Principles and Practice of Humanitarian Communication during and After Natural Disasters and Armed Conflicts

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Abstract
Humanitarian communications has broadly empowered human interaction and mutual understanding within circles and arenas of conflict and disasters. How information is communicated and received during crises is imperative. With peace seriously going on extinction around the world and the growth of countless humanitarian organizations, the need to explore communication is imperative going by the relevance of information, mutual understanding and its knowledge to victims of armed conflict and natural disasters, This paper explained in detail the concept of humanitarian communications, types of humanitarian communications, and how to design effective communication plan for smooth and effective operations of humanitarian actors within humanitarian circle.

Keywords: Armed conflict, humanitarian communications, natural disaster

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian communication has at all times remained a crucial component of humanitarian response. From time immemorial, it has been used as a mechanism for forestalling information gap so that affected settings could coin evocative ideas about the situation deploring their living condition and to also forecast and plan towards better options available to explore in the future.

Humanitarian communication is technical capacity building; information collection and dissemination; preparedness activities; and/ or data analysis for the purposes of saving, alleviating suffering, and protecting the dignity of crisis-affected populations when performed in accordance with international standards of humanity, impartiality neutrality, and independence.

It has broadly empowered human interaction and mutual understanding within circles and arenas of conflict and disasters. How information is communicated and received during crises is imperative therefore adequate communication technique and framework is crucial. According to recent disaster evaluation report, the failure to consider information from and communication with populations affected is one of the greatest needs unmet in serenities affected by disaster.

With the level of panic, stress and devastation during and after natural disasters and armed conflict, insufficiency of information thrives. Glaring imbalance in the appropriate flow of information from top to the bottom is a big challenge. Hence, communication at the grass root level to inform and address the needs of affected and vulnerable communities is always lacking.

According to Markku Niskala, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. *"People need information as much as water, food, medicine orShelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources. Information bestows power."* (World Disaster Report, 2005).
Therefore communities tend to suffer more from disasters when there is imprecision

and nonexistence of adequate facts, this is because, deficit of critical information can lead to uniformed decision-making, which can trigger excessive stress aggravates suffering. IASC, (2008) Posit that, a helpful step in coping with stress is having access to appropriate information related to the emergency, relief efforts and legal rights. It is about positive coping.

Humanitarian communication is a multi-faceted component that renders cross cutting service and backing to all humanitarian actors in the humanitarian arena. It entails appropriate coordination, framing, coining and designing strategies/ campaigns that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) for the benefit of all stakeholders (affected communities, humanitarian responders and governments). Wall and Chery (2010) hold that, in the process of ensuring property dissemination of the required information, suggestions points at the need for humanitarian systems and agencies to recognize the relevance of communication as a sector and also a tool for impactful delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Rationale of the Paper
A cursory glance at the entire world today tells peace is absent. For the past two decades, the world has been battling with numerous forms of natural disasters and armed conflict affecting human existence. As the lack of peace continue to thrive, humanitarian organizations keep evolving too in order to combat the menace and improve the quality of lives of people affected in all ramifications. This howevercannot be achieved without proper communicationsmechanism put in place to ensure the smoothoperations and activities. It is against this backdrop that this paper clearly identified the principles and practice of humanitarian communications since it appears quite little has been done and documented about communication in the humanitarian circle.

Objectives of the Paper
To conceptualize the term humanitarian communication.
To identify the types of humanitarian communication.
To identify stakeholders in humanitarian communication.
To identify rudiments of designing effective communication plan, strategy and how partners activities are documented.

Conceptual Clarification
Humanitarian Communication
As words and concepts may have different meanings in different context, in this paper, humanitarian communication stands fortechnical capacity building, information collection and dissemination, preparedness activities and data analysis for the purpose of saving lives, alleviating suffering and protecting the dignity of crisis affected populations when performed in accordance with international standards of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Principles
In this paper, principle stands for a fundamental source or basis for something, it is a framework that guide a particular process.

Practice
In this paper, practice is the customary, habitual or expected way and procedure of doing something.

Natural Disaster
In this paper, natural disaster is a major event caused by the natural processes of the earth.

Armed Conflict
In this paper stands for a political conflict in which armed combat involves the armed forces of at least on state or more armed factions seeking to gain control of all or part of the state, and in which at least 1000

people have been killed by the fighting during the course of the conflict.

The Concept of Humanitarian Communication

According to BBC World Service Trust (2008), Assessments of natural and manmade disasters have established deficiency in adequate information and communication with affected populations as the most unmet need and that effective provision of information and exchange of messages with affected populations appears to be the least comprehended but most complex challenging factor affecting effective humanitarian services in the 21st century.

