

# The Dominica Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA):

How the flow of information impacts  
disaster preparedness and response



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## List of Acronyms

CDEMA	Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency
CBN	Cable Broadcasting Network
DBS	Dominica Broadcasting Corporation
DMCA	Dominica Media and Communications Association
DNO	Dominica News Online
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GIS	Government Information Service
IEA	Information Ecosystem Assessment
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews

NEPO	National Emergency Planning Organizations
NHC	National Hurricane Center
ODM	Office of Disaster Management
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
UN	United Nations



# 01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**An information ecosystem can be defined as the system through which information flows within a community;** that is, the system through which information is received from one source and passed on to other sources through various channels such as word of mouth, the phone, the internet, television etc. This ecosystem plays a critical role in helping persons prepare and respond to emergencies, disasters and crises and helps them to make better decisions as it relates to protecting themselves and their families. As such, given the Caribbean's vulnerability to natural disasters such as Hurricanes and Earthquakes, **this information ecosystem assessment was conducted to determine how the flow of information within Dominican communities helps persons in their response and readiness to crises and disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## In particular, the investigation sought to:

1 Determine the information needs of individuals and communities across Dominica and the extent to which those needs are met.

2 Identify what infrastructures are in place to support the production and flow of information.

3 Determine the means via which Dominicans generally access information.

4 Evaluate the extent to which individuals and communities have access to key information channels.

5 Identify the sources of information that are most influential and trusted in Dominica.

6 Ascertain how information is processed and used among Dominicans.

7 Examine the impact that the types of information disseminated to the public has on the lives of individuals and communities.

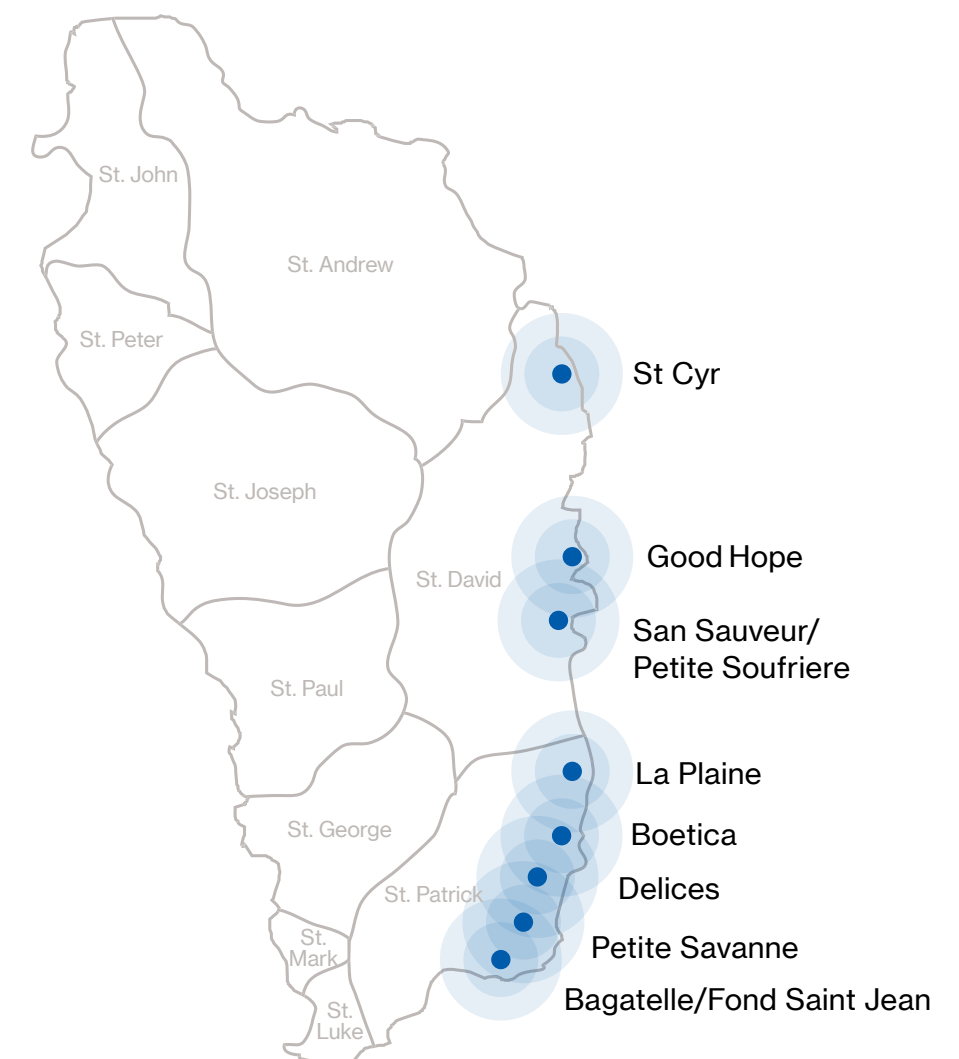
In carrying out the investigation, a mixed methods approach was adopted. Altogether, five focus group sessions comprising a total of twenty-five (25) participants of diverse professions were conducted; five media professionals who work at some of the most influential media outlets in Dominica were interviewed; a survey instrument, comprising of approximately eighty (80) questions, was used to collect data from a total of 208 individuals who reside in various communities across the island (e.g., Good Hope, San Sauveur/Petite Soufriere, and St Cyr); and desk research was conducted to garner information on the media landscape of Dominica.

  
**25 Participants**  
Diverse Professions

  
**5 Media Professionals**  
Influential Media Outlets

  
**80 Questions**  
Survey

  
**208 Individuals**  
Various Communities





## 1.1 Overview of Key Findings and Recommendations

Analysis of the information obtained via these methods revealed the following key findings [also see *Table 1.1* for a more detailed summary of the findings]:

- 1) Dominicans generally have access to the information that they need to make informed decisions, especially as it relates to disaster preparation and response. Despite having timely access to disaster-related information, however, some persons continue to act complacent and either fail or refuse to prepare for impending disasters.
- 2) Access to information during times of disasters is especially challenging as a result of disruptions to utility services and communication channels, as well as damages to the road infrastructure caused by disasters.
- 3) The health and integrity of the information ecosystem in Dominica is currently being threatened by several undesirable properties [see *Section 5* for additional details], including:
  - The poor quality of the radio, internet, and mobile network coverage in some communities across Dominica;
  - The unavailability of internet, mobile and television service in some communities;
  - The proliferation of fake news and propaganda shared on social media and other online platforms;
  - Residents' lack of access to the key information channels;
  - The biased and politically polarizing nature of the information disseminated to Dominicans;
  - Residents' lack of access to information from local authorities caused by bureaucratic government processes, unavailability/inaccessibility of local authorities, and power dynamics between politicians and journalists;
  - The inability of some Dominicans to identify malicious/inaccurate information;
  - The news sources' tendency to report erroneous information; and,
  - The deterioration of trust among Dominicans in their main information sources.

In light of the above discoveries, it is recommended that the key stakeholders, particularly: the local authorities, media, and the citizens, make a concerted effort to strengthen Dominica's information ecosystem, and in turn the nation's resilience against the impacts of future crises and disasters. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

### Government and its stakeholders:

- In collaboration with other local authorities, develop and adopt a communication strategy that seeks to ensure that all Dominicans, regardless of their political affiliations and socioeconomic status, have timely access to all news and information that have implications for their lives;
- Invest in more disaster resilient radio systems, such as amateur radio, and facilitate training in their usage to help with improving information access during times of disaster;
- Develop a measure of public complacency to assess and monitor key preparedness elements such as evacuation efforts, use of emergency shelters and refilling of emergency supplies;
- Ensure that during times of crises and emergencies, messages are tailored in such a way that convince the public that they are in immediate, personal danger and therefore need to take action;
- Seek to provide accurate and timely information on emerging disasters using communication styles that are tailored to special populations (e.g., elders, children, and persons with disabilities etc.) and communication channels that are preferred and/or accessible by all.

### The Media

- In collaboration with local authorities, host public awareness campaigns to enlighten Dominicans on the issue of misinformation and disinformation and how to go about discerning the difference between credible and false or misleading information;
- Commit to strengthening the quality of their journalism.

### Citizens of Dominica:


- Make it their responsibility to scrutinize the credibility of the information disseminated to them.

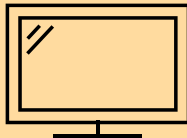

Table 1.1: Summary of Key Findings

<div>Production and Movement of Information</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>For Dominicans, the information channels most frequently used to access and consume information are the radio (79.8%), social media (58.2%) and face-to-face conversations (54.3%).</li><li>Radio (87.9%) and face-to-face conversations (63.6%) are the most used information channels among persons living with disabilities.</li><li>Dominicans' use of a particular information channel is in some cases influenced by the location in which they reside, as phone, radio, TV, and internet services are only accessible in some areas of the island.</li><li>Among the various social media platforms used by the Dominican respondents, WhatsApp (53.8%) and Facebook (47.6%) were reported to be the most frequently used for information access.</li><li>Although social media has been instrumental in increasing Dominicans' access to information, the proliferation of fake news and propaganda shared on the platforms is undermining the credibility of the information shared across the island.</li><li>Local family and friends (78.8%) and local radio/TV personalities (72.6%) were identified by the respondents as their main sources of information.</li><li>Local radio/TV personalities were identified by the respondents as the most trusted sources for accurate information about COVID-19 and disasters and emergencies.</li></ul>
<div>Dominicans' Information Needs</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Across the four (4) main information channels – radio, television, phone, and the internet – community/parish matters, national/country affairs, preparing for disasters, the weather, and local COVID-19 information were consistently among the top five (5) topics/issues which respondents generally accessed and needed more information.</li><li>The majority of the respondents indicated that having access to information related to COVID-19, as well as disaster and emergency situations, is 'important' or 'very important' (COVID-19 = 89.2%; Disasters/Emergencies = 97.6%).</li><li>The majority (84%) of the survey respondents indicated that their current knowledge of disaster and emergency preparedness is sufficient to ensure their safety and the safety of their loved ones, while 16% indicated otherwise.</li></ul>

<div>Dominicans' Access to Information</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Overall, 90.9% of the survey respondents indicated that they have access to a phone, while 84.1% reported having access to a radio, 76.4% indicated having access to the internet, and 63% conveyed that they have access to a television.</li><li>Among the respondents who indicated that they owned a phone (N = 177), 83.6% of them reported owning a smartphone, while 21.5% indicated that they owned a mobile phone, and 3.4% reported having a landline.</li><li>The majority of the respondents (84.1%) reported having mobile network coverage in the areas in which they reside. Of the 7.7% who indicated that they currently live in an area that has no or poor mobile network coverage, a few of them explained that the service fluctuates and is unreliable, while others indicated they have to travel to make a voice call or send a message.</li><li>For those respondents who indicated that they did not have access to the internet (23.6%), the primary reasons voiced were a lack of finances and the unavailability of internet service in their area of residence due to the impact of Tropical Storm Erika (2015) and Hurricane Maria (2017).</li><li>Access to information from local authorities is sometimes a challenge for laypersons and the media.</li><li>As a result of disruptions in utility services and communication channels, as well as damages to the road infrastructure caused by disasters, Dominicans tend to experience challenges accessing information during a disaster.</li><li>The main barriers to information access in Dominica are lack of access to electricity, inability to pay for mobile service, and poor (or lack of) mobile network coverage.</li><li>Persons living with disabilities are especially challenged in accessing information due to their lack of access to the key information channels, poor service coverage, and lack of finance.</li></ul>
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<div>Use of Information</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Upon receiving information, it is customary for Dominicans to share it with others, preferably via word-of-mouth or social media.</li><li>• Dominicans' tendency to verify information prior to sharing varies from person to person and depends on the perceived credibility of the information source.</li></ul>
<div>Impact of Information</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The politically polarizing nature of the information disseminated to Dominicans by the various news and information outlets is negatively impacting the nation's trust in information and is the cause of division among the citizens.</li><li>• Access to disaster-related information is instrumental in helping Dominicans better prepare and respond to future events, and in facilitating humanitarians in their efforts to assist the nation, as well as other Caribbean islands in their response to and recovery from such events.</li><li>• As a result of a number of factors, including the COVID-19 Pandemic, lack of emergency shelters in some communities, and infrastructural issues across the island, Dominicans are not fully prepared for future disasters.</li></ul>

<div>Social Trust</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dominicans' trust in their information sources varies from person to person and from source to source, with some indicating that they largely trust their main sources of information, and some noting that they somewhat trust or have little to no trust in their news and information sources.</li><li>• Dominicans' trust in their main information sources has deteriorated over the years due to several reasons including: the apparent competition between the news sources to be the first to release information, the news sources' tendency to report erroneous information, and the biased and political nature of the information disseminated.</li><li>• Dominicans often encounter misinformation and disinformation both on their online information platforms and in traditional media.</li><li>• In addition to having received disinformation about the La Soufriere volcanic eruption, Hurricane Maria, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the COVID-19 vaccine, Dominicans reported often receiving it about people, people's death, and during elections.</li><li>• While some Dominicans are able to identify malicious/inaccurate information, some are unable to do so, and as a result are sometimes emotionally and psychologically distressed by it.</li></ul>
<div>Influencers</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Among the numerous sources from whom Dominicans access/receive information, the government was identified as the most influential.</li></ul>



# 02 BACKGROUND



The Caribbean is one of the areas in the world that is increasingly vulnerable to high-impact disastrous events. Over the last five decades, Caribbean people have been subjected to more than five hundred (500) of such events, inclusive of category V hurricanes, droughts, floods, storms, volcanic eruptions, tropical cyclones, and earthquakes.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>Given the frequency of occurrence of these events and the severe impact they tend to have on people's livelihood, there is an urgent need to strengthen the region's capacity to prepare for and respond to these events more effectively.

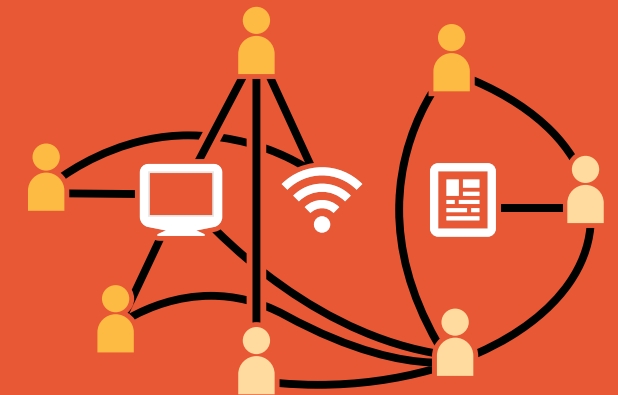
One crucial way in which the Caribbean region can improve its preparedness for and response to these events is by strengthening its *information ecosystem* (see *Section 2.1* below for more details on the information ecosystem). During times of emergencies or disasters, the information ecosystem plays a vital role in equipping individuals and communities with information that shapes their understanding of and response to the specific event. Armed with pertinent information relating to a disaster or emergency in a timely manner, people are better able to make decisions as it relates to protecting themselves and their family. This in turn serves to reduce panic among the population, mitigate loss of life, lessen the adverse impact of the specific event, and preserve human dignity.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, when the information ecosystem is weak, it inhibits persons' access to accurate and relevant information. For instance, even when information is made available to the population, with a weak ecosystem, situations can arise whereby individuals and groups are unable to access and use such information due to a number of reasons, including: their socioeconomic status, physical and mental disabilities, ethnicity, and existing social inequalities.<sup>4</sup> This is especially likely to occur among individuals from poorer households and can significantly jeopardize their well-being and livelihood by hindering their preparedness, response, and recovery from disasters and emergencies.<sup>5 6</sup>

Hence, given the importance of access to information, especially to emergency or disaster preparedness and response, it is critical to examine the health of the information systems – the access, sourcing, flow and trust around information movement – in Dominica. It is anticipated that the findings from this research effort will facilitate greater understanding of: how persons in Dominica access and use information during times of crisis or emergency, the extent to which

individuals or communities across Dominica have access to the various information channels, the sources of information that are deemed influential and trusted, the gaps in information that exist, the extent to which the production and flow of information is supported, and the impact that the types of information disseminated to the public has on the lives of individuals and communities. In turn, this is expected to facilitate efforts to strengthen the information ecosystem in Dominica.

## 2.1 Overview of the Information Ecosystem

An information ecosystem is the adaptive system through which information flows within a community or space.



More specifically, it is a constantly evolving and dynamic system via which information is received from one source and passed on to others, whether through word of mouth, the phone, the internet, radio, and television etc.<sup>7</sup> An Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) therefore examines the flow, trust, use and impact of news and information, and aids in the identification of the most effective methods and channels to use in designing two-way communication strategies to meet the information needs of any given community. IEAs involve an examination of media access and consumption, as well as an evaluation of information needs, information creation, and information distribution that constantly evolve, adapt and regenerate according to a community's needs and challenges.<sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup>The eight (8) critical components of the information ecosystem are depicted in *Figure 2.1*.

