in a consistent and continuous way.



Keep Reporters Working Safely

We help journalists' stay safe while doing emergency response reporting. This can include training focusing on safety and security of journalists during a pandemic including use of appropriate clothing, long handle microphones, Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), and remote news gathering techniques.



Find New Partners in the Community

Internews supports creative partnerships between local media and other community crisis-responders. In some situations, there may be loudspeakers available in the local community that may or may not already be in use by local operators who do one-way broadcasting of messages. Programs, clips, messages and other content developed for or by radio stations can be provided for "narrowcasting" in local locations by the informal loudspeaker operators. The operators can also be trained in basic (safe, distanced) interviewing and documentation skills such that they are able to collect feedback on the programs and pass it to media outlets as well as Internews Communicating with Communities (CWC) staff.



Re-think Community Correspondent Roles

In some humanitarian settings like DRC, South Sudan and Uganda, Internews already has CWC teams on the ground that include Community Correspondents, Information Managers and Data Analysts, all of whom have been collecting face-to-face feedback from the communities on different topics. In the time of COVID we have the opportunity to re-purpose some of this work to help local media outlets work more effectively.

Train radio stringers

Where Internews has a team of Community Correspondents (CCs) working, they are already well placed to interact both with the community and humanitarian agencies working there. They can be retrained to become "quasi-stringers" for partner radio stations. Some may develop skills for creating actual reports, others will be able to collect rumours and misinformation which can then be addressed by radio programming or other content



Create LIVE video or audio chats

Community Correspondents may be trained in audio and video production using smartphones that can be used to capture demonstrations of important health practices (like handwashing). The video content creation will be raw, real-time content that can be shared on social media. It will also foster more personal audience engagement.



Collect questions

Where Internews has CWC data analysis capacity available (even if remote), Community Correspondents can collect questions on a weekly basis from people in their close community and share via WhatsApp or using Kobo to channel into Internews' remote data and information management mechanisms.



Generate news bulletins for humanitarian and health actors

Internews can potentially provide a data collection point whereby community feedback collected from Community Correspondents, WhatsApp groups and callers during the live call-in programs are collated into bulletins for circulation to humanitarian and health actors. This gives them insights into the changing needs of the affected population and challenges around service provision, access to information, rights issues etc. that can help them adjust and adapt their programs.

