



Lifeline Production Manual

A guide on how to make programming for people affected by humanitarian emergencies



BBC

MEDIA ACTION

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD

Contents	
Foreword	2
What is Lifeline programming for?	4
How can it make a difference?	4
What is the difference between Lifeline programming and News programming?	4
Practical Lifeline information	5
What kind of information do people affected by humanitarian crises need?	6
Working with the relief effort	8
Communicating Lifeline information	10
Examples of calls to action	11
Format options for broadcast	12
Two-way communication	13
Interviews for Lifeline	16
Additional resources	18
Bibliography and further background reading	19

Front cover
Through Connexion Haiti, BBC World Service provided daily broadcasts sharing vital information in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2010.
LISA ROBINSON/BBC MEDIA ACTION

Foreword



Before I joined BBC Media Action I worked with Oxfam and saw first-hand in Darfur the importance of communication during humanitarian emergencies.

Oxfam was providing water and sanitation to over 600,000 people in camps across Darfur. When the BBC World Service Trust (as it then was) started Lifeline programming in the area, we were delighted because we were able to work together to ensure that key information reached a mass audience far more quickly, easily and cheaply than was possible face-to-face.

When there was an outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea – or cholera to anyone other than the government – we had to reach 2 million people across Darfur as fast as possible with key information about chlorinating jerry cans and hand washing as well as seeking medical assistance for anyone showing cholera symptoms. The Darfur Lifeline radio service reached camps and villages across the region and played a critical role in stopping the outbreak.

BBC World Service and Media Action can together save many lives in the coming years with Lifeline services. This training manual – that will help prepare us all to respond promptly when an emergency breaks – is a key document and I commend it to you.

Caroline Nursey
Executive Director, BBC Media Action



BBC World Service has long played an important role in reaching people with critical information. In recent years, programming has provided a lifeline for listeners in Haiti following the earthquake, in Pakistan during the floods, and in Somalia where people continue to face challenges around food insecurity.

But we know it's not just about one-way communication. New technologies, especially the mobile phone, are making it increasingly easier for listeners to interact with broadcasters, relief agencies and with each other. Through phone calls, text messages and social media, audiences affected by crisis can share their stories, reflect on the impact and hold those responsible for delivering aid to account.

Packed with practical advice about Lifeline programming, this manual also highlights how programme makers can initiate this two-way communication and offer the chance for those affected by crisis to have a voice. At the BBC we try to place audiences at the heart of what we do – and when disaster strikes and we are able to respond with Lifeline programming – that audience priority is especially critical.

Peter Horrocks

Director, BBC Global News and Chair, BBC Media Action

What is Lifeline programming for?

The purpose of Lifeline programming is to share information with people affected by humanitarian crises in order to help save lives and reduce suffering.

“As well as saving lives, information reduces suffering in the wake of disaster. Tracing lost family and friends, knowing how much compensation you’re entitled to or where you’re going to live, simply understanding why disaster struck: such information means an enormous amount to survivors left homeless and traumatised.”

Markku Niskala, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

How can it make a difference?

In the wake of a humanitarian disaster, a lack of information and communication can exacerbate suffering and reduce the likelihood of survival.

People need answers to basic questions such as: What happened? Where can we find food, shelter and water? How can we protect ourselves? How can we help injured people? What can we do to avoid the spread of disease? What should we do if a family member is missing?

Mass media communication can reach populations rapidly and on a large scale, providing life-saving information and guidance amid the chaos, strengthening the recovery by helping communities understand what is happening and what they can do to help themselves.

People must also be able to communicate their own perspectives and needs so that they have some way of holding relief organisations to account.

What is the difference between Lifeline programming and news programming?

Lifeline programming requires a slightly different approach from conventional newsgathering and reporting. It involves the delivery of practical, actionable information that audiences can use to improve their lives. It’s about reporting *for* those affected rather than *about* them. Topics may cover issues of safety, food, water, shelter, health, hygiene, trauma and more. The fundamental principles of good, responsible journalism remain the same. Values such as accuracy, impartiality, editorial integrity and independence should underpin your work, as ever.