<sup>1</sup> Bello, O., Bustamante, A., & Pizarro, P. (2021). Planning for disaster risk reduction within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. United Nations ECLAC. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46639/1/S2000452\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46639/1/S2000452_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations World Food Programme. (2019). Barbados Annual Country Report 2019: Country Strategic Plan 2018-2020. United Nations World Food Programme. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000113846/download/>.

<sup>3</sup> Article 19. (2005). *Humanitarian disasters and information rights: Legal and ethical standards on freedom of expression in the context of disaster response*. London, UK: Article XIX Publication. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/freedom-of-information-humanitarian-disasters.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Savoia, E., Lin, L., & Viswanath, K. (2013). Communications in public health emergency preparedness: A systematic review of the literature. *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense strategy, practice, and science*, 11(3), 170-184. doi:10.1089/bsp.2013.0038

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4 for reference.

<sup>6</sup> Internews. (2015a). *Why information matters: A foundation for resilience*. Internews. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from [https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/150513-Internews\\_WhyInformationMatters.pdf](https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/150513-Internews_WhyInformationMatters.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 6 for reference.

<sup>8</sup> Internews Humanitarian. (n.d). *Information Ecosystem Assessments*. Retrieved June 25, 2021, from Internews Humanitarian: <https://humanitarian.internews.org/information-ecosystem>.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 6 for reference.

Figure 2.1: The eight critical dimensions of an information ecosystem



Source: Internews. (2015). Why information matters: A foundation for resilience.

### 1. Information Needs

Information Needs refer to the different types of information that are valued and needed by persons within various communities. Information needs are dynamic and can vary/change over time, and even within a particular situation such as a crisis or a disaster.

### 2. Information Landscape

The information landscape refers to the physical and institutional infrastructures that support the production and flow of information; for example: media outlets, distribution systems, production units, and the government.

### 3. Production and Movement

Production and Movement refers to the “who” and the “how” of information. Hence, it refers to who generates and disseminates the information (information sources) and how that information is passed on to and received by others (information channels).

### 4. Dynamics of Access

Information access seeks to address the ways in which people obtain the information they need, and the level of risk undertaken to do so. Access to information is especially critical during times of crises or disasters, and hence it is critical to evaluate the channels through which information is accessed, as well as the potential barriers to information access.

### 5. Use of Information

Information use seeks to address how information is processed and applied by individuals once it is received; for instance, whether they verify information prior to sharing, or use it to make life decisions.

### 6. Impact of Information

This dimension looks at whether some form of behavior change occurs as a result of the information received.

### 7. Social Trust

The social trust dimension looks at the extent to which one believes that the information disseminated by their various sources is reliable and trustworthy.

### 8. Influencers

Influencers are defined as the people, organizations and institutions that shape how information flows within society.

<sup>10</sup> Definitions are adapted from the references indicated at footnote 8, as well as: Internews. (2021). Internews information ecosystem analysis: A human-centered approach. Retrieved June 26, 2021, from Internews: [https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Internews\\_Information\\_Ecosystem\\_Assessments.pdf](https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Internews_Information_Ecosystem_Assessments.pdf), and Internews. (2015b). Mapping information ecosystems to support resilience. Retrieved June 26, 2021, from Internews: [https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/resources/Internews\\_Mapping\\_Information\\_Ecosystems\\_2015.pdf](https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/resources/Internews_Mapping_Information_Ecosystems_2015.pdf)

## 2.2 Country Profile – Dominica

Located between the French territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique, Dominica is the largest and most mountainous of the Windward Islands in the Caribbean. As such, it is well known for its pristine wilderness, tropical forests, and its many rivers, streams, waterfalls, and springs, as well as its thermally active lake. Stretching just over 751km<sup>2</sup> (290 sq.m), it is comprised of ten (10) parishes, namely: St. Andrew, St. David, St. George, St. John, St. Joseph, St. Luke, St. Mark, St. Patrick, St. Paul, and St. Peter, and its largest and most vibrant city is Roseau.

While its official language is English, among its population of 71,808 (2019 est.),<sup>11</sup> there are some who also communicate in French Patois. Given its mountainous landscape, the island's economy is largely driven by agriculture. Unfortunately, the island lies in the path of hurricanes and as such its agricultural sector is vulnerable to the hazards of severe weather conditions. The extent of this was witnessed in 2015 and 2017 when Tropical Storm Erika and Hurricane Maria, respectively, devastated the island, causing severe damage to the island's infrastructure, roads, communications, houses, power supply, and crucial agricultural areas.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Additionally, with Dominica being home to the highest number of volcanoes in the Caribbean (N = 9), it is susceptible to future volcanic activity and the related risk of earthquakes, and given its topography and location, it is also prone to flash floods and landslides. Given this reality and the expectation of it worsening with ongoing climate change, the past few years have seen the island's government investing heavily in disaster-resilient projects with the aim of strengthening its resilience to natural disasters.<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> As Dominica strives to do this and recover from the impact of Tropical Storm Erika and Hurricane Maria however, its economy is again being affected by the



COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, even though there is no current data available on its unemployment rate or its poverty level, it is safe to assume that given the fall in output and government revenue, unemployment and poverty levels have recently worsened, as is the case for the rest of the world.



<sup>11</sup> The World Bank Group. (2019a). Population total - Dominica. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from World Bank Open Data: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=DM>

<sup>12</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. (2021). Dominica. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from The World FactBook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/dominica/>

<sup>13</sup> International Monetary Fund. (2018, September 05). Dominica: 2018 article IV consultation-press release and staff report. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from International Monetary Fund: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2018/09/05/Dominica-2018-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-and-Staff-Report-46204>

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 13 for reference.

<sup>15</sup> International Monetary Fund. (2019, June 26). Building resilience in developing countries vulnerable to large natural disasters. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from International Monetary Fund: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2019/06/24/Building-Resilience-in-Developing-Countries-Vulnerable-to-Large-Natural-Disasters-47020>

# 03 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



To examine the health of Dominica's information ecosystem, data was collected on its eight (8) dimensions, particularly relating to: **Dominican's information needs, the country's information landscape, the information channels most accessible and often used by Dominicans, how they process and use information, and the sources of information that are deemed influential and trusted.** In collecting the data, a mixed methods approach was adopted, including virtual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and desk research. Further details on the methods used are discussed in the following sub-sections.

## 3.1 Interviews



1. Interviewed 17 individuals on average
2. Collect data from at least one person from the communities/ villages of Good Hope, San Sauveur/Petite Soufriere, St Cyr, La Plaine, Boetica, Delices, Bagatelle/Fond Saint Jean, and Petite Savanne



1. Access and consumption habits of Radio, Broadcast/Cable TV and Streaming Services, Phone (Landline, Mobile and Smartphone) and Internet
2. Information needs
3. Interaction and feedback from local authorities
4. Information channels and sources; and demography



1. At least one person from 8 communities/ villages
2. At least 3 persons from Kalinago Community
3. At least 3 persons with no internet
4. At least 2 persons with disabilities
5. At least 2 single-adult headed households
6. At least 2 elderly persons (65 years and older)
7. At least 1 household with 3 or more children under the age of 21
8. At least 1 person on welfare/unemployed
9. At least 1 migrant/immigrant

Tables 7.1 and 7.2 (see Appendix A) provide a breakdown of the demographics for the survey participants from Dominica and the number of survey respondents from each of the groups assessed.







### 3.2 Focus Group and Key Informant Interviews

Five focus group discussions were hosted with residents of Dominica to gain further information from them as it relates to: information flows and trends, information and news consumption, crisis- and disaster-specific information consumption, social media usage, and the issue of misinformation and disinformation. The focus group participants were primarily sourced from the professional and social networks of some of the Dominican researchers. Although a total of forty-three (43) individuals agreed to participate in the focus group sessions, on completion of the five sessions, a total of twenty-five (25) individuals actually participated. These participants were diverse in their profession (e.g., accounting clerk, farmer/entrepreneur, Environmental Health Officer, tour guide, and Police officer, etc.), age (range = 20 - 65; M = 41.4), and place of residence (e.g., Canefield, Bath Estate, Kings Hill, Morne Bruce, and Mahaut) and the majority were women (N = 76%).

In addition, five (5) key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with professionals in the media to garner information relating to the media landscape in Dominica, information and communication trends and needs of Dominicans, news consumption trends on social media, the issue of misinformation and disinformation, and crisis and disaster-specific information. Interviewees were sourced from some of the major media houses/influencers in Dominica, inclusive of: Dominica News Online, The Chronicle, Dominica Media and Communications Association, Nature Isle News and Dominica Broadcasting Corporation. Altogether the interviewees comprised of two (2) women and three (3) men, with careers in the media landscape spanning over twenty (20) years. *Table 3.1* presents an overview of the contents of each of the data collection methods.



Table 3.1: Overview of the Data Collection Methods utilized for the IEA

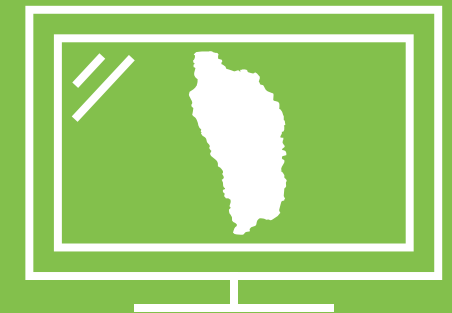
Data Collection Method	Type of Data	Sample Characteristics
Interviews with Survey Instrument	Access and consumption habits of Radio, Broadcast/Cable TV and Streaming Services, Phone and Internet; information needs; interaction and feedback from local authorities; information channels and sources; demography.	Information Vulnerable populations and communities in Dominica.
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	News consumption habits; social media usage; information needs; disinformation and misinformation; information flows and trends.	Laypersons, representatives from a wide variety of industries.
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	Media landscape; information and communication trends and needs; disinformation and misinformation; news consumption trends on social media.	Persons operating in the media landscape.
Desk Research	Media landscape of Dominica	N/A

### 3.3 Limitations

This study experienced a few challenges and limitations. Firstly, the length of the survey instrument proved to be a hindrance, as both the interviewers and interviewees became fatigued during the interview process. Secondly, due to telecommunications issues affecting the island, the focus group participants were limited to persons who had access to technology, as well as some form of internet access. Given this challenge, along with the small sample size, care should be exercised in generalizing the findings of the study to the entire population of Dominica.



# 04 DOMINICA MEDIA LANDSCAPE REVIEW



Dominica has a wide variety of media types, the most popular of which is the Radio. The state-owned Dominica Broadcasting Corporation (DBS) was the first to be established in 1979, followed by Kairi FM and Q95 in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> The Radio Stations within the island are public, private and community-based, primarily operate on the FM band, and broadcast a wide variety of content including music, news and information talk shows.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup>Most programmes tend to be broadcasted in English, although DBS broadcasts a two hour show in Creole. There are also a few online radio stations accessible across the island. Dominica is a very politically polarising community, and this is reflected in its media landscape. Kairi FM, though private, is considered to be aligned with the government, while Q95 (also privately owned) is considered to be aligned with the opposition.<sup>19</sup> However, the two community radio stations, Radio En Ba Mango and Possie Vibrations, are important in counterbalancing the weight given to information emanating from the capital of Roseau.<sup>20</sup>

Similar to other Caribbean territories, Dominica has no daily newspaper, but rather “weeklies” which are published by the two printed newspapers: The Chronicle (which publishes every Friday) and the Sun (which publishes

every Monday).<sup>21</sup> Online News Portals and Newspapers have emerged in recent times as a popular medium in Dominica to supplement the two printed newspapers, the most popular of which are Dominica News Online (DNO) and Emo News. Both printed newspapers (The Sun and the Chronicle) also have an online presence.

Dominica News Online was the first online media house in the country, and its readers have more than tripled over the last few years.<sup>22</sup> Other types of online media include the Domnitjen magazine and ComeSeeTV, an online paid streaming platform. In addition to the rise in online media, there has been an increase in social media usage; active social media users have increased from 39,000 in 2020 (54% penetration) to 42,000 in 2021 (58.3% penetration), representing a 7.7% increase in users.<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup>

Telecommunications in Dominica has significantly changed over the years due to acquisitions, mergers, and natural disasters. Marpin Telecoms & Broadcasting, Orange Dominica Ltd and SAT Telecommunications were all major players in the telecommunications industry before they were each acquired by Cable & Wireless Communications (the parent company of FLOW) and Digicel. As the two sole players in the telecommunications industry, both Flow and Digicel offer mobile, fixed line and broadband services to its subscribers (prior to Hurricane Maria, TV services were also offered but restoring such services post-Maria

have proven to be challenging). Mobile phone connections were 83,800 in 2020 (52% of which were on broadband [3G-5G]) and 84,900 in 2021 (64.6% of which were on broadband), while internet users also increased slightly during this period from 50,100 in 2020 (70% penetration) to 50,200 in 2021 (69.6% penetration). However, the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Erika in 2015 resulted in a massive decline in landline subscriptions. In 2015, landline subscriptions were 20,585, but are now a mere 2,660.<sup>25</sup>

As previously stated, media in Dominica is heavily politicized which creates several challenges including: self-censorship of journalists, access to information (since government tends to give first access to the media house that supports them), how information from different media sources is assimilated by the general public and subtle forms of victimization of journalists at the hands of government.<sup>26</sup> It has also been noted that since reporters tend to stay within the confines of Roseau (where the national radio stations are based) and do not engage in much on the ground reporting across the island, many outside the capital do not feel represented by what is broadcast on the radio.<sup>27</sup> Despite these challenges however, it is generally acknowledged that the media has a crucial role to play in Dominica. Local journalists specifically are seen as playing an important role both as “mediators” between the community and national and international actors, and as a crucial resource for facilitating communication in communities in times of crisis.<sup>28</sup>

## 4.1 Information Vulnerability in Dominica

It is widely acknowledged that survival and recovery of individuals post disaster depends on access to timely and accurate information, thus making communication a critical resource during times of disaster.<sup>29</sup> When there is a lack of access to information, rumors tend to emerge to fill this information void which also exacerbates risk within these communities. This was evident in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017. This storm ravaged the country, causing millions of dollars in damages and deaths and highlighted the vulnerability of the island regarding access to information during times of disaster.<sup>30</sup> During the aftermath of Maria, many were worried by the lack of information in the early days after the onset of the storm and frustrated by communication delays, lack of detail and inaccuracy in the communication received, and the circulation of a multiplicity of rumors. Many also complained that information was “one-way, piecemeal, too late, confusing, and in the wrong language – that leaves people in the dark about when, where, and from whom assistance is coming”.<sup>31</sup> One saving grace during the period, however, was Amateur radio (Ham radio), which became a crucial link between otherwise isolated communities and the outside world.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ACAPS. (2017). Dominica Country Profile. ACAPS. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from [https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20171019\\_acaps\\_dominica\\_country\\_profile\\_0.pdf](https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20171019_acaps_dominica_country_profile_0.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> CDAC Network. (2018). A learning review of communications and community engagement during the Hurricane Maria Response in Dominica. CDAC Network. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/contentAsset/raw-data/4ff05ee5-d604-4c23-a16e-9d1aa2acb5db/attachedFile>.

<sup>18</sup> Wimarck, K., & Lodin, A. K. (2015). A free but afraid press: A comparative study about limitations, challenges and possibilities for journalists operating in Dominica and Saint Lucia [Bachelor's thesis, Södertörn University]. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A840239&dsid=view.er>.

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 18 for reference.

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 17 for reference.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 16 and 18 for references.

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 18 for reference.

<sup>23</sup> Kemp, S. (2020, February 17). Digital 2020: Dominica. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from DataReportal: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-dominica>

<sup>24</sup> Kemp, S. (2021, February 11). Digital 2021: Dominica. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from DataReportal: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-dominica>

<sup>25</sup> See footnotes 23 and 24 for references.

<sup>26</sup> The World Bank Group. (2019b). Fixed telephone subscriptions - Dominica. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from World Bank Open Data: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.MLT.MAIN?locations=DM>

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 18 for reference.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 17 for reference.

<sup>29</sup> See footnote 17 for reference.

<sup>30</sup> Casey-Maslen, M. (2018, September 17). A lesson from Hurricane Maria: Communicate!. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from The New Humanitarian: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2018/09/17/lesson-hurricane-maria-communicate>

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 30 for reference.

<sup>32</sup> Porter, K. (2018, January 5). Broadcasters, hurricanes and recovery in the Caribbean. Retrieved March 08, 2021, from Public Media Alliance: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/broadcasters-hurricanes-recovery-caribbean/>

# 05 KEY FINDINGS



## 5.1 Production and Movement of Information

A healthy information ecosystem is generally characterized by a multitude of channels via which information is disseminated to the public, as well as sources from whom the information is generated. In Dominica, information is often disseminated to the public from information sources such as: the government, local friends/families, community leaders and local radio personalities via the information channels: social media, radio, the internet, face-to-face conversations, and the phone. The following subsections identify the most popular information channels and sources among Dominicans.