Drawing inference from Christoplos (2006) and the 2005 Pakistan OCHA, (2006) and 2010 Haitian earthquakes with information insufficiency at its peak coupled with humanitarian communications operations often narrowly designed, it can be established that most communication plans do not address the overall information needs of affected populations.

Most humanitarian communications plan and framework often fail to meet the required communication standard professionally because of poor feedback mechanism and sometimes no feedback mechanism at all. It is important to establish feedback mechanism as it creates a two way flow of information between humanitarian actors and affected communities. According to IOM (2014) Feedback mechanisms enable expectancy supervision and serve as a yardstick for communities to hold the humanitarian community accountable.

The model humanitarian communication has been vastly conceptualized by the international Organization for migration (IOM) as a two communication strategy for creating meaning and mutual understanding between relevant stakeholders involved in humanitarian affairs or activities globally. The two key components are described below:

- Taking into account the information needs of and feedback from affected communities in developing an appropriate information response;
- Providing communications service to humanitarian actors by disseminating assistance-related information to affected communities.

These two components form the basis and background for communication activities in humanitarian work.

Information from Affected Communities

Humanitarian communications creates a suitable platform for feedback in order to give affected communities the opportunity to extend their plights and needs and also express their grievances verbally and non-verbally so that humanitarian responses and recovery mechanism can be improved. However, for the purpose of accurate information flow, it is always imperative to understand how people and governments access information currently. It will enhance the manner through which information is provided and responses solicited.

Information to Affected Communities

A well designed and realistic humanitarian communication plan or campaign directs victims of disaster in affected communities on how and where to access humanitarian assistance in a timely and accurate manner, what the assistance is all about and also what to do when help needed but not available. An effective humanitarian communications plan should have a wide reach in terms of coverage while putting into cognizance the vulnerable who are likely to be affected if not prevented.

Types of Humanitarian Communication

- Operational communication; is the transformation of information between humanitarian actors and interlocutors. In most cases these interlocutors are personalities from academic circles, civil society organizations and government officials. Operational communications is divided into two, internal operational communications and external operation communications. The internal operational communication ensures that all departments in the organization cohabit and understand each other mutually.
- Beneficiary communication or dissemination: is about empowering people by giving them a voice to participate in their own. It connects humanitarian programming with vulnerable people employing appropriate communication channels to provide and receive information. (two way flow method of communication between humanitarian actors and beneficiaries)
- Communication for development (C4D); it is a tool used in humanitarian communication circle and beyond to promote social and political transformation through enhanced participation. It also promote social change using the methods and instruments of interpersonal communication, community media and modern information technologies. The aim is to enhance community engagement, social mobilization and behavior change

Importance of Humanitarian Communications
The need to be well equipped and fed with information during disaster is extremely paramount. Accessing help from humanitarian actors, understanding and knowing where the help is, who is rendering the help as well as the nature of the assistance are fundamentally dependent on information received.

A study by Christoplos, (2006) on the tsunami response also stated that "poor information flow is unquestionably the leading source of dissatisfaction, anger and frustration among affected people". Affected victims need adequate information in order to make informed choices about immediate needs, survival and future plans. Concrete substantiation proposes that there is a desire and need for information and a frantic frustration when it is not available.

"For people who are caught in conflict and other emergencies, the need for information is often acute. Frequently, they are separated from their families, lack shelter and adequate food, and are scared and confused by the events occurring around them. Programming tailored to the needs of such people can provide an essential information lifeline." (DFID, 2000)

Wall and Chéry, (2010) connotes that at all stages of crisis and disaster, information is needed for survival. Enthusiastic technical communications support to humanitarian operations can facilitate trust, mitigate conflict, develop and strengthen relations and craft trails into the perceptions and issues of the community, as was the case during the response in Haiti.

Stakeholders in Humanitarian Communications
The entire humanitarian network and activities basically depends on communication between beneficiaries and organizations. according IOM, (2014), The exceptionality of humanitarian communications widely known as "beneficiary communications," is the circle of information flow, that is, among beneficiaries; from beneficiaries to organizations and agencies, and then back

to the beneficiaries; and also extend to members of humanitarian community and the government in order to create an aesthetic balance. The feedback contrivance permits end users, (beneficiaries) to have uninterrupted input in respect of service delivery, therefore, humanitarian communications thrives based on user-led mechanism and driven-function.

