CDAC Haiti
Learning Review

Executive Summary

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Preface

This Learning Review was made possible as part of the generous support provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (UNOCHA) Emergency Relief and Response Fund (ERRF) to CDAC Haiti.

The CDAC Network commissioned Channel Research to undertake the CDAC Haiti Learning Review, which was conducted between October 2011 and January 2012. Channel Research interviewed and met with 55 individuals from a variety of UN, INGO, NGO, Red Cross, media development organisations, journalists and representatives of local media, and officials from different Government of Haiti departments, in Port-au-Prince, London, Bangkok, and New York.

This Executive Summary is part of the Learning Review. The full Learning Review will be available on the CDAC Network website from April 2012. See **www.cdacnetwork.org**

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Executive summary

The Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network is a unique initiative that brings together expertise from the humanitarian, media development and technology sectors in a new collaboration that recognises information and two-way communication as key humanitarian deliverables. It was formed in 2009 with a view to improving communication between aid actors and disaster affected populations.[1]

In the immediate aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the CDAC Network undertook its first ever ground initiative. This initiative, which came to be known as CDAC Haiti, was funded largely through the OCHA's ERRF with some additional short-term funding in 2011 from the global CDAC Network and the World Health Organisation (WHO). In total, CDAC Haiti received $US 615,000.

This Learning Review aims to document CDAC Haiti's activities, assess achievements, and contribute knowledge about what worked, what didn't, and why. A key component of the Review is the identification of lessons from this 'new' area of humanitarian coordination that can be drawn for other emergency operations. The Review was conducted between October 2011 and January 2012.

PHASES
OF CDAC HAITI

CDAC Haiti began as an informal, short-term pilot initiative. From the beginning it aimed to provide a system-wide communication coordination mechanism – an unusual ambition for what was technically a stand alone project. The objective was to enable humanitarian operations to get life-saving information to affected populations and, of equal importance, to channel the affected population's voices back to aid actors.

In the early months, CDAC Haiti benefitted from a few committed individuals in both headquarters and in Haiti who had the vision to set sufficient groundwork in place for the future direction of CDAC Haiti and its secretariat. This meant that when secretariat staff were eventually recruited they had a strong foundation on which to build, and were able to carve out CDAC Haiti's role as a coordination mechanism, advocator and service provider in the area of communication with disaster affected communities relatively quickly.

By the time the cholera epidemic became fact in October 2010, CDAC Haiti had gained enough credibility to be requested by OCHA to become the 'communication sub-cluster' on cholera. CDAC Haiti found its stride in the three months that followed. Evidence suggests that its achievements in this period were widely regarded as filling an important gap and adding value to the humanitarian effort.

CDAC Haiti shut down for nearly three months when funding ended in January 2011. Having initially been conceived with a short-term perspective, CDAC Haiti and the global CDAC Network did not systematically seek a sustainable funding base. While CDAC Haiti was restarted at the end of April 2011, it never fully regained its former momentum.

In its last phase, CDAC Haiti continued to undertake what this review considers to be quality work. Its coordination function became much less pronounced as its focus centred on building capacity among its key government partners. The secretariat finally closed in November 2011, although most stakeholders in Haiti were in agreement that this was premature. They deemed that it would have had a critical role to play in the upcoming return and relocation of displaced populations.

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1 Initially this included the BBC World Service Trust (now BBC Media Action), British Red Cross, Internews, Irish Red Cross, Save the Children Alliance and Thomson Reuters Foundation. OCHA was considered a member of the core group although it did not contribute financially in the early stages.

ACHIEVEMENTS
OF CDAC HAITI

The humanitarian response in Haiti represents one of the largest cross-agency commitments to communication ever seen in an emergency. The humanitarian community's capacity to communicate with affected communities reached new ground, and evidence suggests CDAC Haiti played a critical role in this overall achievement by mobilising partners toward appropriate, efficient and coherent communication with disaster affected communities.

In Haiti and elsewhere, efficient information sharing among humanitarian partners, identification of gaps and collective filling of those gaps, and efforts to minimise duplication and enhance effectiveness requires effective coordination. And to work successfully, a coordination mechanism requires credibility, information management systems and regular coordination meetings. It also needs the ability to lead strategically, integrate itself into the humanitarian system and to advocate. CDAC Haiti met most of these requirements as illustrated by the findings summarised below:

- Most stakeholders had a high regard for the competence, efficiency and dynamism of the CDAC Haiti secretariat staff. The secretariat acted as a neutral party, ran meetings in a democratic manner and was adept at building consensus among the range of different partners.

- Overall, most people considered the secretariat's regular coordination meetings useful. These meetings made it possible for partners to collaborate on: i) providing coordinated and relevant life-saving information *to* disaster affected populations, and ii) ensuring that feedback *from* affected populations was effectively channelled to the humanitarian community. Stakeholders maintained that the coordination effort was effective in avoiding duplication and filling gaps in the response. Without CDAC Haiti, they believed, many opportunities would have been missed and the quality of the response would have been diminished.