### 5.1.1 Radio: The Most Used Information Channel among Dominicans

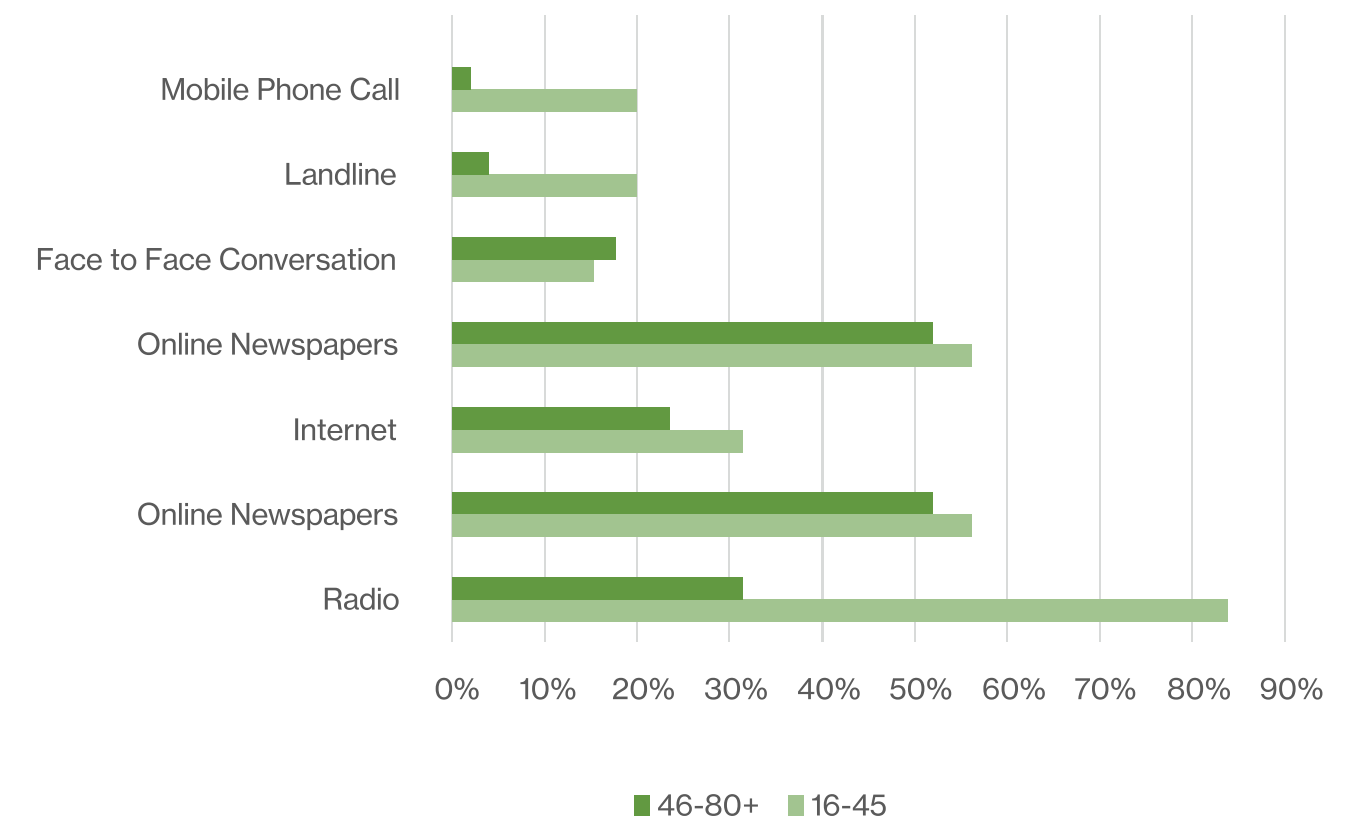
Among the survey respondents, the information channels most frequently used to access and consume information were the radio (79.8%), followed by social media (58.2%), face-to-face conversations (54.3%), and the internet (49.5%). The same channels emerged as the most frequently used to obtain information relating to COVID-19 and disasters or emergencies, with the radio (COVID-19 = 76.9%, disaster/emergency = 77.9%) again identified as the most used. Explaining why the radio is such a popular information channel, one focus group respondent noted the following:

“For us the elders, we know that radio will never fail us. It has never failed us, whereas social media, the telephone, the cellular phones – they will fail.... When you are looking at sources of information that you will get information from that will be reliable and consistent, we look at the radio stations. However, the internet will give you information instantaneously. But when a disaster strikes, these systems will fail. And so, radio frequency, as has been proven, will stand the test after a disaster and information will be shared and will continue to be shared on these platforms.”  
– Man, NGO representative

### 5.1.2 Social Media and Internet: The Most Used Information Channel among Persons Who Fall in the 16-45 Age Group

Also of importance to note was the finding that social media (83.8%) and the internet (75.2%) were more often used by the survey respondents who fell in the 18-45 age category than those who fell in the 46-80+ age group. Those in the latter category reported mostly relying on the radio (88.2%) and face-to-face conversations (52%) for their news and information. Please see *Figure 5.1* for further details.

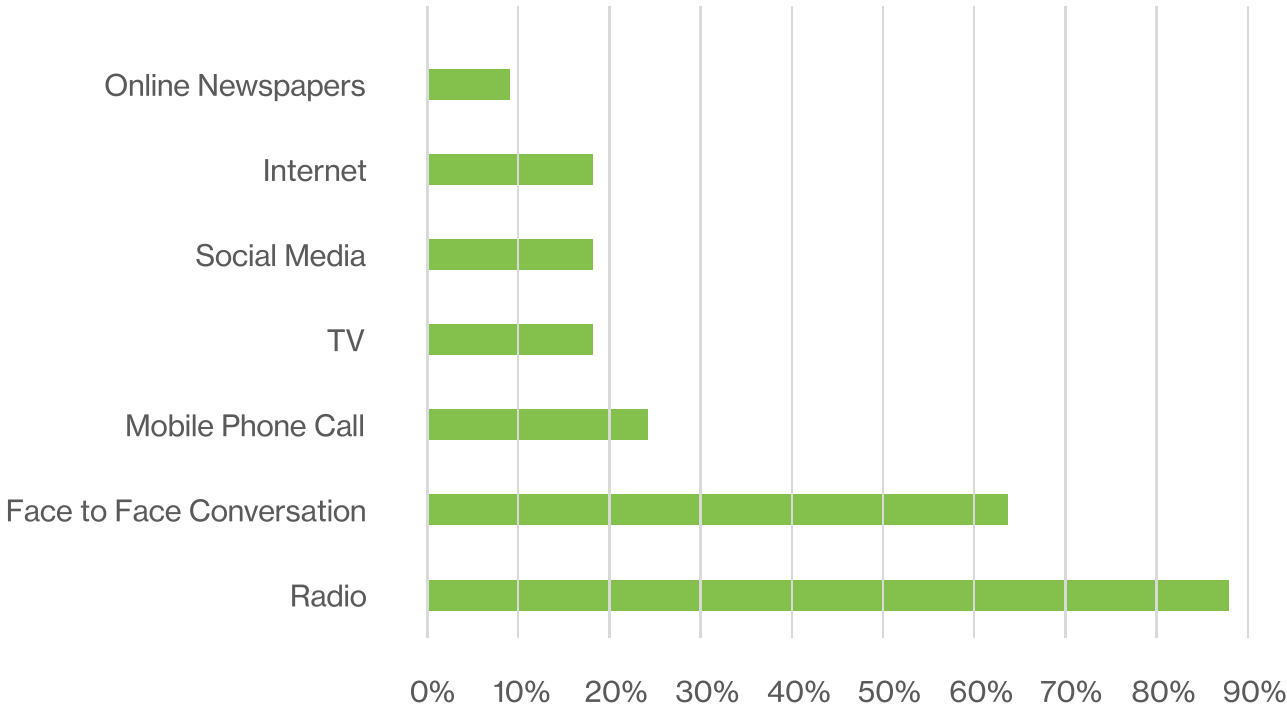
**Figure 5.1: Most used information channels among persons in the different age groups**



### 5.1.3 Radio and Face-to-Face Conversations: The Most Used Information Channels among Persons Living with Disabilities

Among the thirty-three (33) persons living with a disability who participated in the survey, the majority of them reported that they rely heavily on radio (87.9%) and face-to-face conversation (63.6%) to obtain news and information, including that related to COVID-19 and disasters/emergencies. *Figure 5.2 depicts their use of the various information channels.*

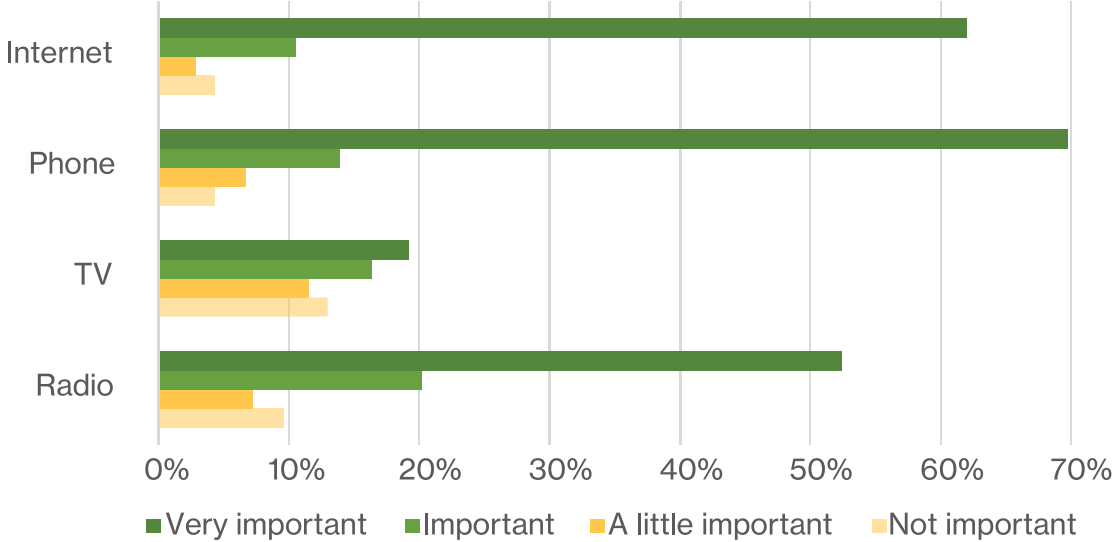
**Figure 5.2: Most used information channels among persons living with disabilities**



### 5.1.4 Television: The Least Important Information Channel to Dominicans

In rating the importance of the various information channels (radio, TV, phone, and Internet), the survey respondents identified television as the least important [see Figure 5.3]. Speaking on why the phone and internet are important communication channels to them, one survey respondent highlighted that the phone helps persons to stay in contact with their family and friends, while another noted that the internet is one of the quickest ways to access reliable information. With respect to the radio, one survey respondent stated that “a radio is important because it is used when the internet service drops during bad weather. You also do not need to have internet service to use the radio”.

**Figure 5.3: Survey participants’ ratings of the importance of the various channels for accessing information**



### 5.1.5 The Influence of Service Availability on Types of Information Channels Most Often Used by Dominicans

As noted by some of the survey respondents and Key Informants below, Dominicans’ use of a particular information channel is in some cases influenced by the location in which they reside, as phone, radio, TV, and internet services are only accessible in some areas of the island.

“People in the country on the outskirts of Roseau would probably rely more on the radio, whereas where internet access is readily available, those people would gravitate towards social media.”  
– Woman, Media Professional, 34 years’ experience in the media industry

“I have not watched TV in four years, since Hurricane Maria. The service has not been restored since then.”  
– Woman, 45-59 years old

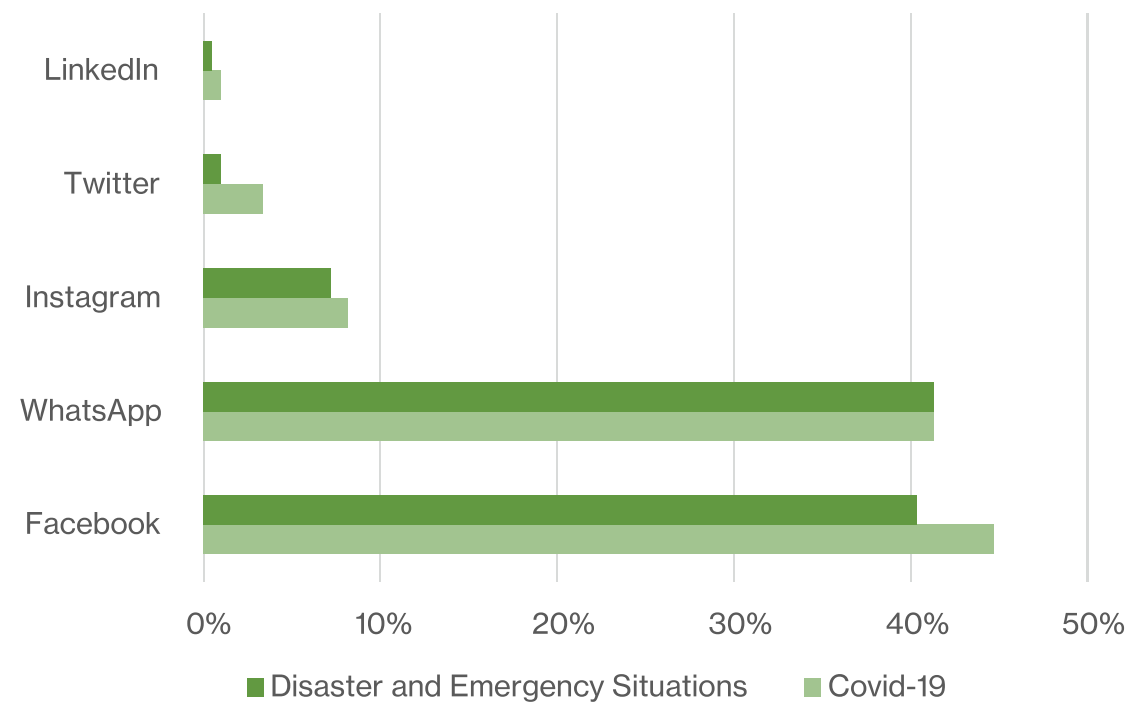
“

Our television capacity has diminished significantly since the passage of Hurricane Maria – because our television stations got damaged, and they’re still in the process of re-building.”  
– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry

### 5.1.6 Facebook and WhatsApp: Most Used Social Media Platforms among Dominicans

Among the various social media platforms used by the survey respondents, WhatsApp (53.8%) and Facebook (47.6%) were reported to be the most frequently used for information access. The same trend was noted in the case of the most used social media platform to obtain/receive information related to COVID-19 and disaster/emergency situations, as illustrated in *Figure 5.4*.

**Figure 5.4: Most used social media platform for accessing COVID-19 and disaster/emergency related information**



According to the focus group respondents, these social media platforms offer them numerous benefits, inclusive of: the ability to quickly and easily access and share information worldwide; the opportunity they provide as marketing tools; and the opportunity they provide to reconnect with past friends. The Key Informants added to these benefits, highlighting that Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are instrumental in helping the media houses increase their reach across Dominica.