Practical Lifeline information

Information for audiences must be applicable to their immediate situation. Consider the different angles of a story in an emergency:

NEWS

“Chaos at distribution points... Is aid being delivered properly...? Is there enough food to meet the needs...?”

This does not offer concrete, actionable information affected audiences can use to inform their own decisions about how to get help or help themselves.

LIFELINE INFO

“To receive food distributions, you need to have a voucher. You can register... Vouchers cannot be bought, sold or traded... Food rations will include...”

Audiences can act on this information by following the procedures for distributions and know what they are entitled to receive. This can also help to reduce corruption.

NEWS

“Cholera may kill thousands living in the camps during the quickly approaching rainy season...”

This information does nothing to empower audiences to take action to improve their situation.

LIFELINE INFO

“Cholera is a disease that causes... It is spread by... You can prevent cholera by... Aid agencies are distributing water purification tablets... tablets may taste funny but... Building and maintaining latrines is important because... Different ways of building latrines include...”

At a first glance, this kind of information may seem dull, especially for those listeners who are unaffected. But remember:

1. If you are caught up in a crisis and at the risk of disease, malnutrition and death, this kind of information is all you want to know.
2. It is only as boring as you make it!

As well as saving lives and helping people caught up in a crisis cope, well-crafted Lifeline programming can make compelling listening for wider audiences, as they learn about the day-to-day challenges their fellow human beings are facing and how they are dealing with them.

All the usual options and opportunities for creative and engaging programming are still there for you to weave this crucial life-saving information into your reports or packages.

In sudden major emergencies, the priority is getting the information out there as quickly and clearly as possible. But in more localised or later-stage crises, you will want to think about how to simultaneously provide practical information to help those who are directly affected and at the same time engage those listeners who are not.

What kind of information do people affected by humanitarian crises need?

This will, of course, vary according to the nature and stage of the crisis. Try to do more than make assumptions about what information people need. One of the easiest ways of finding out what audiences want to know is to ask them. You should also ask relief providers who have been on the ground what kinds of information needs they have identified.

Here are some examples of questions people may want answers to:

Immediate aftermath of a disaster

At this stage there is often chaos and confusion, and usually no organised relief effort. People only know what they can see around them, and the media can play a major role in helping them understand the nature and extent of the crisis and how best to stay safe. They might want to know:

- What is happening?
- Why?
- Where?
- What are the dangers now?
- How can I protect myself and my family?
- Is it dangerous to stay in the area where I am?
- What kind of help is available and from whom?
- How long is the crisis likely to go on for?
- Where can I find more information?
- What can I do to help my children cope with the trauma?

Resource

infoasaid message library

infoasaid – a joint BBC Media Action and Internews initiative – has developed a free message library for both media and humanitarian staff to use in the early stage of an emergency.

The messages can be used to provide populations with basic, generic information, until more specific information becomes available. Topics cover many different areas related to humanitarian crises, from what to do during aftershocks to safety in flood waters and simple sanitation advice. Always ensure that any pre-prepared messages are suitable to a specific emergency situation before broadcasting. Visit www.infoasaid.org*

*The infoasaid project is due to close at the end of 2012, but the resources will be available on the project's website until January 2014 and after that at other sites, which can be found from the infoasaid website www.infoasaid.org

It is also important to keep an eye out for damaging misinformation that may be circulating and to correct it. Earthquakes have led to rumours of nuclear invasion, causing widespread panic. False information about the expected arrival of a tsunami has caused stampedes.

Several days after the event

The community will probably have become more organised and certain services may be up and running. Some assistance may have arrived from the government or local organisations (although it usually takes one to two weeks for major international relief efforts to become operational).

