

Audience Research In A Time Of Cholera: Focus Group & Survey On Haiti's Frontline

Photo by SolidarIT



Researcher Johnson Numa conducts audience research survey with earthquake survivor living in IDP camp

In recent years humanitarian organizations have increasingly recognized the critical role that information plays in saving survivors' lives in crisis situations and empowering them in the recovery phase of disasters. Relief organizations are clearly able to identify a number of key issues that are likely to be important to affected populations such as the location of healthcare facilities or distribution points for food and water. However, they do not know the priorities of those people in terms of information or the ultimate impact of information provision on them. Audience research provides an excellent mechanism for acquiring data on both.

In designing its daily humanitarian information radio program Enfomasyon Nou Dwe Konnen (ENDK – News You Can Use) in Haiti following the January 12, 2010 earthquake, Internews did just that. The research started with focus groups to examine the best mechanisms of communication with and information needs of the affected population. These served as a basis for developing the rolling audience assessment that has been on-going since mid-March, 2010. Every two weeks the research team returns to the same places, including both camps and neighborhoods, to assess if and how people's information needs have changed. The data is then processed by the team using advanced analytical methods. Consequently, Internews has tracked the changing information needs of the affected population by interviewing more than 11,000 people in and around 9 areas of metropolitan Port-au-Prince, as well as Petit-Goâve, and Léogâne, the town at the epicenter of the earthquake. In addition, the research team analyzes SMS texts sent to ENDK. The program receives an average of 50-100 a day, some of which are answered directly in the "mailbox" portion of the program. As with the audience survey, these also serve as a source of information about the affected population's information needs.

The results of these studies feed directly into the newsroom planning for

ENDK's daily programming which reaches up to 70% of the Haitian population via approximately 40 radio station partners. Very unusually, the ENDK radio program, as a humanitarian communications project, responds directly to the affected population's articulated needs, representing a true two-way information flow.

Since 21 January 2010, ENDK has produced approximately 1000 magazine features. The broadcast output of ENDK has paralleled the findings of the research team on the Haitian population's changing information needs: immediate post-earthquake, people sought information on the location and availability of health services. In February, their concerns shifted to food, food distribution and education. March information demands were for earthquake-related topics, specifically after-shocks and/or the likelihood of another large quake. Settlement and relocation of IDPs was the dominate topic in April. In May, Haitians turned their informa



An ENDK journalist interviews children for a radio program.
(Photo by Benoit Cassegrain and Rosemond Lorumus)



Internews is an international media development organization established in 1982. It has worked in over 70 countries worldwide. Its mission is to empower local media worldwide to provide people with the news and information that they need, the ability to connect, and the means to make their voices heard. Internews provides vital humanitarian information to up to 70% of the Haitian population via its daily radio programme, ENDK which is broadcast by over 35 radio stations across the country. Internews' work in Haiti is supported by the USAID's OTI, UN OCHA, the Knight and MacArthur Foundations, the Centre de Crise of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission.

tion demands to the hurricane season. In June, Haitians, along with the rest of the world, turned their attention to the World Cup. July, the top concern was once again health, which consistently along with education, housing and employment are the most demanded information themes. Elections, health, and education in the month of August vied for the top-spots. These concerns all gave way in the autumn to urgent - and ongoing - needs for information on the cholera epidemic, and, for a period in November - on Hurricane Tomas, which have been faithfully mirrored in ENDK's programming schedule.

That the Internews' project has accomplished its goals is evident through the results of a second set of focus groups conducted in July 2010 following six months of ENDK broadcasts. Results showed that whereas in February, one month after the ENDK's inception, only 80% of participants knew of the radio program, in July 100% were aware of its existence. More importantly, focus group participants were able to identify key pieces of information that they had integrated into their daily lives, such as how to protect oneself during an earthquake or hurricane; how to properly set up a tent/tarp for maximum protection against the elements; how to prevent malaria by using a mosquito net and getting rid of any standing water; how to prevent diarrheal diseases by washing hands regularly and only drinking potable water.

The project has also been more broadly successful as evidenced by the multiple ways published results are used in addition to informing ENDK's newsroom planning. The research reports are distributed widely on a fortnightly basis to the UN clusters and to all agencies working on the relief and recovery process including the Haitian government and local NGOs. The fact that they are compiled with statistical rigor has led to their use as the basis for the communications strategies by a range of organizations, such as HelpAge International, that have come to value the power of audience research. As a consequence, several, including United Nations Office of Project

Services (UNOPS), International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), and International Organization for Migration (IOM), have been working collaboratively with the Internews research team to implement a survey on the affected population's understanding of key cholera prevention messages, which is informing current messaging strategies on the epidemic. In collaboration with the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Haiti coordination initiative, Internews has also trained staff from several organizations - the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), IOM and the International Medical Corps (IMC) for instance - desiring to implement their own

studies using focus group research. Another, unanticipated impact of the audience research initiative is that Haiti now has 18 staff trained in audience research methodology and practice. As a direct result of their work with Internews, they are now developing their own independent research firm that will serve both the humanitarian community and Haiti's media sector, which urgently needs professionally sound and credible metrics to attract quality advertising revenue. A core group of 5 Haitian researchers have moved into senior management roles within the team. Current Head of Research, Franck Lafont says that his new leadership role has helped him to "better develop his capacity in research planning and organization." Louisena Louis, another member of the management team stated that "today I can say that with the Internews research office I have started a new career."

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