Along with these benefits, however, come numerous challenges. Consistent with the focus group respondents, these challenges include: the proliferation of fake news and propaganda which thereby undermines one’s ability to determine the credibility of information; the abundance of time needed to manage multiple social media pages; the security risks presented across the different platforms; and the time-consuming nature the platforms. Speaking to the credibility of the information accessed on social media, one Key Informant noted:

“

Whereas before, you had to wait for the information to be received by the different journalists or news agencies; now, it’s I send a WhatsApp, or I put a Facebook post. I don’t think the accuracy is there because it’s always somebody else’s opinions and not a researched, informative package or clip you’re receiving.”  
– Woman, Media Professional, 5 years’ experience in the media industry

In addition to these challenges, a number of concerning trends have also been observed, including: the lack of care or concern about the truthfulness of the information prior to sharing; the tendency to post more negative content; the speed at which bad news spreads; and the uncaring attitude of many social media users. One Key Informant noted the following:

“

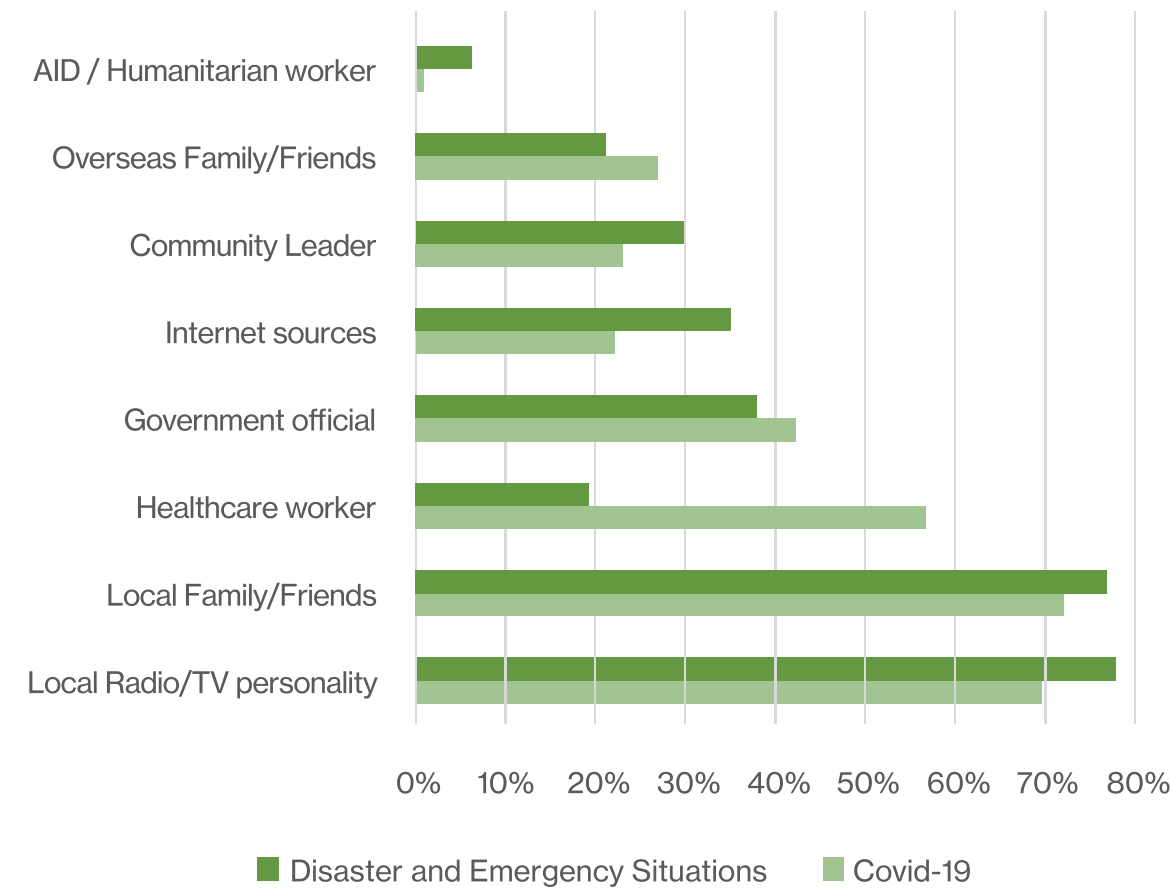
I think that social media brings out an uncaring attitude in our people. There is a lot of negativity on social media. People are quick to criticize and tear you down; they look for the negatives in things. There’s more negativism than positive stuff on social media. So those kinds of stories that tend to put people in a bad light that tend to highlight highly controversial negative things, I think they are shared most on social media.”  
– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry



5.1.7 Local Family, Friends, and Radio Personalities: The Most Popular Information Sources among Dominicans

Local family/friends (78.8%) and local radio personalities (72.6%) were most often identified by the survey respondents as their main sources of information. Similarly, local family/friends and local radio personalities were identified as the most popular source for COVID-19 and disaster/emergency related information, as illustrated in *Figure 5.5*.

**Figure 5.5: Survey participants’ main sources of information for COVID-19 and Disaster/Emergency related information**



5.1.8 Local Radio Personalities: The Most Trusted Source for Information about COVID-19, Disasters, and Emergencies

Local radio personalities were most frequently identified as the most trusted source for accurate information about COVID-19, disasters, and emergencies. In addition, the survey and focus group respondents reported that they also receive crisis and disaster related information from: the Government Information Service (GIS), the Office of Disaster Management (ODM), the government, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the United Nations (UN) resident coordinator office based in Barbados, The National Emergency Planning Organization (NEPO), the Dominica Red Cross, the National Hurricane Center (NHC), and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). The Key Informants added to this list of sources, noting that they also receive disaster and emergency related information from: the police, Dominica Meteorological Service officials, the Dominica Media and Communications Association (DMCA), and the disaster coordinator in Dominica. Among these sources, ODM was noted to be the primary source for disaster and crisis related information in Dominica. One focus group respondent highlighted that:

“ In Dominica, we know that we can trust and depend on the Office of Disaster Management, because their business is to make sure that they are giving credible updated information on the hour, every half hour, every 15 minutes etc. When... a disaster like a hurricane is approaching, you know that you listen now to the Office of Disaster Management, because they are the people responsible for giving us the information. For example: when people should move, what needs to be in your emergency bag, what time you move, etc. So that is our main source of information.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent





## 5.2 Dominicans' Information Needs

The type of information needed by an individual, group, community, or a nation tends to be diverse and is constantly evolving. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to determine the types of information Dominicans are generally in need of on a daily basis, as well as during times of crises and disasters. The following subsections highlight their feedback.

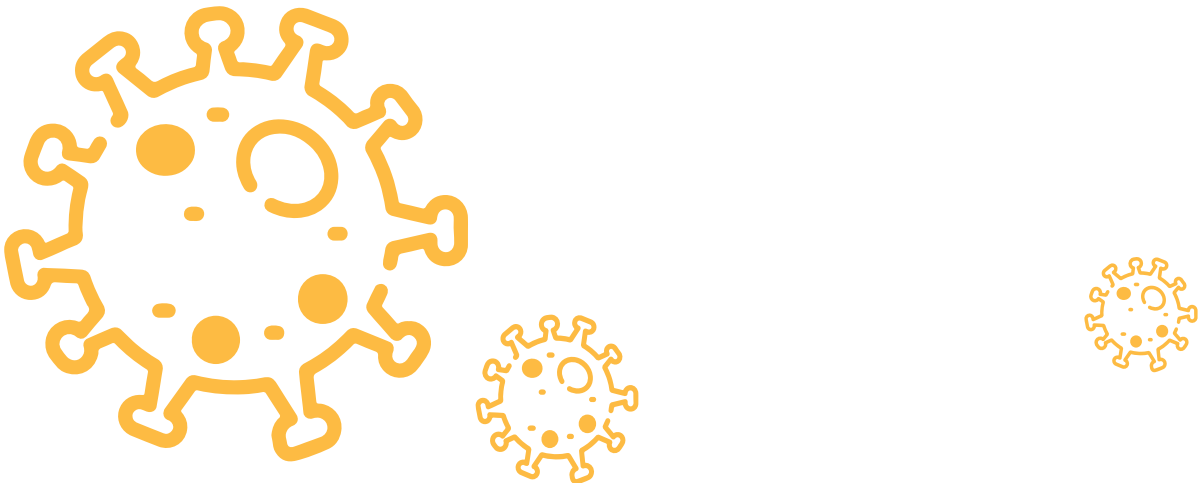
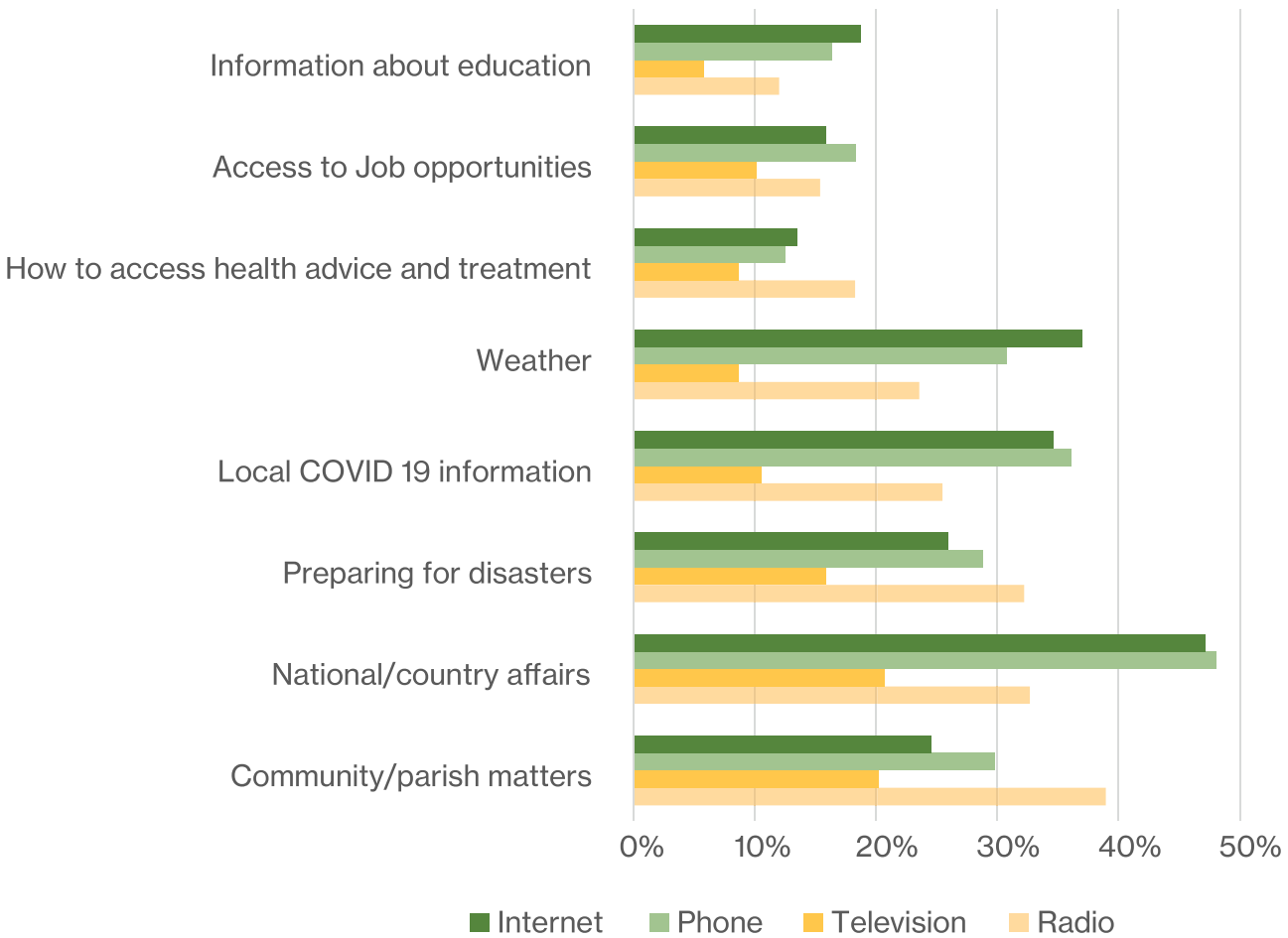
### 5.2.1 Types of Information Most Needed by Dominicans

In ascertaining the information needs of Dominicans, the survey respondents were asked about the type of information they tend to access on the four (4) main information channels: radio, television, phone, and the internet. A comparative analysis of their responses showed that across the said channels, community/parish matters, national/country affairs, preparing for disasters, the weather, and local COVID-19 information were consistently among the top five (5) topics/issues on which respondents generally need information [see *Figure 5.6*]. Other note-worthy topics/issues on which both the survey and focus group respondents reported needing information included but were not limited to: capacity building opportunities; juvenile justice; sports opportunities, programmes, and activities; agriculture; civic rights and responsibilities; public health; solid and liquid waste management; youth entrepreneurship; road improvements and access; youth programmes, development and opportunities; and regional and international news.

Of these identified topics/issues, the survey respondents noted that they especially need more information on: **national/country affairs** (e.g., politics, poverty, sports opportunities, national development, cultural programmes, youth development and opportunities), **preparing for disasters** (e.g., hurricane shelters, hurricane preparation and response), **community/parish matters** (e.g., after school sports for children in the community, statistics on number of students attending college for the Kalinago territory, funding opportunities for community projects, the village council's community plan and agenda, road improvements), **local COVID-19 information** (e.g., facts on the COVID-19 vaccine, long-term effects of the vaccine), and **the weather**, respectively.



**Figure 5.6: Most needed type of information, as identified by survey respondents, across the information channels – radio, television, phone and internet.**



5.2.2 COVID-19 and Disaster/Emergency related Information is important to Dominicans

In rating the extent to which COVID-19 and disaster/emergency related news and information are important to them, most of the survey respondents indicated that access to both types of news and information are either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ (COVID-19 = 89.2%; Disasters/ Emergencies = 97.6%). As highlighted by a few of the respondents, disaster/emergency related information is needed to prepare and respond to disasters, and the absence of it can endanger one’s life. To effectively prepare and respond to disasters and emergencies, the Dominican respondents reported that that they require various types of information before, during and after the event. Among the top concerns of the survey respondents at the onset and in the aftermath of disasters or emergencies were information relating to: the safety of their friends and family, provision of basic resources (e.g. food, electricity, water, and clothing), and shelter/ housing. Following these, they also require information that will help to ensure their survival. *Table 5.1* presents a breakdown of the different types of information needed by Dominicans during the different phases of a disaster/emergency, as indicated by the focus group respondents and Key Informants.

Table 5.1: The different types of information that is commonly needed by Dominicans before, during and after a disaster/emergency

Phases of a Disaster/Crisis	Information Needs
Before a Disaster/ Emergency	The locations of the shelters and name of the shelter manager;
	What is the event, the urgency, and the potential impact of the situation;
	How to prepare for the event and ensure one’s health and safety;
	List of things you need to have in your disaster preparedness kit, and the stores in which you can locate them;
	Things that you need to do and/or should do while the event is affecting the nation;
	Given the current COVID-19 climate, what are the risks of being in a shelter;
	Progress updates on the impending event;

Phases of a Disaster/Crisis	Information Needs
Before a Disaster/ Emergency	When it is time to evacuate and go to a shelter;
	The emergency communications plan that is in place;
	Who can one reach out to if assistance is needed and where can they be found;
	The plans of the government and the disaster management agencies to support the citizens;
	What support will be required when the event occurs;
	Hazards in the communities which need to be addressed prior to the occurrence of the event;
During a Disaster/ Emergency	A layman’s explanation of the different terminologies that will be used to describe the event.
	What is happening and the length of time the event will last;
	If/when the event will be affecting your community;
After a Disaster/ Emergency	The impact that the event is having on various parts of the nation.
	The overall impact of the event on the nation;
	How to approach your insurance company after a disaster, and how to get one’s assets/property assessed;
	The needs of persons affected and/or displaced by the event;
	What support is being given to those who were affected by the event, and how these individuals can access and benefit from the support;
	The measures that will be put in place to prevent or reduce the impact of similar future events;
	Places where essential supplies can be sourced;
	The well-being of friends and family members;
	Where to seek shelter if necessary.

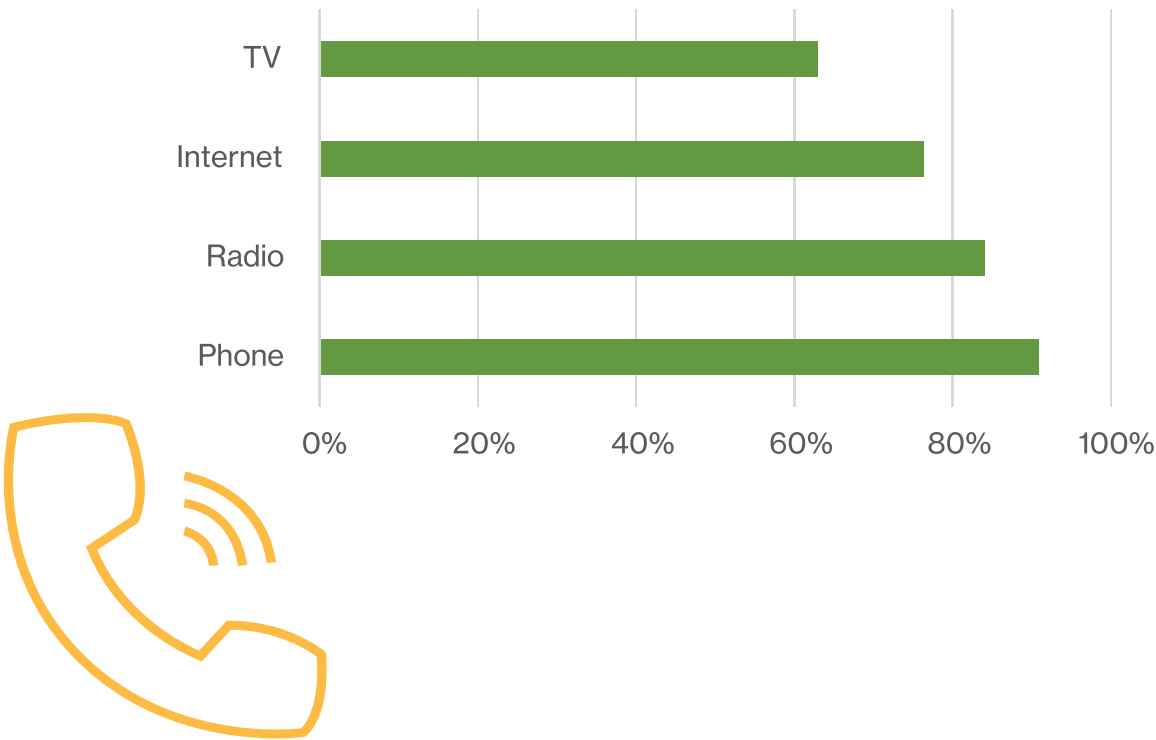
### 5.3 Dominicans’ Access to Information

The explosion of digital technology has transformed the way in which people communicate with each other. Thus, in addition to the traditional communication channels: radio, television, landlines, print newspaper, and face-to-face conversations, people today also communicate using digital communication, inclusive of: the internet, social media, online newspapers, smartphones, laptops, tablets and much more. The upcoming subsections examine the extent to which Dominicans have access to key communication channels and information sources, as well as the barriers commonly encountered in accessing the information needed.