Key questions may include:

- What food/water/shelter is available and how do I access it?
- How can I register to receive supplies distributed by agencies?
- What medical support is available? Where do I have to go to get it?
- Which agencies are helping? How do I recognise them, what are their logos and what services do each provide?
- What health risks are there and how can I protect myself from them?
- How should we dispose of waste?
- What security risks are there? How can I reduce them?
- A member of my family is missing. What should I do?
- Which communication facilities are functioning?
- Which transport routes are open?
- Is it safe to return home?

Get it right!

As with news reporting, if information is perceived as inaccurate or incomplete, broadcasters will lose their audiences' trust and could do more harm than good.

In a humanitarian emergency, this is even more the case – incorrect information can exacerbate suffering and even cost lives. Imagine the consequences of reassuring villagers that food aid will arrive tomorrow, when it is still several days away or telling people driven from their homes by conflict that it is safe to return, when it is not.

If incorrect information is broadcast, rectify it as quickly as possible and inform the relevant authorities or agencies so they can act to limit the consequences.

Weeks or months after the event

More long-term issues to do with recovery and reconstruction will arise, such as schooling, housing, dealing with trauma, and employment and livelihoods. People will want information on the recovery process and on what options and support are available to help them rebuild their lives.

There may also be questions of accountability: are the efforts of the government and wider relief agencies meeting people's needs? Has aid money been well spent? It might be appropriate to change the format of programming to reflect these longer-term themes (see format ideas below).

Working with the relief effort

Effective Lifeline programming requires regular contact and co-ordination with the relief effort. As early as possible, you should start liaising with international and local organisations, as well as government actors, to find out what is happening and identify useful information for your audiences.

If they are present, try to **tap into co-ordination mechanisms** such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) or whatever emergency response committee local authorities have set up.

Ideally, aid organisations and local authorities will agree on key information to transmit to the population and you can play a role in communicating it, exercising your usual editorial judgement and caution about accuracy, impartiality and reliability.

The bigger picture

Think also of those listening who are not direct victims of the crisis but may have been affected in other ways.

For example, if your programming centres around displaced people in camps, think about the host community, whose own lives and resources may have been affected by the sudden influx of people. Often this creates tensions. How might you help them understand what is happening and what they can do? Or, what about the diaspora? Those who know affected people can often help pass on crucial information, or may want to know if there is any way they can help.

Unfortunately, it's not unusual for audiences to be bombarded with conflicting information about what to do, leaving them even more confused than before. In some cases, communication with affected populations is barely on the relief agenda and people are left in the dark as to what to do and what help is coming. A lack of information leaves space for rumours and wild speculation, which can cause even more damage.

If it looks like communication with affected populations isn't on the agenda, try to change that! Remind relief co-ordinators that information will strengthen the aid effort and ask them to identify useful information for populations.

Always make it clear to contacts within the humanitarian community that you are doing Lifeline programming, not news reporting. Media relations officers usually focus on providing information for the media *about* rather than *for* affected communities. If you explain that your work is aimed at supporting the aid effort, you will be more likely to get the kind of information you need. You may have to ask to speak to someone who is directly involved with the relief effort on the ground to get the information you need.

Impartiality

Lifeline programming can run the risk of being seen as partisan, especially if the humanitarian crisis is conflict related. Be scrupulously impartial about how you gather, deliver and target Lifeline information.

Be wary of those with political or sectarian interests trying to manipulate information.

For example, a high-profile politician might state: "Cholera has been brought to the area by XXX ethnic group."

Your focus should be on the useful information for your audience, for example: "If you have frequent watery diarrhoea or are vomiting, you may have cholera. Do not panic. Cholera can be cured. Go to a doctor or clinic immediately."