- The secretariat was particularly noted for being an efficient provider of reliable information. It digested and packaged information using different channels and formats to meet the needs of its constituency.

- The CDAC Haiti secretariat offered strategic leadership by playing a proactive and catalytic role. This included pitching ideas, bringing parties together, promoting synergies and coordinating joint initiatives that advanced the overall goal of communicating with disaster affected populations. Furthermore, the secretariat offered its advice and support to partners that saved them time and resources.

- The CDAC Haiti secretariat effectively integrated itself into the humanitarian system. It regularly liaised and networked with several clusters. Despite its lack of a formal coordination status and initial recognition within the system, because of its credibility and knowledge CDAC Haiti was invited to participate in the overall Inter-Cluster Coordination (ICC) meetings as if it were itself a cluster within the humanitarian system.

- CDAC Haiti made clear gains in raising awareness about two-way communication, listening to vulnerable people and taking their voices into account. Informants believe that the secretariat's persistent advocacy resulted in the CDAC Haiti message getting through to humanitarian organisations and relevant government agencies.

A particular strength that the secretariat developed over time was its ability to collaborate with government partners and connect the government with the NGO community in relevant ways. The employment of a Government Liaison Officer was an important asset in this regard. Evidence suggests that the systematic work to build capacity among the government partners enhanced connectedness and will result in tangible improvements with good prospects for sustainability.

Some areas that stakeholders thought should be considered in the context of a future CDAC-like initiative – but that CDAC Haiti did not address sufficiently or at all – include: developing a policy

document to guide communication work and help set priorities; funding pilot projects with partners that could be taken to scale; undertaking or facilitating more research and studies; providing more technical support to partners; contributing to systematic monitoring and evaluation of the effects of communication work; and involving programme staff more systematically in efforts to show the centrality of two-way communication to programme quality and effectiveness as well as accountability.

ENABLING FACTORS

For the purpose of learning and replicating, it is useful to examine the factors that enabled CDAC Haiti to undertake successfully its role as a coordination mechanism.

- To begin with, it benefitted greatly from **hard-working, skilled and committed individuals**. CDAC Haiti was conceived by global CDAC Network members who were committed to implementing, and learning from, a field initiative. It was subsequently run by dynamic, professional and agile staff who accomplished a lot with limited resources.

- Second, CDAC Haiti received **solid backing from the Humanitarian Coordinator** (HC) **and OCHA** (one of the CDAC Network founding agencies). The HC supported CDAC Haiti steadfastly from the start, fully concurred with CDAC Haiti's overall principles and gave it the opportunity to lead the sub-group on cholera communication within the cluster system. OCHA also lent its support to CDAC Haiti by *inter alia* backstopping, defending[2] and funding the initiative. When needed, OCHA helped place CDAC Haiti on the agenda of different strategic meetings and gave it visibility. Furthermore, CDAC Haiti gained a measure of legitimacy by its association with OCHA. This allowed it to interact effectively with the cluster system and the ICC.

- Third, **Internews** (another of the founding agencies) **enabled CDAC Haiti,** not only as its host agency – a task it performed in a supportive manner – but also as an active member of the CDAC Haiti group. Internews ensured that part of CDAC Haiti maintained a solid footing in the media sector. Moreover, its audience research and analysis added significant value to the broader CDAC Haiti initiative, particularly since very few humanitarian organisations possessed this kind of capacity. Internews staff at their HQ also had a clear sense of the practicalities of running CDAC Haiti as key staff had already worked in Haiti from the beginning of the Haiti initiative for different periods of time.

- Fourth, the cholera epidemic presented CDAC Haiti with a tremendous opportunity to prove itself. There was a **vacuum in the leadership of health communication coordination** that neither WHO/PAHO nor UNICEF had the capacity to fill.[3] CDAC Haiti was given the chance because it had already gained credibility in the humanitarian system. However, had the relevant UN agencies felt able to shoulder this task, most probably CDAC Haiti would not have been asked to lead the communication sub-group.

- Fifth, UNOPS and IOM's engagement in CDAC Haiti proved invaluable, particularly in face-to-face communication initiatives and field research. This is because both these organisations had a large number of **community mobilisers** working at field level that meant that the voices of affected communities could be heard in CDAC Haiti meetings. This valuable resource also enabled critical joint field-level assessments. Information about these assessments can be found in the full report.

- Last, even though CDAC Haiti might have benefitted from an even broader membership base, there was **enough critical mass of each type of organisation** – UN agencies, media development organisations and organisations with social mobilisers – to create the balance the initiative needed to achieve its goals.

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2 As discussed in the full report, OCHA defended CDAC Haiti when the government and other stakeholders questioned its role and non-formalised status.