#### 5.3.1 Television: The Least Accessible Communication Channel for Dominicans

Dominicans’ access to the key information channels – radio, phone, internet, and television – varies according to the area of the country in which they reside. As highlighted in *Figure 5.7*, television is the least accessible of the four channels. According to the survey respondents, this is a consequence of a lack of access to television services in some of the communities, which is reflected in the small percentage of persons (23.9%) who reported having access to a streaming service.

**Figure 5.7: Percentage of survey respondents who reported having access to the various information channels: radio, phone, internet, and television**



#### 5.3.2 Poor or Lack of Mobile Network Coverage a Major Challenge for Some Communities

Among the survey respondents who indicated that they owned a phone (N = 177), 83.6% of them reported owning a smartphone, while 21.5% indicated that they owned a mobile phone, and 3.4% reported having a landline. The majority of them (45.8%) identified their service provider as Flow, while the others reported using Digicel (33.9%) or both (19.8%). Keeping in touch with friends and family (landline = 83.3%, mobile phone = 90.7%, smartphone = 94.6%), receiving news and information alerts (smartphone = 70.9%), and internet access (smartphone = 70.9%) were identified among the top three (3) activities for which the respondents used their phones. Overall, most of them (84.1%) reported having mobile network coverage in the areas in which they reside. According to some, however, the coverage is poor. As highlighted in *Table 5.2*, at least 30% of the respondents from six (6) of the targeted communities complained that poor mobile network coverage sometimes prevents them from obtaining the information they need. Of the 7.7% who indicated that they currently live in an area that has no mobile network coverage, a few of them reported having to travel to make a voice call or send a message; a travel which for some took less than 10 minutes, and for others, between 10 to 20 minutes, or more than 20 minutes.

**Table 5.2: Percentage of participants from the targeted communities across Dominica who reported having poor mobile network coverage**

Targeted Community	Total number of participants from the targeted communities	Number of Participants who reported having poor network coverage	Percentage of Participants who reported having poor network coverage
Good Hope	12	6	50.0%
San Sauveur/Petite Soufriere	27	7	25.9%
St Cyr	13	6	46.2%
La Plaine	16	5	31.3%
Boetica	15	3	20.0%
Delices	13	6	46.2%
Bagatelle/Fond Saint Jean	22	4	18.2%
Petite Savanne	13	4	30.8%
Other Kalinago Territory*	32	13	40.6%

\*These territories include: Bataka, Concord, Crayfish River, Gaulette River, Mahaut River, and Salybia

5.3.3 Lack of Access to Internet a Major Challenge for Some Communities

For those respondents who indicated that they did not have access to the internet (23.6%), the primary reasons voiced were a lack of finances and the unavailability of internet service in their area of residence, especially since the passing of Tropical Storm Erika and Hurricane Maria. As can be seen in *Table 5.3*, over 40% of the respondents in all the targeted locations reported that they do not have internet at home. One respondent noted that when he is at his Petite Savanne home, he does not have internet, but has full access to the internet at his Bellevue home. Additionally, some of them reported that their lack of access to devices and lack of knowledge regarding how to use those devices prohibit their access to internet. Of the one hundred and fifty-nine (159) respondents who indicated that they had access to the internet, the majority (85.5%) noted that the device generally used to gain access is their smartphone, followed by their laptop (42.8%). Most of them reported frequently using the internet to gather information on relevant topics and issues (68.6%), to receive news and information alerts (68.6%), for social networking (68.6%), and for entertainment (66.7%) such as streaming and listening to music.

Table 5.3: Percentage of participants from the targeted communities across Dominica who reported having no internet at home and no access to the internet

Targeted Community	Total number of participants from the targeted communities	Percentage of Participants who reported having no internet at home	Percentage of Participants who reported having no internet access
Good Hope	12	66.7%	16.7%
San Sauveur/Petite Soufriere	27	74.1%	29.6%
St Cyr	13	84.6%	15.4%
La Plaine	16	43.8%	18.8%
Boetica	15	73.3%	26.7%
Delices	13	53.8%	15.4%
Bagatelle/Fond Saint Jean	22	63.6%	40.9%
Petite Savanne	13	76.9%	46.2%
Other Kalinago Territory*	32	50.0%	18.8%

\*These territories include: Bataka, Concord, Crayfish River, Gaulette River, Mahaut River, and Salybia

5.3.4 Access to Information is a Challenge for Persons Living with Disabilities

Consistent with feedback from the focus group respondents, persons living with disabilities are especially challenged in accessing information due to their lack of access to the key information channels, poor service coverage, and lack of finance. This issue is highlighted in the following excerpts:

“In the case of persons with disabilities, I would say it’s the lack of the necessary devices in terms of, radio and the telephone, absence of internet access in certain areas, if they have to use their phones and even the affordability of data. So not many persons with disabilities are able to afford those devices and most times they have to really depend on neighbours and relatives and friends to give them the information if they don’t have the devices readily available.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

“Technology has been so advanced that as a blind person you are able to use and access information and communication technology just as anybody else. What the problem is, for most of us is the affordability.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

In particular, feedback provided by the survey respondents revealed that access to the internet is especially problematic for persons living with disabilities, with only 30.3% of them indicating that they have *internet at home*, and 48.5% of them reporting that they have *access to the internet*.



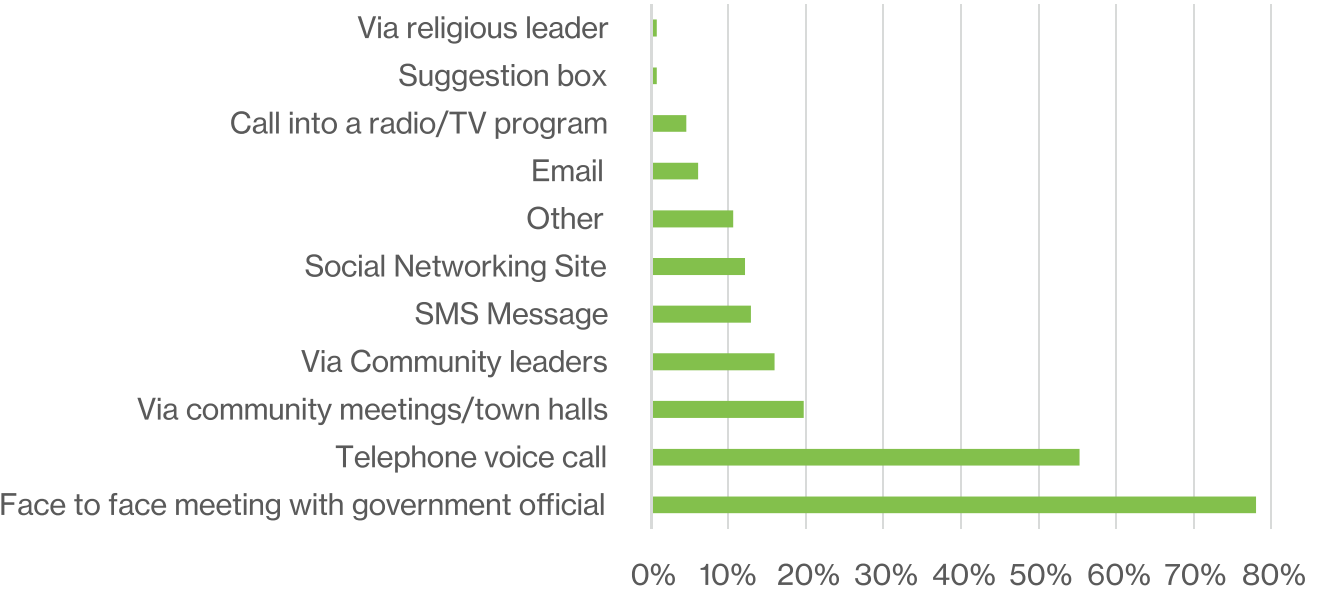


### 5.3.5 Access to Information from Local Authorities is sometimes a Challenge for the Layperson

The survey respondents reported that they generally have access to information from local authorities. When asked if they are usually able to ask questions of, or raise concerns with, local authorities about their needs, 72.1% (N = 150) of them replied in the affirmative, with 11.3% of them indicating that despite being able to, they never took advantage of the opportunity. In the case of those who do take advantage of the ability to access information directly from local authorities (N = 132), they tend to do so using numerous mechanisms [see *Figure 5.8*], among which the most popular and most preferred appeared to be face-to-face meetings and telephone voice calls.

Most often, they contact their local authorities to discuss issues relating to their current situation (e.g., lack of internet service and poor internet connection; concerns about their housing situation; citizenship; home repairs; education and employment opportunities; garbage disposal issues at apartments), disaster and emergency preparedness and response (e.g. hurricane shelters), and the needs of their community (e.g., road access; community statistics; engaging the youths in community development; community development, programs, and projects; entrepreneurship opportunities; traffic signs in community; internet access), or to complain [see *Figure 5.9*]. Relative to the community matters which the respondents indicated they needed to discuss with local authorities, three noteworthy issues were highlighted, particularly with respect to: access to reliable internet, road access, and home ownership. Specifically, the respondents noted that they needed to discuss with local authorities: the need for a bridge in Laglee as they currently have to walk through a river to access public transportation and to attend school; the need for legal ownership of the apartment buildings into which they were moved by the government after their village was devastated by the passage of Tropical Storm Erika; and the need for reliable internet access in such buildings, as the poor connectivity currently presents challenges for the children when trying to complete their school assignments.

**Figure 5.8: The main mechanisms used by the survey respondents to communicate with local authorities**



**Figure 5.9: Topics/issues that survey respondents most often discuss with local authorities**



The majority of the survey respondents revealed that on the occasions that they did reach out to local authorities for information, they frequently (16.7%) or sometimes (36.4%) received responses to their questions or concerns, while 36.4% of them reported that they rarely receive a response, and 10.6% of them noted that they never do. Despite generally receiving feedback from their local authorities, as highlighted in the following excerpts, the respondents reported that obtaining a satisfactory response to their questions and concerns from local authorities are sometimes a challenge.





“Local authorities don't really know how to function in their roles. All they know is to be a place holder. So, getting results when you bring up concerns or questions is in my opinion a waste of time. You seldom get a proper response.”  
– Woman, 26-35, San Sauveur

“Depending on the type of information that you want, and who you go to for it, they might be a little tight lipped or don't want to say anything about certain topics. For example, certain politicians or police officers, especially when it deals with delicate matters, they don't usually want to report on this information. And it makes it hard to provide the general public with accurate information about certain things that are going on in the country.”  
– Woman, Media Representative

“If you are well placed in society, and you do have colleagues who are within these ministries, it's much easier for you to obtain data if you go through them. So, you use your network. And that works for me very well... So basically, it's how you are placed, where you are placed and what information you require. And I believe the information, sometimes it is readily available, but may not be as readily accessible. Basically, it's knowing who to call to give you that support.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

For those respondents who indicated that they are unable to ask questions of or raise concerns with local authorities, the main reason cited was the inaccessibility of authorities. Speaking on this issue, some of the survey respondents stated:

“Parl rep [Parliamentary Representative] is not accessible. He does not answer messages or take calls. He hardly ever comes to the community to speak with the villagers.”  
– Man, 16-25, Fond St. Jean

“The parl rep [Parliamentary Representative] is hard to get to and hardly ever answers messages or calls. Disabled people need more help in Dominica.”  
– Man, 26-35, Petite Savanne

“Those people do not care about people like me, single mother, unemployed and like I have no rank. So, I do not tell them anything because it would be useless.”  
– Woman, 36-45, Boetica

### 5.3.6 Access to Information from Local Authorities a Major Challenge for the Media

Like laypersons, media professionals also experience challenges with accessing information from local authorities. In accordance with the Key Informants, on some occasions when attempts are made to obtain information from local authorities, particularly the police and government officials, responses are either never received or delayed, sometimes to the point that the information is no longer relevant. This causes an obstruction to information flow as the journalists are thereby delayed in disseminating the information to the public or fail to do so altogether because of their principle of not reporting partial stories. While one Key Informant recognized that the hindrance to access is sometimes caused by bureaucratic government processes, another noted that sometimes the lack of access to local authorities is intentional and is used as a form of control. Explaining the issue, the Key Informant stated the following:

“If you can’t control the media by directly influencing what they publish or broadcast, what they do, is they use indirect influence, they either cut off access to government sources, where if you’re looking for balance for a story, you’re not able to get somebody to comment on it. And therefore, sometimes you even give up on the story because of the principle that you have of not running a story that you do not think is balanced or fair. And if you get the information, and you can track government officials and say look, this is what I have. It is critical of you, and I need your side of the story in order to present a balanced story. And they give you all kinds of run around. Short of saying no, they say call me back, or can you hold it and I’ll get back to you and eventually you wake up one morning and find out that you’ve had the story for a week, and it’s no longer relevant, it’s outdated. And I think that’s one of the things that we need to address.”

– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry

In addition to the above, the Key Informants cited the lack of human and financial resources, and the lack of trained media professionals as issues affecting information access in Dominica.

“We have a situation where we are always trying to catch up in terms of having sufficiently qualified and trained personnel to do the job. And so, because of the fact that media organizations don’t have a lot of money, we are not able to employ academically qualified persons. People have university degrees and we do not have the resources to provide the training – well organized, structured and intense training for those people. So, a lot of the training that takes place is done in house; we recruit people off secondary school or State College.”

– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry

### 5.3.7 Access to Timely Disaster and Crisis related Information is sometimes a challenge for the Media

Overall, the Dominican respondents expressed mixed views about whether they generally receive timely information relating to impending disasters and crises. In accordance with the majority of the focus group respondents and some of the Key Informants, Dominicans generally have timely access to the information they need to make decisions before, during, and after a crisis or a disaster. Their feedback revealed that disaster-related information is shared extensively, with

information being disseminated using numerous channels, including mainstream media, amateur radio, flyers, postcards, SMS text messages circulated by Flow and Digicel, popular music artists, video documentaries, and social media. In highlighting the extent to which efforts are being made by local authorities to disseminate crisis and disaster related information to the public, one focus group respondent noted the following:

“I think I also want to commend the local government, because one of the ways that they do it as well, is that they send out communication to the churches, they send to the schools, they send out to the local government, which is the village councils, and also to youth groups and different groups in the communities.”

– Woman, Health Professional

On the contrary, some of the Key Informants reported that access to crisis and disaster-related information is not always timely. They stated that obtaining such information from the authorities is sometimes challenging, which in turn impedes their ability to disseminate said information to the public in a timely manner. Explaining the issue, two of the Key Informants noted the following:

“It always proves difficult because the people with the information are withholding it and you sometimes have to bulldoze them to get the information.”

– Man, Media Professional, 20+ years’ experience in the media industry

“We have this dilemma of not being able to get information sometimes in a timely manner from the ODM and it being available elsewhere. But we have to make that determination as to whether we go with what is available and risk putting out the wrong information or information that is not totally accurate, or whether we wait for the ODM and put the information out late.”

– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry

5.3.8 Communication During Disasters: A Work in Progress

Some of the Key Informants indicated that access to information *during* a disaster is especially difficult in Dominica. According to them, this challenge is primarily a result of disruptions to utility services and communication channels, as well as damages to the road infrastructure caused by the disaster. Recognizing that there is a need to improve access to information during a disaster, some of the Key Informants indicated that efforts are in progress to address the problem. While one Key Informant noted that her organization currently has its antennas placed at strategic locations across Dominica, and a transmitter to ensure that information can be transmitted on most of its frequencies during a disaster, another reported being in discussions with the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission in Dominica (NTRC) to determine what mechanisms can be put in place to access information from and disseminate information to the rest of the country when the normal means of communication are affected. In addition, a focus group respondent reported that some government agencies are currently looking into utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) Mapping to predict the potential impact of impending disasters and to improve disaster communications and response.

