

MESSAGE LIBRARY USER GUIDANCE

ABOUT THE MESSAGE LIBRARY

People affected by disaster must have access to timely, appropriate and accurate information to help them keep themselves and their families safe and well. They should also know their rights, entitlements and be able to give feedback about assistance. Responders have a duty to put in place appropriate, systematic and coordinated mechanisms to ensure this.

Information should be in the right languages and formats, based on trusted sources of information and shared through people's preferred channels. These factors will vary depending on who you are aiming to reach, so aim to use a mixed methodology approach.

Our Message Library offers clear, concise and simple messages on a range of topics as templates for you to adapt and use in the context you are working in. These are intended to help you make a quick start on communicating with communities while you further develop mechanisms for on-going dialogue with diverse groups within each community.

This document provides guidance on contextualising and using the messages. We also recommend taking the 3-hour e-learning course [Communication is Aid](https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=768). (<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=768>)

For more detailed information see [Collective Communication and Community Engagement in humanitarian action: How to Guide for leaders and responders](http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/how-to-guide-on-collective-communication-and-community-engagement-in-humanitarian-action). (www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/how-to-guide-on-collective-communication-and-community-engagement-in-humanitarian-action)

HELP US KEEP THE LIBRARY UP TO DATE

If you would like to contribute to topic reviews, have found a message that needs greater clarity, or wish to create a new topic, please contact us at info@cdacnetwork.org.

HOW TO DEVELOP AND SHARE INFORMATION

Promote the principle of community participation throughout actions, even in an emergency, for more positive outcomes.

Preparedness Actions

- Anticipate who might be at risk; when, where and why at they at risk; how you can reach them most effectively to share messages about the risk.
- What is the most relevant and useful information that people will need? Plan for preparedness, response and recovery.
- Use the message library to adapt and translate appropriate key messages on the risk(s), humanitarian principles and other relevant content.
- Coordinate with the relevant people both within your organisation and outside of it to pre-approve the messages and to ensure that systems for mass information dissemination are in place and can be scaled up.
- Check whether there is a working group or platform where you are working and join in collaborative efforts with government, community-based organisations, NGOs, UN and Red Cross / Crescent agencies, as well as media development agencies, local media and the private sector, e.g. technology providers (like the signatories to the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter). See for example: [National Platforms — CDAC Network](#) (www.cdacnetwork.org/national-platforms).

Developing information content

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, information needs will likely focus on what happened, how to trace missing loved ones, how to connect with family and friends, how to stay safe, what assistance is available and how to access it. Over time the needs will evolve and become more complex.

Information should be clear, concise and simple. If people are affected by trauma they may struggle with complex information. Stick to a few key messages to aid retention and clarity, and direct people

IMPACTFUL INFORMATION

Information content and key messages will have most impact if the information is relevant, useful and actionable, and if people:

- Are encouraged to discuss the information and ask questions
- Understand how they, their families and communities will benefit from acting on it
- Feel the language, approach and actions are compatible with their culture and customs
- Trust the source of information and know where to get further detail if needed
- Hear repeated and consistent messages from different sources.

to where they can find further information if they want it. Use plain, jargon-free, local language(s) and encourage positive action. Build in means for interaction, so that people can ask questions and provide feedback so you know how information needs are evolving.

Actions for effective information sharing

Determine what the risks are and what information content is needed. Ensure information is accessible and takes measures for the intentional inclusion of groups that are often disproportionately disadvantaged. Consult context analysis, needs assessment data, lessons from comparable responses and community consultations. Get input from communities regarding what information is needed, for whom and how it should be disseminated.

- **Take a 'good enough' approach.** This means starting with a quick, simple solution to avoid information vacuums, which can lead to bad outcomes. 'Good enough' doesn't mean second best; it acknowledges that in an emergency adopting a quick and simple approach may be the only practical possibility. Review and amend approaches accordingly as the situation evolves.
- **Determine target audience:** who needs to receive information as a priority? Not everyone is at equal risk and you should not make assumptions about who is likely to be most at risk. Use any needs assessments available and get input from communities to help you determine the audience(s).
- **Check what information already exists.** Search the [Message Library](http://www.cdacnetwork.org/message-library) (www.cdacnetwork.org/message-library) for relevant topics, which can be downloaded in PDF or Word. Check also what has been developed by the National Disaster Management Authority, government health ministry, or clusters. Use these messages as a starting point to get information out quickly.
- **Be intentional in your information sharing.** Develop specific objectives on your information campaign to guide your messaging. This will avoid information overload. Sometimes you will need to restrict information as not all information is for everyone, e.g. mass radio broadcasts about cash distributions could put recipients at risk of being attacked. Assess all information for suitability and risks.
- **Make sure that the information is useful, relevant and actionable,** enabling people to understand the assistance available and take action for themselves. Information should evolve over time as the context and needs change.
- **Contextualise messages** by translating them and adapting them both for the audience and channels through which they are being disseminated.
- **Adapt to your audience.** What is their level of knowledge of the issue? What action or behaviour do you want to encourage? What is the motivation for people to take this action or behave differently? What are the resulting key messages you need to convey? Get input from the community and test your assumptions.
- **Engage the target audience in the design and delivery** to determine the best combination of format, visuals and language to use. Text alone has limited value so include pictures, or use radio messaging, loudspeaker announcements, videos, and in-person communication. Working with community influencers like elders or celebrities can help gain trust.

- **Pre-tested with a sample of the intended audience.** Ensure that the language, approach and actions are compatible with people’s culture and customs. Test comprehension by mother tongue, level of education, gender and age. If you can’t pre-test with the intended audience you could ask e.g. drivers, warehouse / admin staff or others who have no prior technical knowledge.
- **Draw on technical experts to ensure accuracy.** Work with staff from relevant ministries, clusters, national platforms, etc. to develop correct, consistent information. Avoid confusion or harm due to the use of different terminology. Get specific support from technical experts, especially for sensitive issues such as nonrefoulement, protection, gender, targeting.
- **Share information on an interactive, two-way basis.** Use different channels (see below) to reach different audiences in a community and reinforce information. Always include opportunities for people to ask for clarification and raise questions, issues or complaints.
- **Plan your formats according to timing.** There are suitable formats for more complex information, such as radio dramas or community theatre, however, these may take time to develop and may be more relevant in weeks and months after a disaster rather than immediately unless they are prepositioned.
- **Disseminate information quickly, effectively and cyclically.** A cycle of information sharing, listening and dialogue will identify any issues with what has been shared (e.g. misunderstandings), identify new risks, rumours, etc. and enable you to build this into a next cycle of information sharing.

Examples of channels for information sharing and creating dialogue

Community meetings / assemblies	Hotline numbers	Voice recorders
Community representatives	Needs assessment	Perception surveys
Volunteers, community relays	Household surveys	Helpdesks / Information hubs
During distributions	Community activities	Information caravans
Newsletters	Focus groups	SMS
Radio and TV discussion programmes, debates, call-ins	Key or personal interviews	Social media, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp
	Flyers, leaflets	

REFERENCES

For more information on this topic, we recommend the following references.

CDAC Network (2019). **How to Guide for leaders and responders: Collective Communication and Community Engagement in humanitarian action.** www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/how-to-guide-on-collective-communication-and-community-engagement-in-humanitarian-action

CDAC Network & Humanitarian Leadership Academy (2017). **E-learning: Communication is Aid.** <https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=768>

CDAC Network (2017). **Rumour Has It: A Practice Guide To Working With Rumours.** www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/20170610-rumour