Communicating Lifeline information

- **Repeat** key messages regularly, especially in the early stages. Bear in mind that when people are traumatised, they can have trouble retaining information.
- Present information in a **simple, clear** way. You're a journalist, you already know that, but for Lifeline Programming it's especially important as people will be acting on the information you provide and need clarity at this confusing time.
- Where possible, present information as a **call to action** – too often people faced with a humanitarian emergency are treated as passive recipients, who are expected to sit and wait for help. But, with a bit of guidance, they are the best-placed people to improve their situation.
- Encourage people to **share** the information with their friends, family and community.
- Provide **contact points** for further information – websites, addresses, phone numbers, service kiosks.
- Don't sensationalise. ("This must be the most devastating disaster ever!") **Stick to the facts.**
- Consider those who may have **special needs**: women, children, the elderly and disabled often face additional challenges in a humanitarian crisis.
- **Attribute sources.** In the chaos of a crisis all kinds of rumours can emerge. Double-check facts and say where they came from.
- Check the **credentials** of the experts you speak to and don't ask them questions beyond their areas of expertise.
- Create a **sense of community**. People will suffer less if they feel that they are not alone (see 'two-way communication' on page 13)
- **Promote hope** – simple things such as an encouraging, reassuring tone can make a difference.

Examples of calls to action

“Do you want to see camp life improved? You could join or create a community committee to improve different areas of camp life, such as water, health, shelter and education. Contact XXX for more information.”

“Humanitarian aid is free! No one has the right to touch you or demand any sexual actions/favours from you in return for assistance.”

“If you have been raped or sexually assaulted, visit your local health facility as soon as possible. You can then be treated against sexually transmitted infections including HIV. You can also get emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy and receive support and advice. This care is confidential.”

“If you have been injured, keep your wounds clean and seek treatment as soon as possible. Call XXX to find out where your nearest health facility is.”

“If you see anything that looks like a bomb, a military object, a bag that does not belong to anyone, or something that you don’t recognise: Stop! Don’t touch! Step back. Tell the adults.”

“Older people and the disabled should get shelter before everyone else. Make sure they are close to water distribution points, latrines and kitchen facilities, as well as the health centre. As a camp resident, you can help by making sure they don’t feel isolated or unsafe, and that they can evacuate their shelter easily.”

Adapted from the infoasaid message library

Format options for broadcast

The most suitable format and amount of airtime allocated for Lifeline programming will depend on many factors, including the phase, scale and severity of the crisis, the broadcast channel (for example, a local station targeting a very specific area versus a channel which spans multiple countries, where not all listeners will be affected by the crisis), and what fits in best with existing programming.

Lifeline information can be specifically flagged up as part of a special 'Lifeline' section of output, or integrated into existing programming, for example as an add-on to a standard news report or magazine programme about the situation. Lifeline information might be presented through:

- **A straight bulletin** – a presenter simply explains what has happened and offers clear instructions on what to do. This is often suited to the immediate aftermath of a sudden major emergency.
- **Interviews** – suitable subjects might be humanitarian experts involved in the relief operation, doctors, psychologists etc. The voices of those directly affected can be included if appropriate (see 'Interviews for Lifeline' below)
- **An illustrated bulletin**, including field reports, packages and interviews.
- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** – short segments of Lifeline information, interspersed with regular programmes.
- **A drama** – a useful tool for dealing with complex or sensitive themes, usually best-suited to longer-term programming in the later stages of a crisis.

- **A debate programme** – again, better for the later stages, a useful tool for holding to account those responsible for relief and reconstruction.
- **A magazine programme**, with a range of the above, perhaps including phone-ins if appropriate.

Case study

When cyclone Nargis struck Burma in 2008, BBC Media Action and the BBC's Burmese Service produced **Living Today, Stronger Tomorrow**, a series of five-minute bulletins covering a range of humanitarian topics at different stages of the emergency, ranging from survival to reconstruction.

Once the relief phase was over, the format of the programmes changed to include a mix of drama, PSAs, voices from the affected area and expert interviews on the issue of the week. The drama and PSAs were developed to introduce new themes or deal with difficult topics using humour and role modelling.

"I can't see so when my radio was destroyed in the cyclone, I felt very isolated. Now that I have a radio, I feel like I can see!"