5.3.9 Barriers to Information Access in Dominica

To identify the barriers to information access in Dominica, the survey respondents were asked what prevents them from obtaining the information they need. As highlighted in *Figure 5.10*, there are numerous factors that inhibit them from accessing the information they need, of which the lack of access to electricity, inability to pay for mobile service [see *Table 5.4* for cost of mobile data in Dominica], and poor (or lack of) mobile network coverage were the most frequent causes.

Figure 5.10: Barriers to information access in Dominica

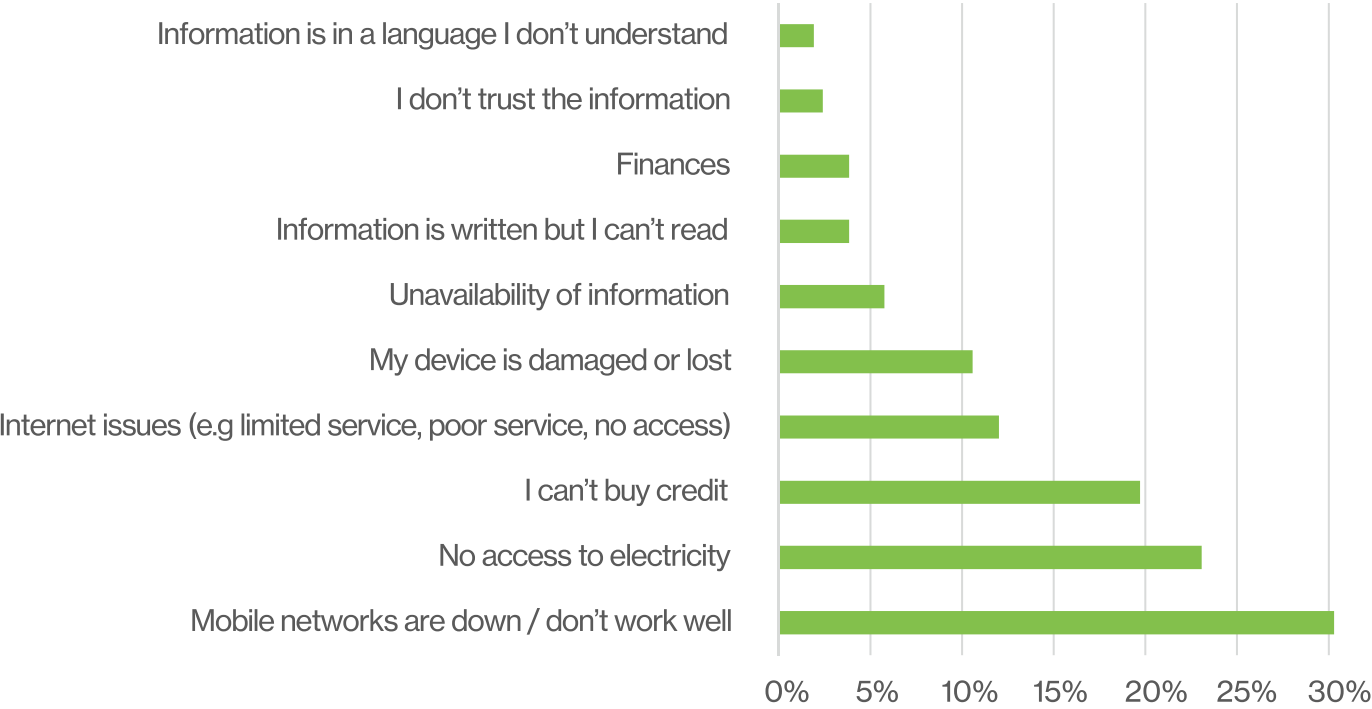


Table 5.4: Cost of mobile data in Dominica<sup>33</sup>

Service Provider	Service	Type of Plan	Price Range
Flow	Prepaid Data Plan**	1GB - 15GB/daily	\$5 - \$75
	Post-Paid Data Plan	2GB - 15GB/monthly	\$79 - \$229
Digicel	Prepaid Data Plan**	2GB -20GB/daily	\$6 - \$85
	Post-Paid Data Plan	25GB - 85GB/monthly	\$100 - \$260

\*Prices quoted in Eastern Caribbean Dollars

\*\* Prices for prepaid data plans depend on the amount of data purchased and the duration of the plan, which ranges from 1 to 30 days

In addition to the above, a number of other noteworthy barriers to information were reported, inclusive of:

- Poor radio service in various communities across Dominica;
- Key information only being shared on some radio stations;
- Primary sources of information, particularly local authorities, being inaccessible or not forthcoming with the information;
- Being disabled;
- Lack of access to devices e.g., phone, radio or TV;
- Lack of access to utility services in the community; and,
- Technical jargons used in the communication of information.

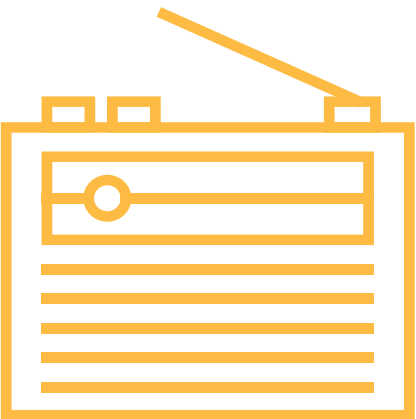


33 The data in this table is based on the fees quoted on the websites of Flow Dominica and Digicel Dominica

Speaking on the challenge experienced in accessing information from communities that are plagued by poor communication channels, two focus group respondents noted:

“ I don’t listen to any radio stations because where I’m located, I cannot get signal.... So, I’m in the, in the centre of the island...in the heart of the island. Sometimes I might get a French station for some reason, but to connect to DBS, even on my laptop is an issue. Q95 and Kairi is a no no; we don’t get signal from them. For the internet service, I’m on a data box. And we do have some neighbours on unlimited Wi-Fi, but they are having issues.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative, Coron

“ Only recently like two three weeks ago or something we got internet in our homes [in the southeast] – Flow internet. Since after the Hurricane Maria we’ve been using Digicel data and that only came about after a little while. Even to get Flow phone service, I have to drive five minutes out, and from there towards the rest of Dominica I’ll be able to get the actual phone service. So, we use the Wi Fi in the in the house. And now like let’s say some of my neighbours who are elderly, or they are living alone etc., they might not have smartphones, or TVs or even internet in their homes. It would have to take people like myself, people on the disaster committee, people in the village councils, etc, to try to transfer important news to them. Or if or even through church, through word of mouth- persons sharing information, because they don’t have the devices and are impeded by their age and literacy level.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent



## 5.4 Use of Information

In today’s digital environment, when people receive information, they do not only process and use the information at a personal level; they sometimes share it with their friends and family as well as to millions of other people using the numerous online platforms available to them. This section outlines how Dominicans go about processing the information that they receive, and the various ways in which they use it upon receipt.

### 5.4.1 Dominicans Do Not Always Verify Information Prior to Sharing

Upon receiving information, it is customary for Dominicans to share it with others, preferably via word-of-mouth or social media. When sharing on social media, they expressed a preference for using Facebook and WhatsApp, with WhatsApp being their favourite. Given the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation often encountered on these platforms, they were therefore asked whether they tend to verify accuracy prior to sharing information with others. Analysis of their feedback revealed that sharing and verification practices varied from person to person and depended on the source of information. Accordingly, while some respondents indicated that they are not information sharers, some noted that their tendency to verify information prior to sharing depends on the perceived credibility of the information source. Additionally, some noted that they verify their information by sharing with close friend/family circles, while some confirmed that they deem the information to be accurate once all the news sources reported on it, and therefore have no need to do any further verification. Conversely, some respondents admitted to not always verifying the accuracy of information prior to sharing, arguing that sometimes it is impossible to do so either because the primary source of information is refusing to verify, or because the information needs to be shared quickly upon receipt. The following excerpts highlight some of the ways in which the respondents go about verifying news and information.

“ I think when you understand the panic it [sharing] can cause, you’re self-conscious about it. So, you may say, okay... I came across this, but I may not share it in a general group. So, because [she] and I speak or because [he] and I speak, I may say well, I came across this, but it’s not like widespread. So that might be your fact check, by sending it to the next person but not widespread.”  
– Woman, Intergovernmental Organization Representative

“ I look into it first to know whether or not it is true or false... I go on Emo [EmoNews] because that is where I get most of the information. So, if I don’t find it on EmoNews, then I will decide it’s not true. Or, if I haven’t heard it from anybody else, that’s also how I’ll know that it is not true, and also if I didn’t hear it on the news.”  
– Woman, Health Professional



“Typically, if I get certain things on WhatsApp... I'm always skeptical of certain things ... I may want to research it first a bit more to see. But if it comes through the news station, I know if ...I know DBS takes their information giving a bit more serious. They research things before they actually broadcast it... So, once it's coming from them like that then I know it's something that actually took place. But I am more skeptical of things coming from WhatsApp media especially.”  
– Man, FGD Respondent

“For me, I like to double check, triple check. So, if the information that I receive is generally the same thing on all news platforms throughout I say okay. But then if it's just one place then you know, something is not adding up somewhere. I always like to check. I never like to go with the first thing that I see.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

Outside of social media, the focus group respondents indicated that Dominicans have a general tendency to share information in physical spaces such as: rum shops, bars, the salon, the barber shop, the bus, bus stops, workplaces, shops, and family gatherings. In these spaces, persons generally discuss and share information regarding current events, politics, the latest rumours or gossip, and hot topics.

“You find people will gather at their offices, they will meet at the bar, they will meet on the Bayfront, they will meet- let's say they're going on their regular walks, their exercise, and people communicate. So, there are different places that you would find people meeting and talking. So, you meet up, you hang out with your friends, and I guess depending on what is happening in the country, at any point in time, you will see a bigger gathering or more conversations, but a lot of people they use their offices, their lunchtime, everybody sits down and you want to talk about what's happening in Dominica.”  
– Woman, Intergovernmental Organization Representative

## 5.5 Impact of Information

Information and knowledge are crucial to the development of society. Depending on the type of information provided to the public, it can either be an agent of positive or negative transformation. For instance, while it can be instrumental in fostering greater civic participation, it can also be used to perpetuate the governments' control and influence over its citizens. This section highlights the impact that the information accessed by Dominicans have on them generally and during times of crises or disasters.

### 5.5.1 Politically Polarizing Information is causing Division among Dominicans

Although the Dominican respondents enjoy having access to information relating to local matters, many of them complained about the politically polarizing nature of the information disseminated to the public. Consistent with feedback from the focus group participants, because the information provided to Dominicans by the various news and information outlets is generally biased in favour of either the current government or the opposition, there is a similar division among the citizens. Consequently, some Dominicans process their information through a biased lens whereby their determination of the trustworthiness of the information provided is influenced by their political affiliation. Hence, one is more likely to believe that the information is true if it comes from the radio station that is affiliated with the party that they support, and vice versa. Moreover, some respondents indicated that the biased nature of the information generally broadcasted on the radio stations on mornings tend to influence their emotions, way of thinking, and their actions. Explaining the issue, two respondents stated the following:

“In Dominica, if you have to start your day, don't go to certain programmes. Chances are you're gonna hate somebody by midday.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent

“If you're not an independent thinker, one side can make you feel very happy, like the whole world is going fine. The other side will make you feel like so much chaos.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent



Other than the above negative effects, the information disseminated is generally instrumental in keeping the citizens informed of local and current events, and in stimulating discussions among people in work and home settings, as well as within the communities.

### 5.5.2 Access to Crisis and Disaster related Information enhances Dominicans' Preparedness and Responsiveness

With respect to information relating to impending disasters and crises, it was reported that while some persons tend to use the information to enhance their preparedness and responsiveness, some are complacent and do not adhere to the warnings given, as highlighted in the following excerpt:

“Some people would hear a storm is coming and that to prepare and they would be up the road by the rum shop talking, laughing and drinking like nothing is happening.”  
– Man, FGD Respondent, La Plaine

Moreover, humanitarians utilize crisis and disaster-related information to assist the nation, as well as other Caribbean islands in their response to and recovery from such events. For instance, they have in the past supplied water tanks to communities affected by water shortages caused by a storm; provided food and basic hygiene necessities for those being housed in shelters and otherwise displaced; provided technology for children to facilitate the continuation of their education; and facilitated fund raising efforts for other Caribbean islands affected by a disaster.

### 5.5.3 Dominicans are not Fully Prepared for Future Disasters

Although the majority (84%) of the survey respondents indicated that their current knowledge of disaster and emergency preparedness is sufficient to ensure their safety and the safety of their loved ones, with one respondent confidently stating that he survived three bad hurricanes and therefore can handle anything, 16% of them indicated otherwise. As to the reasons for their lack of confidence in their ability to ensure their safety, one respondent indicated that *“there is a focus on one disaster (hurricane) without highlighting the other possible disasters such as volcano eruption and earthquake”*, while another highlighted the poor quality of radio reception as being the core reason.

Similar to the survey respondents, the focus group participants and Key Informants expressed mixed views about Dominicans' level of preparedness for future disasters. While some of the focus group participants indicated that they are better prepared, having invested in building stronger and more resilient homes after the passing of Hurricane Maria, a Key Informant and a focus group participant reported that they are not completely prepared as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, lack of emergency shelters in some communities, and infrastructural issues across the island. Explaining the problem, they stated the following:

“In terms of physical preparedness of shelters, we should be better this season than we were last...or the one before. But there are still several communities that do not have emergency shelters and certainly not to accommodate the number of people that would need to be accommodated...within COVID permissions.”  
– Woman, Intergovernmental Organization Representative

“We also have some infrastructural issues. Post Maria, some bridges were lost. I would really like to see us take action on certain areas. We have a lot of vulnerable areas in Dominica...a lot of communities that suffer a lot during times of disaster. Sometimes there's a lot of rain and landslides and road blockage...some communities are just cut off.”  
– Woman, Media Professional, 34 years' experience in the media industry



## 5.6 Social Trust

Peoples' level of trust in the information that they access daily is dynamic. As a result of a number of factors, including the perceived impartiality, quality, and accuracy of information, their trust level sometimes decreases or increases. The upcoming subsections highlight the extent to which Dominicans trust their main information sources, and the various factors that have impacted their trust over the years. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation and its impact are also examined.

### 5.6.1 Dominicans' Trust in their Information Sources is on the Decline

In determining the extent to which Dominicans trust in the information that they generally receive, respondents were asked to what extent they trust their key sources of information. Feedback from the focus group respondents indicated that trust varied from person to person and from source to source. Whereas some respondents indicated that they completely or largely trust several of their main sources of information, some reported that they somewhat trust their main sources, and others admitted that they have little to no trust in their news and information sources. This difference in trust inferences is highlighted in the following excerpts:

“For me, DBS. I think they make it their duty, to provide you with credible information in everything, whether it is in news, in sports, they run with facts. So, I have a lot of confidence in them, and how they deliver the news. And if there is an error in one thing, they make it a point of duty to apologize quickly. So that's why I have confidence in them.”  
– Woman, Health Professional

“Sometimes the online sources such as EmoNews publish false information. I don't really trust them, so I barely listen to them.”  
– Woman, Health Professional

“Some stations are politically charged so they would give information to you based on whatever political party they support. So, you tend to get conflicting information from both sides.”  
– Man, FGD Respondent, La Plaine

“Just last week, some pictures were circulating on one of the news platforms of the volcano that had erupted in St. Vincent, and they were not factual. So, they had to take it down. So sometimes the information is not credible all the time. So, you get the information but at the end of the day, you still have to take it with a grain of salt and leave room for doubt.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent

“You can tell, there's different biases, even in the print media. For me to get a full or comprehensive view of the news in Dominica, I have to listen to all the radio stations and read all the newspapers because they don't all report the news on the ground. So, you listen to all radio stations, you read all newspapers to get a full and balanced view of everything.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

When asked if their trust in their main information sources changed over the years, quite a few of the focus group participants responded in the affirmative, stating that their level of trust has decreased for various reasons, including: the youthfulness and inexperience of the current journalists, the apparent competition between the news sources to be the first to release information, the lack of depth in the reporting, the news sources' tendency to report erroneous information, the perception that news is less professional and factual, and the bias and political nature of the information disseminated. Some of the Key informants also acknowledged that trust in the media has decreased, with one of the respondents commenting that gone are the days when there were practitioners who upheld the professional ethics of a trusted media, whose responsibilities are to: provide people with factual, accurate, credible, and honest information; disseminate information to the public as quickly as possible while prioritizing quality and integrity over being first; and to remain independent of politics or any particular interest, and thereby provide impartial, objective information to the public.

