

Recommendations for strengthening communication and community engagement in the Libya floods response

February 2024

About this bulletin

This bulletin summarises the key findings and recommendations for strengthening collective efforts on communication and community engagement in the Libya floods response.

The findings are drawn from a qualitative consultation with more than 30 representatives from the humanitarian community conducted in November 2023–January 2024.

Context

Restricted space for civic and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) poses significant barriers to engaging directly with communities and, while there was an opening of the civic space in the immediate aftermath of Storm Daniel, the operating environment remains challenging. Additionally, fragmented coordination and remote management constraints pose barriers to joint working on communication and community engagement.

Finding 1: Lack of information sharing is compounding suspicion of aid actors and resulting in low awareness of services amongst affected populations

Recommendations

- **(Coordination, particularly Early Recovery)** Actors in the reconstruction response should **develop a joint communication strategy which clearly explains their role and activities.** Such a joint communication campaign would aim to demystify the role that aid partners will play in upcoming reconstruction efforts in the flood affected region, particularly in relation to the role of the municipal and national government and promote the value of a vibrant civil society. As explored in Finding 2, social media could be an effective platform for such a campaign.
- **(All response actors)** Community engagement activities that are taking place should be **two-directional, with aid partners taking time to adequately explain their activities and their intended outcomes.** This should include working closely with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) implementing partners on a joint approach to community engagement and two-way communication, particularly in the early stages of a new project.

Finding 2: Mass media channels, especially social media, are significantly underutilised for both one-way and two-way communication with communities

Recommendations

- **(All response actors)** Seek out training and guidance on the effective use of social media for **community engagement:** in addition to tailored training packages, there are a number of free online resources¹ available to provide practical guidance for aid actors looking to establish a more active social media presence. In order to minimise adverse risks of social media engagement, organisations looking to incorporate social media more actively into their programming should also conduct a thorough risk/benefit analysis prior to introducing new activities.
- **(All response actors)** Utilise existing platforms and collective action for engagement through **social media:** working through established social media pages or accounts, such as BBC Media Action's El Kul2, can both minimise risk to individual organisations, and capitalise on the population reach.
- **(All response actors)** Use social media channels for two-way communication and **'communication as aid' purposes, not just outward promotional communication:** Regularly publish and promote accurate, verified information on social media feeds regarding information on early recovery and reconstruction efforts for people to share. Organisations should continuously engage with user comments on social media posts so that misunderstanding and misinformation can be quickly corrected, and disinformation identified. Additionally, explore opportunities to incorporate social listening into programme activities to ensure that they are better informed by the perceptions and priorities of affected populations.

Finding 3: Some good practice but limited joined-up working or cohesive communication and community engagement strategy guiding the response

Recommendations

- **(All response actors) INGOs and local organisations should be more integrated into decision-making spaces and joint accountability mechanisms:** while it is positive that some coordinated communication and community engagement activities are operational in Libya, these should be accessed by a wider range of aid actors. CSOs in particular should be encouraged to engage with such platforms given the unique connection, and access, that they have to affected populations. Within this, international partners should proactively engage with CSOs to build trust and support them to access coordination structures, which can be exclusionary due to language barriers and the use of technical humanitarian jargon. Work to better understand the current barriers which are preventing both CSOs and INGOs from engaging in existing accountability spaces would also be helpful in broadening participation.
- **(Coordination partners) Coordination partners should aim to strengthen information-sharing and links between communication and community engagement initiatives to improve coherence:** building on the existing Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) mapping work led by OCHA, but also extending to more systematic sharing of guidance mainstreaming communication and community engagement in programming, as well as creating space for partners to share best practice and lessons learned from existing communication and community engagement activities. Specifically, working groups whose mandate is likely to extend beyond the nexus transition, should explore the opportunity to include a communication and community engagement component into their long-term strategy.
- **(Coordination partners) Any joint communication and community engagement strategy and/or guidance should take into account the planned changes to the aid architecture:** recognising that the overall aid coordination structures will change, and that communication and community engagement planning should aim to reflect this, for example by being integrated into the implementation of the UN Cooperation Framework 2023-25, which will underpin much of the nexus way of working.

¹ See for example, IFRC (n.d.) [Social Media e-learning course](#). IFRC (n.d.) [How to Use Social Media to Better Engage People Affected by Crises: A brief guide for those using social media in humanitarian organisations](#).

² El Kul is an online news and information platform with over 1.3 million followers. The platform reached approximately 60 thousand people per month in Derna alone in the aftermath of Storm Daniel.