3 This statement is based on evidence from the named stakeholders.

IMPEDING FACTORS

Despite its achievements, CDAC Haiti faced a number of impeding factors:

- First, CDAC Haiti had **no formal status as a structure within the overall humanitarian coordination system.** In addition, it had several iterations of objectives. Many stakeholders regarded this as an advantage – indeed, CDAC Haiti made the most of its ambiguous status and varying objectives by freely manoeuvring to respond to emerging needs and opportunities and exploring what a communication coordination mechanism on the ground could potentially engage in and accomplish.

  Overall, however, the lack of formal status undermined accountability and predictability within the humanitarian system in Haiti. The running of CDAC Haiti was left to individuals to define and manage as opportunities and needs arose. If it were not for the commitment and drive of these individuals, informants claimed that CDAC Haiti would have collapsed early in its inception. It is doubtful that another country-level CDAC initiative could function as well without its status, role and objectives being clearly defined and articulated within the humanitarian system.

- Second, CDAC Haiti was encumbered by **not having a funding strategy, which undermined its sustainability.** It managed to survive, stumbling at times, and was disadvantaged by the inability to plan ahead and strategise.

- This issue is partly related to the third impediment, which was that CDAC Haiti did not receive enough **strategic guidance**. It was launched before the global CDAC Network was institutionally developed to possess the tools, processes and structures needed to manage this country-level operation. In a sense, 'the cart was put before the horse'. Furthermore, there was insufficient capacity for on-going strategic guidance at the global level as members had their own full-time jobs. As time passed, some members felt less ownership and/or were ambivalent towards the initiative in Haiti and began to regard it as a parallel structure. Meanwhile Internews, as host agency, played a larger role than it initially envisaged that went beyond fiduciary and other hosting responsibilities.

- Fourth**,** the lines of **communications and accountability systems** involving the country level, the host agency and the global CDAC Network's Steering Committee were not well established. Over time, sub-optimal information exchange by all parties led to further reduced ownership of CDAC Haiti by the CDAC Network. This weakened the sense of accountability from the country level and led to even less communication.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

CDAC Haiti was a highly relevant initiative that contributed to making the humanitarian effort in Haiti more effective, efficient and relevant to need. It succeeded in providing much needed services, coordination, strategic leadership, capacity building and advocacy for better communication with affected people. While a favourable context and propitious circumstances played a critical part, hard work and skilful decisions, along with OCHA's on-going support, also contributed to CDAC Haiti's success.

The CDAC Haiti experience shows what can be achieved through effective coordination of communication with affected communities. It also illustrates the dynamics that provide results and the potential pitfalls along the way. Furthermore, the experience underscores **the necessity of addressing governance systems, accountability, resource mobilisation and status issues** before any CDAC-like entity is deployed in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This Review has the following recommendations for the CDAC Network and the humanitarian community:

Recommendation 1: The international humanitarian community – in particular, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (ISAC) principals, NGOs and donors – **should consider the coordination of two-way communication with disaster affected communities as a vital and standard component of emergency response**. It should explore ways to ensure a predictable, legitimate and sufficiently resourced coordination function with a clear mandate to *inter alia* address gaps and duplicative efforts in communication with affected populations. Since the communication needs of affected populations typically increase during the emergency phase, a CDAC-like coordination function will require a medium-term perspective.

Recommendation 2: In its strategy formulation work, the **CDAC Network should consider the role it can play to support the humanitarian effort globally** in the area of communication with affected communities. The successes of CDAC Haiti offer the Network a new level of credibility to draw on for its critical advocacy role for communication with affected populations. It should use its unique position to build on the experience gained in Haiti to **further strengthen the humanitarian community's capacity to address the communication needs of disaster affected populations** at the operational and policy levels. This includes sharing knowledge and skills by *inter alia* developing tools and guidelines; undertaking innovative pilot initiatives; identifying good practice; conducting training; and backstopping the humanitarian effort on the ground.

Recommendation 3: The CDAC Network should **engage with actors who are proponents of approaches that promote accountability, participation and human rights** (such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership [HAP] International, the IASC Sub-Working Group on Accountability with Affected Communities,[4] the Listening Project, Save the Children, Oxfam, etc).[5] Jointly, they should explore how communicating with disaster affected communities can be enhanced by integrating principles and approaches related to accountability; freedom of expression; and the right to information, to participate, and to be heard. Pilot initiatives and studies should be considered. Donor organisations that promote rights based approaches and accountability should be sought as partners.

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4 Since early 2010, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Baroness Amos, has reinvigorated the debate on making accountability toward beneficiaries more vital and operational within the UN system. This includes a fresh look at information flows and communication in disasters through the recently launched Sub-Working Group on Accountability to Affected Populations, chaired by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP). This Sub-Working Group is part of the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach. (The CDAC Network is already working with this group.)

5 HAP and Save the Children currently sit on the CDAC Network Steering Committee.