## 5.6.2 Misinformation and Disinformation: A Major Cause of Distress among Dominicans

There is a proliferation of misinformation<sup>34</sup> and disinformation<sup>35</sup> that is affecting the information ecosystem in Dominica. As revealed in the previous section, Dominicans often encounter misinformation and disinformation both on their online information platforms and in traditional media. When asked about their experience with such types of information, the majority of the focus group respondents acknowledged that in the past they have come across the issue in some form, with one respondent saying that s/he receives “*lots of them*” and another saying that s/he receives them “*all the time*.” In addition to having received disinformation about the La Soufriere volcanic eruption, Hurricane Maria, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the COVID-19 vaccine, they reported often receiving it about people, people’s death, and during elections. The following are some excerpts of their accounts of when they received disinformation and misinformation in the past, and a description of how receiving such information has affected them.

“They made it [COVID-19] sound like it was that easy to die from it. I feel like the information was not being said properly. And that gave me real anxiety attacks. So, like am I gonna die tomorrow if I just go somewhere and just see somebody. I was afraid of leaving my house or going to work because they tell me if I leave my house that I’m going to die. That was not cool.” – Woman, Media Representative.  
– Man, FGD Respondent, La Plaine

“In Hurricane Maria, persons couldn’t contact their family on island. My mother lives in Guadeloupe and my boyfriend’s family lives on the other side of the island, and the information that they were receiving is that that part of the island was wiped out. So, for them, in their mind, we were dead.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

<sup>34</sup> Misinformation refers to false or misleading information that is disseminated without any intention to harm, mislead or deceive others (CivicSpace.tech, 2021). The sender of such information is unaware that the information is false.

<sup>35</sup> Disinformation refers to false or misleading information that is disseminated intentionally to harm, mislead or deceive others (CivicSpace.tech, 2021). The sender of such information is fully aware that the information is false, yet knowingly shares it with the intention of deceiving others.

“Not too long I had someone send me a WhatsApp texts stating that one of my youth members got shot and killed. And trust me, I went weak. And I was trembling. But I called one of the youths in the area who told me it was false. The child was at her father’s home and the mother quite afraid, she was crying.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent

“[I have received disinformation] even about people as well. And it causes you sometimes to formulate your own impression; so, it impacts on the way you think about and look at things and people. So, it changes your whole perspective, sometimes on things and perhaps your approach to something might change.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

While some of the respondents are able to identify malicious/inaccurate information, some are unable to do so, and as a result are sometimes emotionally and psychologically distressed by it. According to them, their inability to identify such types of information is sometimes due to their failure to verify it either because they would have received the information from a trusted source, they didn’t have the time to carry out due diligence, or because of the realistic manner in which the information was presented. Speaking on the issue, two of the focus group respondents noted the following:

“Fake news usually comes in a very convincing package because you have to spice it up and season up so somebody can get it. And of course, because of the way it is presented, a lot of times you have the tendency to believe it almost immediately and you share it.”  
– Woman, FGD Respondent

“It depends on who brings it sometimes, who the information comes from, and if it is somebody that we feel that is credible, like a friend or a husband or wife, you know, a fellow colleague who you trust, then you tend to want to believe what they say.”  
– Woman, NGO Representative

To accommodate for the untrustworthiness of their news and information sources, a few of the focus group respondents thereby advocated that the public should not rely on any one source for their information and should make it their responsibility to scrutinize the credibility of the information disseminated to them.

### 5.6.3 Effects of Misinformation and Disinformation on Journalism in Dominica

Over the years, the media has been significantly impacted by the issue of misinformation and disinformation. According to feedback provided by the Key Informants, the advent of fake news has made the job of journalists in Dominica increasingly challenging, and this is further exacerbated by social media. Speaking on the challenges that social media poses for them, two of the Key Informants noted the following:

“The information gets on social media so quickly before anything else, that in the environment in which we operate where the competition is growing- there are many more online publications springing up- there is a struggle to try to get the news out as quickly as possible but ensure that the information is accurate.”  
– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry

“We are always competing with social media. Right now, the way things are set up, anyone can be a “reporter”. So, for example, just last week with the situation in St. Vincent, there were lots of fake pictures being circulated, because everyone wants to be the “hero” or the one to break the news during this sort of time. So yeah, it’s very challenging, and even here ... at home, sometimes in the middle of a disaster, you might get some pictures or information from a particular community, and if you do not verify that, you will be very surprised to find out that it’s wrong information, or it’s something that happened before or it’s not even somewhere in Dominica. It’s been a challenge dealing with the public now that everyone has access to social media, and everyone can just post what they have to post.”  
– Man, Media Professional, 21 years’ experience in the media industry

Furthermore, one Key Informant admitted that in their effort to uphold their responsibility as mainstream media to disseminate credible information to the public, they tend to risk undermining their competitiveness, as ensuring accuracy of information tends to result in publishing delays:

“Because people tend to gravitate towards social media, they tend to believe that everything that goes out on social media is true and we have to deal with that. They begin to say “well, okay, but that was already out on Facebook since two days ago or yesterday. How comes it’s only now you guys coming out with that?”. It’s difficult to make them understand that even if it is posted on Facebook, we have a responsibility as mainstream media to ensure that the information that we bring to you is accurate. And so, it takes some time to get that done. And if it turns out that the information that was on social media is true, it makes us look as if we are slow and inefficient in doing our job.”  
– Man, Media Professional, 40 years’ experience in the media industry

### 5.6.4 The Media’s Fight Against Misinformation and Disinformation is Challenged by Social Media

In the era of misinformation and disinformation, Dominican journalists are mindful of the increasing need to be careful with regards to the information that they disseminate to the public. Despite their claimed efforts of trying to do so by verifying their information, as highlighted above, they are sometimes culpable in perpetuating misinformation in Dominica. To better ensure that they only disseminate credible information to the public, the Key Informants therefore recommend that journalists make an improved attempt to: obtain their information from reputable sources, prioritize being factual over being first, and to put out information that has been verified.

Conversely, one Key Informant expressed his doubts in the extent to which the media can aid with combatting the spread of misinformation and disinformation. In addition to not having systems in place to actively monitor rumors and/or disinformation affecting communities, he stated that the fight against the spread of false information on social media is going to be especially challenging, and there is very little they can do about it. Speaking on the issue, he noted:

“What can we do? I’m not too sure. Because I think it’s a mindset now that a lot of people feel that they can empower themselves in terms of taking up the role. We can speak to it, we can advise a lot of people, or we can put out advisories. But even the authorities have been struggling with it especially since 2015, after Tropical Storm Erika. Everyone has access to, for example, the weather channels and stuff on the internet, so everyone is also a forecaster when it comes to tracking hurricanes. So, it’s kind of difficult because no matter how much the officials beg people to only trust information coming from the ODM or the Met office, people still do what they want to do.”  
– Man, Media Professional, 21 years’ experience in the media industry

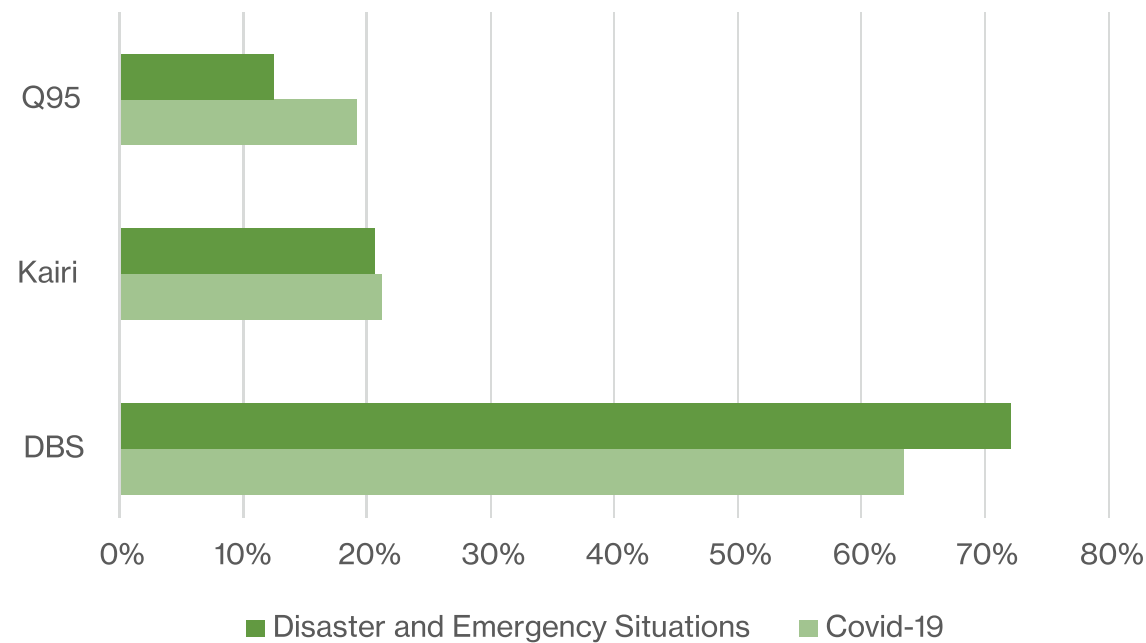
## 5.7 Influencers

In general, the information providers that populate an information ecosystem have the power to impact the way people think, act, and feel. Due to factors such as trust, accessibility and politics, some providers possess more power than others in influencing people. This section identifies the most influential provider(s) in Dominica.

### 5.7.1 The Government: Most Influential Information Provider in Dominica

Among the numerous sources from whom Dominicans access/receive information, the government was identified as the most influential. Thus, when accessing information from their most used channel – the radio (see more in Section 5.1.1) – Dominicans most often turn to those that are known for broadcasting information generated by the government, namely: DBS Radio (also referred to as the ‘Nation’s Station’) and Kairi FM. This observation is reflected in the social media followings of the two, with them being the two most followed/liked among the local radio stations (see *Table 5.5*). It was also confirmed by the survey respondents. DBS Radio is especially popular among Dominicans for crisis and disaster related information (see *Figure 5.11*), as being a government-owned service, it is known for receiving and thereby disseminating said information to the public more quickly. Other major influencers of news and information in Dominica are the local online news outlets, particularly DNO, EmoNews, and DA Vibes, respectively, as reflected in their followings/likes on Facebook (see *Table 5.5*).

**Figure 5.11: Most popular radio stations among survey respondents for crisis and disaster related information**



**Table 5.5: Social media presence of the most popular media outlets in Dominica**

	Facebook		Twitter	Instagram	YouTube
As of June 7, 2021	Followers	Likes	Followers	Followers	Subscribers
Printed Newspapers					
The Sun	2,041	1,937	-	-	-
The Chronicle	1,824	1,760	88	-	-
Online News Portals					
Dominica News Online	103,505	99,465	3,642	4,815	1,630
EMO News	63,075	33,339	-	2,807	1,090
DA Vibes	32,895	32,069	112	-	572
Nature Isle News	618	587	-	-	-
Radio Stations					
DBS Radio	22,648	17,706	91	194	824
Kairi FM	25,100	17,177	240	2,320	550
Vibes Radio	11,974	8,654	324	113	14
Q95 FM Radio	7,652	7,237	327	1,164	1,720
Radio En Ba Mango	1,037	1,041	-	-	43
Voice of Life – ZGBC Radio	468	454	-	-	-



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



As mentioned in Section 2.2, Dominica is prone to disasters; as a result of its geographical location, it has been and will continue to be affected by severe weather conditions. In recognition of this, in recent years, the country's leadership has made it a priority to enhance the island's resilience against the destructive impacts of disaster events. One such means via which the country can enhance its resilience is by strengthening its information ecosystem. With a healthy information ecosystem, it is anticipated that all or most Dominicans will have the ability to access the information they need to understand and effectively respond to events that affect their lives. Thus, with respect to crises and disasters, everyone will have access to the information they need to facilitate their safety and that of their family and friends.

Accordingly, this assessment was conducted to examine the health of Dominica's information ecosystem. In particular, the investigation sought to: 1. determine the information needs of individuals and communities across Dominica and the extent to which those needs are met, 2. identify what infrastructures are in place to support the production and flow of information, 3. determine the means via which Dominicans generally access information, 4. evaluate the extent to which individuals and communities have access to key information channels, 5. identify the sources of information that are most influential and trusted in Dominica, 6. ascertain how information is processed and used among Dominicans, and to 7. examine the impact that the types of information disseminated to the public has on the lives of individuals and communities.

In carrying out the investigation, a mixed methods approach was adopted. Altogether, five focus group sessions comprising a total of twenty-five (25) participants of diverse professions were conducted; five media professionals who work at some of the most influential media outlets in Dominica were interviewed; a survey instrument, comprising of approximately eighty (80) questions, was used to collect data from a total of 208 individuals who reside in various communities across the island (e.g., Good Hope, San Sauveur/Petite Soufriere, and St Cyr); and desk research was conducted to garner information on the media landscape of Dominica [see Section 3 for further details]. Analysis of the information obtained via these methods led to several discoveries, the most crucial of which were that:

- 1. Dominicans generally have access to the information that they need to make informed decisions, especially as it relates to disaster preparation and response. Despite having timely access to disaster-related information, however, some persons continue to act complacent and either fail or refuse to prepare for impending disasters.**
- 2. Access to information during times of disasters is especially challenging as a result of disruptions to utility services and communication channels, as well as damages to the road infrastructure caused by the disaster.**

### **3. The health and integrity of the information ecosystem in Dominica is currently being threatened by several undesirable properties [see Section 5 for additional details], including:**

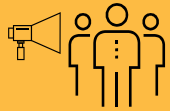
- The poor quality of the radio, internet, and mobile network coverage in some communities across Dominica;
- The unavailability of internet, mobile and television service in some communities;
- The proliferation of fake news and propaganda shared on social media and other online platforms;
- Residents' lack of access to the key information channels;
- The bias and politically polarizing nature of the information disseminated to Dominicans;
- Residents' lack of access to information from local authorities caused by bureaucratic government processes, unavailability/inaccessibility of local authorities, and power dynamics between politicians and journalists;
- The inability of some Dominicans to identify malicious/inaccurate information;
- The news sources' tendency to report erroneous information; and,
- The deterioration of trust among Dominicans in their main information sources.

These undesirable properties have the potential to cause further deterioration of the health of the information ecosystem. If they are allowed to persist, they will eventually undermine Dominican's ability to access accurate, credible, and relevant information, which in turn will impede their civic engagement. Once this happens, citizens will lose their ability to make informed life decisions and actively participate in their community, which in turn will undermine the effective functioning of society.

In light of the above discoveries, it is recommended that a concerted effort be made to strengthen Dominica's information ecosystem, and in turn the nation's resilience against the impacts of future crises and disasters. Accordingly, it is proposed that the key stakeholders, particularly: the local authorities, media, and the citizens, partake the following course of actions to address the issues plaguing the different areas of the information ecosystem.

# 6.1 Recommendations for Improving Access to Information

As discussed in *Section 5.3*, access to information is challenging for some individuals, media professionals, and communities in Dominica. The reasons behind this challenge included but are not limited to: the unavailability of internet, mobile and television service in some communities; the unavailability/inaccessibility of local authorities; and persons' lack of access to key information channels. To address the issue and thereby improve the population's access to credible information, it is proposed that the government and other local authorities seek to develop and adopt a communication strategy that facilitates Dominicans' access to all news and information that has implications for their lives. As a part of this effort, it is recommended that the local authorities make a special effort to:



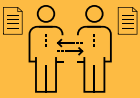
## Develop and adopt a more inclusive public communication strategy

A greater effort needs to be made to ensure that vulnerable segments of the population, particularly those Dominicans who do not have access to traditional or normal means of communication, are also able to receive/obtain relevant information. The existing practice of sharing information through platforms that are inaccessible to some communities are impeding those communities' access to relevant information as well as their civic participation. Hence, a more inclusive communication strategy, which promotes the use of information channels that cater to the needs of different segments of the population, including the elderly and persons living with disabilities, should be adopted.



## Improve the communication infrastructure across Dominica

The passing of Tropical Storm Erika and Hurricane Maria in recent years caused significant damages to the communication infrastructure across Dominica. Consequently, this has left some communities with poor or no access to radio, internet, phone, and television coverage. Given the importance of communication infrastructure to information flow, it is proposed that the government embark on a project to improve the radio, internet, phone, and television infrastructure across Dominica.