A blind Burmese monk who received a radio after cyclone Nargis

Two-way communication

Where possible, Lifeline programming should offer the chance for those affected by the crisis to have a voice. The many benefits include:

- Giving people a platform to express their needs
- Creating a sense of community and connectedness, so that people know they are not suffering alone
- Strengthening the feeling of ownership of Lifeline programmes, hence building listenership
- Helping to identify gaps in response and hold governments and relief organisations to account
- Helping to identify and correct misinformation and rumours

Some options for two-way communication

From the field – of course, there is no substitute for being on the ground to gather first-hand information and talk to people face-to-face. Don't forget that you're making Lifeline programming, and focus on what will be useful for affected audiences.

SMS, email and voice messages – you can invite people to SMS or leave voice messages on a dedicated number. You might choose to use SMS channels to get messages out to people as well.

Live phone-ins – doing this within the first few days of a crisis might not be suitable as you are most likely to get calls from people who are in a state of extreme distress, confusion and desperation and the lines might not be working. Phone-ins might be more appropriate for the later stages or recovery phase of a crisis, when the time is right for people to reflect on their situations and to hold the relief effort to account.

Social networking tools – Facebook, Twitter and others can be a rapid and cheap way of gathering and sharing information.

Things to think about with two-way communication

- Think about the suitability of the different options based on the situation. What works well in one context might be totally unsuitable for another.
- Consider what technology/infrastructure is functioning? What resources will be required to manage this approach? Is the target audience literate? Do people use their mobiles for SMS or voice only? What two-way channels are audiences already familiar with? For example, are radio phone-ins or social media sites popular? What channels will be effective at reaching the most isolated and vulnerable?
- Avoid creating unrealistic expectations. If you are inviting people to contact you with their concerns, make it clear that you are offering them an opportunity to voice their needs, but you are not able to solve their problems or direct aid.

- Some of the information you receive might be valuable for authorities or aid agencies involved in the response. If you have the resources, think about how you might pull together key issues from audiences and share them.
- Gather and share encouraging examples of communities pulling together to serve as a model and inspiration for others.
- There is a risk you will be inundated with calls or messages. Before inviting people to contact you, think carefully about how the influx of information will be managed.
- If you choose to use social networking sites, think carefully how you might moderate the content. While offering an extremely useful platform for people to communicate their needs, consider the risks of people posting incorrect information on your pages.

Case study

In 2010, heavy monsoon rainfall caused serious flooding in Pakistan, affecting over 18 million people and killing approximately 2000. BBC Urdu and BBC Media Action launched Lifeline broadcasts and invited affected people to voice their concerns by calling a voicemail service. The production team were then able to produce content addressing the issues raised in those calls. Each programme focused on a particular location and region-specific issues.

“When you are living in a village in a rural area like this one (which was devastated by the flooding), you cannot know what is happening elsewhere. I think every returnee has the same dilemma. Most of us have just returned to villages and do not know where to start. I’ve heard good discussions about different rehabilitation activities on BBC Lifeline Pakistan. Someone will call in to the programme with a dilemma and the host will speak to other people who were in the same position. I like that.”

Male returnee, Pakistan

Interviews for Lifeline programming

As you choose your interviewees and questions, remember that the end product is *for*, not *about* those who are suffering. Aim to include people who can share useful information, or offer some kind of guidance or encouragement. Remember that people may be traumatised and vulnerable. In some situations – particularly conflict – it may be unsuitable to include voices of people who are directly affected and may even put them at risk.

Unhelpful questions: You lost your children, you must be devastated? What it was like when your house collapsed?

Helpful questions: What is it you and your community need most right now? How are you organising yourselves to cope?

Some more DOs and DON'Ts

DO ask before interviewing and don't insist if you get a 'no'. For some, sharing their story may be therapeutic, for others it may be damaging.