Finding 4: Limited understanding of population needs makes it difficult to deliver aid to the most vulnerable

Recommendations

- **(All response partners, particularly information management) Data with methodological limitations is better than no data at all:** explore non-traditional avenues for collecting data on the needs of affected populations – for example, through more extensive qualitative methods, social media, ‘snowball’ sampling methods, and key informant networks and closer consultation with civil society groups which are embedded in the community.
- **(Coordination partners) Stronger coordination is needed to promote mechanisms for data access, sharing, analysis and utilisation across the response:** the creation of a secure common analysis platform would be extremely valuable in enabling information sharing between aid actors, improving the overall knowledge base and minimising the burden on communities participating in needs assessments.
- **(Coordination partners) Creative approaches to targeting are needed:** should restrictions on accessing information for targeting persist, aid responders should aim to agree on a minimum shared criteria for prioritisation, and then cross reference this with secondary data and qualitative evidence (for example through a limited number of focus groups). Lessons can be drawn from the work of the Cash Working Group which has already made progress in this regard, as well as initial efforts led by the Interagency Thematic Working Group.

Finding 5: Against this backdrop, early recovery efforts and the nexus transition represents both risk and opportunity

Recommendations

- **(International response partners) International partners should draw on local expertise and, to the greatest extent possible, the voices of communities themselves, to ground reconstruction and nexus programming in local realities:** mass media, CSO partnerships and working through municipal governments may increase opportunities for community participation in the absence of more traditional face-to-face approaches to engagement. Additionally, longer-term development programming should prioritise building community engagement approaches into the design and monitoring of activities with the aim of building trust and improving programme relevance.
- **(Coordination partners) Strategic guidance on communication and community engagement in early recovery efforts is needed:** clear strategic leadership within the aid infrastructure is vital to ensure regular information sharing, mapping of planned and existing activities to avoid duplication and provide counsel on pre-existing socio-political dynamics that should be taken into account in programme delivery.

- **(All response partners) Reconstruction activities must be designed with a conflict-sensitive lens:** design and delivery of programming, including how communities are engaged within this process, should be informed by systematic conflict sensitivity analysis to minimise risk of adverse harm or misinterpretation of activities.
- **(All response partners) Information and communication about the response should use context-appropriate language:** all communication about aid programming activities avoids references to the ‘Derna response’ and instead use more geographically inclusive language such as the “Storm Daniel response” or “floods response”.
- **(All response partners, with leadership from coordination) Take time to develop clear communication regarding how aid decisions are made, where possible demonstrating that aid is reaching all vulnerable communities:** transparent communication on the beneficiary selection process would further promote transparency and mitigate the risk of communities perceiving that some groups are benefitting over others.

Finding 6: Longer-term communication and community engagement solutions require greater and more systematic engagement with local actors

Recommendations

- **(Coordination partners) Up-to-date stakeholder mapping can serve as a valuable resource to international actors looking to strengthen local partnerships and more effectively engage with affected populations:** coordination partners should lead stakeholder mapping of local actors to better understand the existence and capacities of first responders and civil society groups. Mapping should build on the pre-existing work of UNDP in this area and be widely disseminated to humanitarian and development partners.
- **(All response partners) Engage more intentionally with pre-existing community structures that have played a central role in the immediate flooding response:** this includes both local ‘westerners’ but also the high volumes of ‘eastern’ volunteers who travelled to the flood-affected region to offer support in the weeks following Storm Daniel. Again, the production of a stakeholder mapping of local actors would be a key resource to support these efforts.
- **(All response partners) Build a common understanding of the language and aims of communication and community engagement efforts across UN, INGO and local actors:** in particular, use terminology and ways of working that are relevant and familiar to local actors and affected populations. Capacity bridging activities regarding communication and community engagement should be two-directional, recognising that local actors bring deep contextual knowledge and experience that can inform how best to communicate and engage with affected communities.
- **(All response partners) In the absence of opportunities for direct community engagement, NNGOs and CSOs can act as a proxy:** local organisations generally represent the communities that they work in and are led and staffed by Libyan nationals. Against the backdrop of ongoing access constraints, such actors can be consulted as part of communication and community engagement efforts when direct engagement with affected populations may not be possible.

Finding 7: Communication and community engagement should underpin ways of working with government in reconstruction efforts

Recommendations

- **(Coordination partners)** **Develop a cohesive communication strategy for engaging with government:** including the development of common messaging about the role of international aid actors in the response and support being provided to government authorities. Within this, clearly defining aid partners as playing a technical supporting role to the existing Municipal Operational Plans will be key.
- **(Coordination partners)** **As much as possible, build a common understanding with government partners of the importance of communication and community engagement in the success of reconstruction activities:** partners should aim to understand government policies, strategies and initiatives related to engaging with affected people to better synergise with existing approaches. Where relevant, partners should push for community participation, two-way communication and transparent information sharing to be mainstreamed in all joint government activities.
- **(International response partners)** **Strengthen collaboration and pathways for engagement with local partners who regularly partner and coordinate with government authorities to strengthen relationship building:** focus on building strong partnerships at municipal level to increase credibility and help enable improved engagement and two-way communication with affected communities.



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H2H Network
Humanitarian
Action Support



CDAC Network

Sayer Vincent–Invicta House
108–114 Golden Lane
London EC1V 8BR
United Kingdom

-  cdacnetwork.org
-  [@CDACN](https://twitter.com/CDACN)
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