## Provide all media outlets, regardless of their political affiliations, with equal opportunities to access information from local authorities

Given that the effectiveness of mass media in disseminating news and information differs as a result of varying preferences among Dominicans regarding the channels from which they most often obtain information and sources who are more trusted [see *Section 5.1* for more information], it is critical that local authorities enable timely access to information for all media outlets, and not just those who report pro-government content. Hence, local authorities should make a concerted effort to honour all requests for information equally and provide all media outlets with equal opportunities to access information that is relevant to the public. In the long term, a Freedom of Information Act should be developed to regulate this process.

# 6.2 Recommendations for Improving Access to Information During Disasters

During times of disasters, communication flow is often the first to be affected due to disruptions in utility services (electricity and internet) and damages to communication infrastructures. Given that information access is crucial in saving lives, as well as effective response to and management of disasters, ensuring consistent and uninterrupted communications during these times is vital. With radio proving to be the most affordable and resilient emergency communication channel, it is proposed that the government invest in more radio systems, particularly those that have a track record for facilitating information sharing during such times (e.g., amateur radio). In addition to investing in such systems, the government should ensure that at least two persons from each community and disaster response agency across Dominica are equipped with and trained to use such systems.

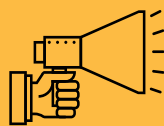
# 6.3 Recommendations for Improving Trust in Information

Accessing *trustworthy* information in Dominica is currently a major challenge. As discussed in *Section 5.6*, the information ecosystem in Dominica is plagued by bias and politically charged information, as well as a proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. This issue is undermining the public's trust in the content disseminated by their main news and information sources, which in turn has negative implications for civic participation and democracy. It is thereby critical that immediate steps be taken to improve the credibility of the information disseminated to the public. In doing this, the media, lay persons and the local authorities all have a role to play. The following are thereby proposed:



**Dominicans should make it their responsibility to scrutinize the credibility of the information disseminated to them**

With social media making it possible for people to spread misinformation and disinformation quickly and easily to a global audience, and the increasingly negative impact that such information tends to have on individuals, civil society, and democracy [see Section 5.6 for examples], there is a growing need for today's information consumers to evaluate information credibility. By verifying accuracy of information before sharing with friends and families, Dominicans can be instrumental in decreasing the spread of false or misleading information across the nation, and thereby increase their access to more trustworthy information. Please see Appendix B for some tips on how to assess information credibility.



**Local authorities and media outlets should host public awareness campaigns to enlighten Dominicans on the issue of misinformation and disinformation and how to discern the difference between credible and false or misleading information**

Although some Dominicans tend to make an effort to assess information accuracy prior to sharing, they do not all adopt best practices for doing so. Additionally, some of them do not always scrutinize accuracy before sharing [see Section 5.4 for further details]. Given that the layperson plays a significant role in the spread of misinformation and disinformation across the island, and their failure to assess credibility facilitates the spread of such information, it is essential that interventions be directed at training and encouraging Dominicans to be more attentive to information accuracy. With consideration to the recent research finding that people are often susceptible to misinformation and disinformation because it fails to occur to them that the information may be false,<sup>36</sup> it is proposed that steps be taken to sensitize the public on the issue and educate them on how to be more mindful information consumers to help minimize its spread.



**Media professionals in Dominica should commit to strengthening the quality of their journalism**

In addition to sometimes being guilty of circulating misinformation, media outlets in Dominica have also been accused of reporting information that is largely biased and politically polarizing [see Section 5.6 for additional details]. Given that Dominicans rely heavily on local media outlets to keep them informed, and often use these sources to verify information credibility, it is imperative that media professionals prioritize providing the public with accurate information to avoid contaminating the local information ecosystem with misinformation. In achieving this endeavor, it is recommended that journalists strive to:

abide by standards and ethics of the profession, refrain from publishing unverified information, photos and videos, minimize the publication of stories with sensational headlines, maintain fairness in their reporting, and to always get it right in the first instance rather than rely on post-publication corrections. It is also recommended that media professionals obtain training in fact-checking, combatting misinformation and disinformation, and in evaluating the credibility of visual content and information sources to aid in improving the nation's access to trustworthy news and information.<sup>37</sup>

**6.4 Recommendations for Improving Disaster Preparedness and Response**

Despite generally having timely access to disaster-related information, some Dominicans remain complacent and fail to carry out the necessary protective actions to safeguard themselves and their family. This decision to not prepare could be a result of number of reasons, among which 'the willingness to prepare' and 'the capability to prepare' are usually the most common.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of the reason, however, the fact remains that failure to prepare for a crisis or disaster can significantly undermine one's resilience. As such, it is important to take steps to reduce complacency among Dominicans. Although it continues to be one's responsibility to take the necessary precautions upon receiving emergency warnings, there are a number of measures that the government can undertake to reduce complacency and improve public preparedness during disasters and emergencies.<sup>39</sup> Hence, in addition to their current disaster preparedness efforts, it is proposed that the government of Dominica also:

- Develop a measure of public complacency to assess factors such as Dominican's evacuation efforts, use of emergency shelters, and refilling of emergency supplies etc., and monitor it during times of crises and disasters to gain an accurate measure of the extent to which the public respond to emergency warnings.
- Ensure that during times of crises and emergencies, the message is tailored in such a way that convinces the public that they are in immediate, personal danger and therefore need to take action. For example, at the onset of a storm or hurricane, the focus of the messaging should be on articulating the path, timing and strength of the disaster event, as well as information on shelters, emergency foods and water supply, and evacuation routes etc.
- Provide accurate and timely information on emerging disasters using communication styles that are tailored to special populations (e.g. elders, children, and persons with disabilities etc.) and communication channels that are preferred and/or accessible by all.

<sup>37</sup> Ireton, C., & Posetti, J. (Eds.). (2018). Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation. UNESCO.

<sup>38</sup> Wang, X., & Kapucu, N. (2008). Public complacency under repeated emergency threats: Some empirical evidence. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(1), 57-78. doi: 10.1093/jopart/mum001

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 38 for reference.

<sup>36</sup> Pennycook, G., Epstein, Z., Mosleh, M., Arechar, A., Eckles, D., & Rand, D. (2021). Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. *Nature* 592, 590–595. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2>

# 07

## APPENDIX A

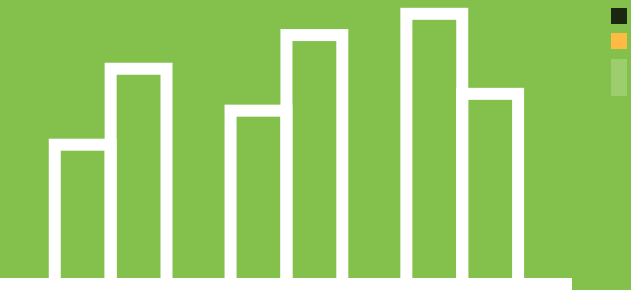


Table 7.1: Breakdown of the demographics for the participants from Dominica

	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Gender	Women	119	57.20%
	Men	89	42.8%
Age	16-25	24	11.59%
	26-35	37	17.87%
	36-45	44	21.26%
	46-59	47	22.71%
	60-79	43	20.77%
	≥80	12	5.80%
Highest Level of Education	Completed College/ University	28	13.53%
	Some College/ University	21	10.14%
	Completed Technical/ Vocational	6	2.90%
	Some Technical/ Vocational	7	3.38%
	Completed Secondary	36	17.39%
	Some Secondary	19	9.18%
	Completed Primary	56	27.05%

	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
	Some Primary School	29	14.01%
	No schooling, literate	2	0.97%
	No schooling, illiterate	3	1.45%
Nationality	Dominican	194	94.63%
	Haitian	4	1.95%
	St. Lucian	2	0.98%
	Cameroonian	1	0.49%
	Barbadian	1	0.49%
	Dominican-British	1	0.49%
	Cuban-Dominican	1	0.49%
	Nigerian	1	0.49%
Ethnicity	African	117	56.25%
	Kalinago	53	25.48%
	Mixed (Kalinago and African)	20	9.62%
	Other (e.g., philipino, creole, French, Black Latino)	9	4.33%



	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
	Indian	1	0.48%
	Unsure	8	3.85%
Languages spoken	English	185	99.46%
	Creole	73	39.25%
	Patois	19	10.22%
	French creole	14	7.53%
		33	15.87%
Persons living with Disabilities	Motor	6	18.18%
	Intellectual	2	6.06%
	Visual	10	30.30%
	Auditory	2	6.06%
	Unable to care for self	3	9.09%
	Mixed (e.g., visual, intellectual, speech and languages, unable to care for self)	10	30.30%

**Table 7.2: Breakdown of the number of survey respondents from each group assessed in Dominica**

Criteria	Number of Respondents
Good Hope	13
San Saueveur/Petite Soufriere	28
St. Cyr	16
La Plaine	16
Boetica	16
Delices	15
Bagatelle/Fond Saint Jean	23
Petite Savanne	16
Kalinago Community	41
Persons with no internet at home	75
Persons living with disabilities	26
Single-adult headed households	33
Elderly persons (65+)	39
Households with 3 or more children under the age of 21	23
Persons on welfare/unemployed person	33
Migrants/immigrants	11

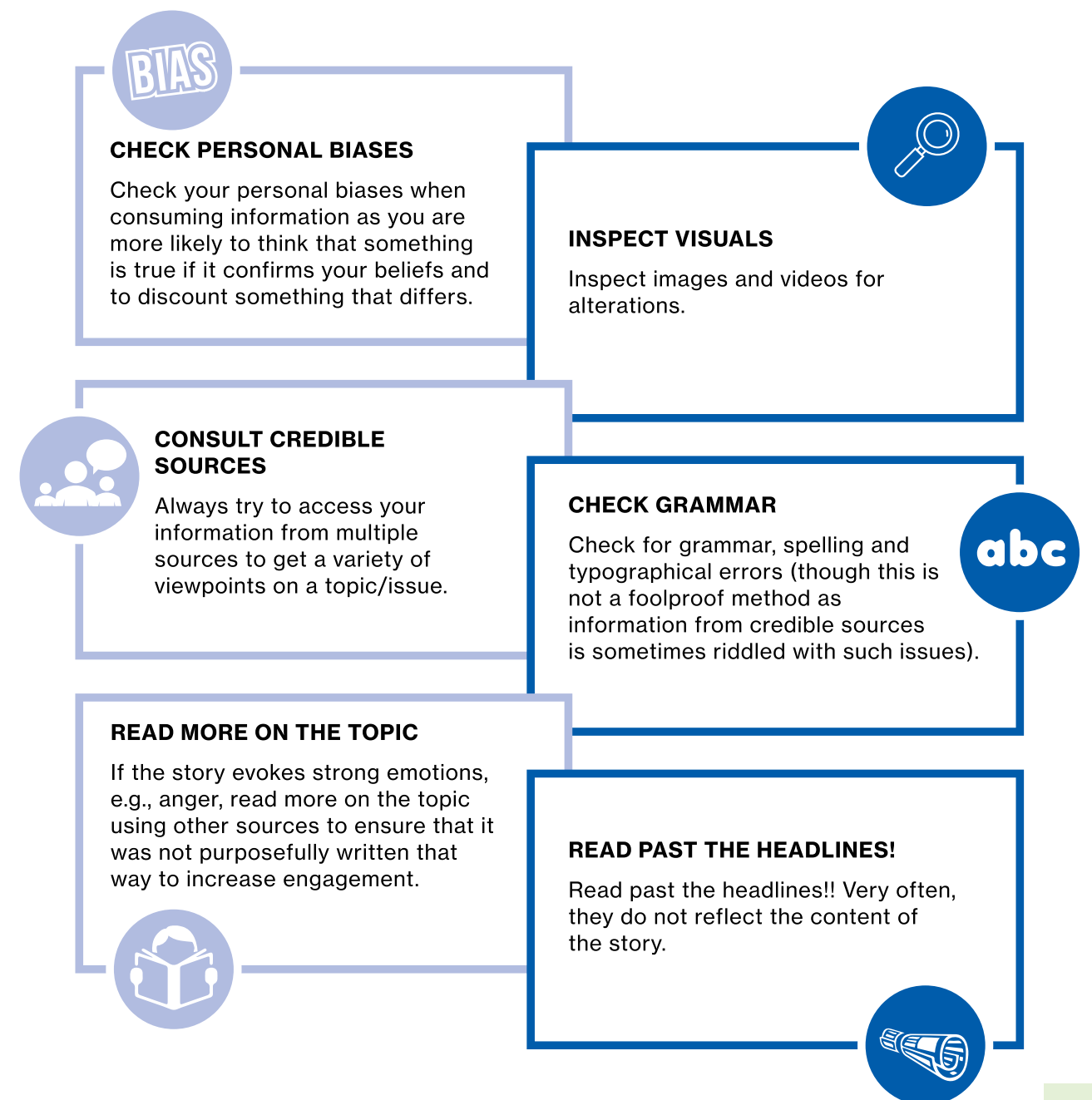
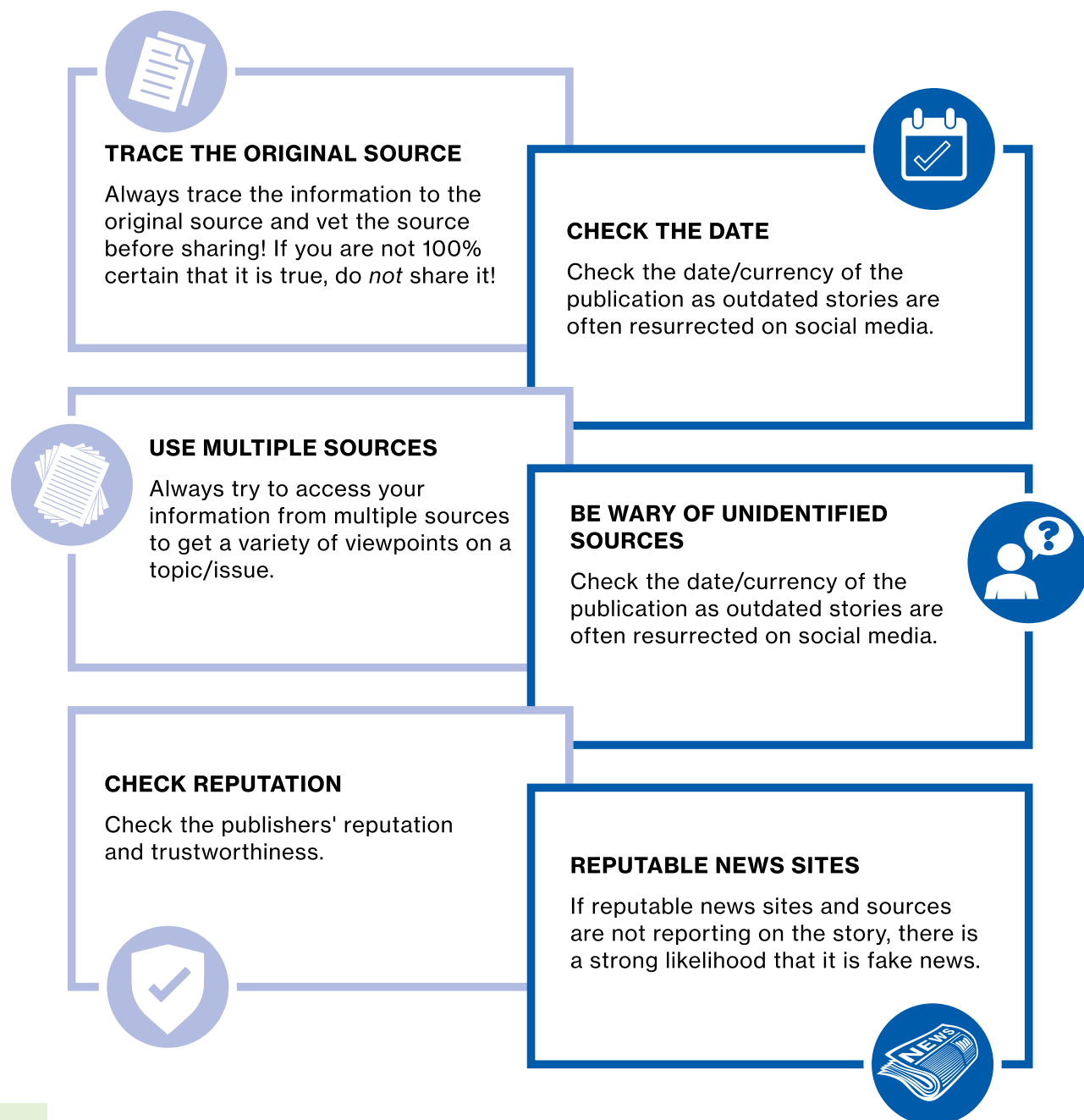




# 08

## APPENDIX B



**Figure 8.1: Tips for determining information credibility and reducing the spread of misinformation and disinformation**





Generally, Dominicans have access to the information that they need to make informed decisions, especially as it relates to disaster preparation and response. Despite having timely access to disaster-related information, however, some persons continue to act complacent and either fail or refuse to prepare for impending disasters.