DON'T rush interviewees. Speak slowly and be patient. People who have been traumatised can have difficulty processing information. Allow for long silences and repeat questions if necessary.

DO invite those interviewees directly affected by the crisis to express their needs or share experiences which others might learn from.

DON'T ask children to describe a traumatic experience, unless you are qualified to deal with traumatised children (which you probably aren't). It can inflict additional emotional scars.

DO be conscious of your body language: in stressful situations, people need to feel they are being listened to and understood. Try to reflect that you're listening in your body language.

DON'T assume that aid workers and people in uniforms are not personally affected by the crisis. They also may have lost loved ones or colleagues, or be emotionally vulnerable because of the suffering they are witnessing.

DO look after yourself. Sleep, eat, and seek help if your physical or psychological well-being has taken a big hit.

Additional resources

Humanitarian news and information

ReliefWeb www.reliefweb.int – humanitarian information and analysis, maps and graphics to illustrate humanitarian crises.

AlertNet www.alertnet.org – news and analysis on humanitarian crises.

IRIN www.irinnews.org – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) humanitarian news site.

Aid Workers Net www.aidworkers.net/?q=node/351 – a knowledge-sharing database for aid workers.

CDAC Network www.cdacnetwork.org/public/resources – resources relating to communication with disaster-affected people.

International Crisis Group www.crisisgroup.org

Tools for Lifeline communication and planning

infoasaid* is a project aimed at improving communication with crisis-affected communities. On infoasaid.org you can find a number of useful features, among them:

Diagnostic tools including checklists on information needs, radio and TV feasibility guides and guidelines on the characteristics of different communication channels.

A message library – an online searchable database of messages for those wanting to share critical information with affected populations in an emergency. The messages include warnings and alerts, advice on risks and threats and how to mitigate them.

Media landscape guides providing a comprehensive picture of the media and telecommunications landscape, information on media consumption patterns, radio and TV coverage maps and a contact directory of media and telecoms operators in the most crisis-prone countries in the world.

An e-learning course on the key components of effective communication with crisis-affected communities.

*The infoasaid project is due to close at the end of 2012, but the resources will be available on the project's website until January 2014 and after that at other sites, which can be found from the infoasaid website www.infoasaid.org

Dartcenter.org – articles, expert interviews, journalist-to-journalist advice, tip sheets and other resources for journalists covering violence and tragedy.

Bibliography and further background reading

All of the publications below are available online

Communicating in recovery Australian Red Cross, 2010

http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Communicating_in_recovery_resource.pdf

Dealing with Trauma: Practical Suggestions for Journalists Covering Catastrophe,

Anne Nelson, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and Dr. Daniel Nelson, M.D., University of Cincinnati School of Medicine Posted on: 27/06/2008 Disaster Reporting (ijnet) 14

<http://ijnet.org/stories/practical-suggestions-journalists-covering-catastrophe>

Five Essential Elements of Immediate and Mid-Term Mass Trauma Intervention: Empirical Evidence, Stevan E. Hobfoll et al. 2007

<http://mhpss.net/wp-content/uploads/group-documents/140/1330584195-Masstraumaintervention.pdf>

Humanitarian Reporting in Pakistan Journalists' Handbook, Internews, 2010

<http://www.internews.org/research-publications/humanitarian-reporting-pakistan-journalists-handbook>

Lifeline Media: Reaching populations in Crisis, Loretta Hieber, September 2001

http://www.preventionweb.net/files/636_10303.pdf

For more background reading on the role of communication with populations in emergencies, see BBC Media Action's policy briefings:

Left in the dark: The unmet need for information in emergency response

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/humanitarian_response_briefing.pdf

Still left in the dark?

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/policybriefing/bbc_media_action_still_left_in_the_dark_policy_briefing.pdf

BBC Media Action is a founder member of Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network, a cross-sector initiative formed in response to the policy paper *Left in the dark* with a view to improving two-way communication between aid actors and disaster-affected populations. Website: www.cdacnetwork.org

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