The impact and value of humanitarian communications cuts across the diverse spheres of human lives because countless of those whom profit from information assistance are not beneficiaries in the traditional sense. This is gradually becoming true indeveloping countries like Nigeria and other middle income countries where assistance basically comes from the management, remittance flows and non-traditional cohorts of aid and reclamation.

- The stakeholders includes (religious leaders, traditional rulers, communities), local organizations and partners; civil society organizations and personalities from academic circle) they are a great source of information, they have a firm grip of the context and can talk about vulnerabilities, risks, and the context in which response occurs, and which communities or beneficiaries to target.
- Indigenous establishments and acquaintances may already have a relationship with benefactors and target communities.
- Stakeholders are used for the purpose advocacy that is, information disseminators and also incorporated in the process of developing messages. While communications experts among them can give intellectual advice on the tune, tone and the entire message delivery system in order to ascertain the most effective methods of communication.

Target Audiences in Humanitarian Communications
Humanitarian communications goes hand in hand with target audience. It has quitea number of target audiences, some of which are as follows:
Affected Communities
According to IOM, (2014), the following are significantphilosophies about targeting disaster-affected communities as audiences of humanitarian communications:
- Information on disaster risk reduction and hazard warnings should be communicated prior to an event.
- Disaster-affected communities provide critical information during the emergency and early recovery phases.
- A feedback mechanism should be put in place so that the needs of affected communities are brought to the attention of humanitarian actors through the cluster system and can be addressed.

Working Constellations and aid organizations in Humanitarian Community
- Humanitarian communications offers a centralized system through which targeted information can be provided by all clusters and working groups to the right end user.
- Humanitarian communications provides a valuable feedback mechanism that allows for better accountability, more effective management of information flow and expectations, and, ultimately, better humanitarian response.

Government
The government's role in humanitarian communications includes the following:
❖ Increasing effectiveness of assistance by informing communities at the grassroots level and improving its humanitarian response through their feedback;

❖ Allowing for impartial grievance collection

The international Human Accountability Partnership

Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) is an established mechanism that provides support to Humanitarian Communications Unit in order ensure Standard in Accountability and Quality Management. These two phenomenon are the engine that powers effective humanitarian work or activities, they are however applicable to other departments aspects of an organization's work, including activism and development. HAP is the first international standard premeditated to recognize, evaluate and develop humanitarian actors' accountability towards affected populations, as well as the quality of humanitarian programmes.

Basics for setting a bench mark in respect of Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). The six benchmarks for communications units and other departments are:

- Instituting and strengthening commitment for effective service delivery. The organization sets out the obligations that it will be held accountable for and the manner of delivery.
- Workforce/man power and competence. The associationcertifies that staff members have the required expertise competencies that will enable them to meet the stipulated expectations and commitments.
- Information. The organization make certain that the target audience (people it aims to assist), and relevant stakeholders,have access to timely, relevant and clear information about the organization and its activities (IOM, 2014).
- Participation. The organizationcreates a two way flow system of

communication where the beneficiaries or their target audience can express their views and also make relevant inputs in analysis and programmes decisions.

- Handling complaints also known as complaint response mechanism (CRM). The organization create an assessable means through stakeholders and beneficiaries can raise complaints and suggestions for the purpose effective service delivery. This is achieved by using suggestion boxes, the internet where available and telephones. Other organizations implore the use of focus group discussion (FDG), interviews and assessments with toolkits (ODK and Kobocollect).
- Learning and continual improvement. The organization through the use of a technique called, Monitoring evaluation appraisal and learning (MEAL) learns from experience in order to unceasinglyadvance its performance.

Communications Operations in Humanitarian Circle

Effective communications are always two-way by design and strategy. It is used during the entire continuum of preparedness, relief and recovery.

- Readiness and disaster risk reduction. Information is crucial in creating awareness in the process of establishing disaster response strategy. Proper media mapping must be done and also local languages must be clearly identified in order to ascertain how best the required information can be disseminated in cases of disaster.
- Early warning systems. There are lots of effective early warning models that clearly guides in cases of disaster. However these models are scientifically tested in order to find out their effectiveness. (Basher, 2006).
- Emergency. The negative impact of disaster is reduced drastically when

people are fed with information constantly and when appropriate mechanism of feedback is provided.

- Early recovery. Affected vulnerable communities crave to be acquainted with what they are entitled to, what longer-term relief is planned and how it will be delivered. In each of the three stages, the people have a right to be educated about their prerogatives and rights, accessiblefacilities and the deliverables owed them, as well as the projected behaviour of the staff of each organization partaking in the humanitarian response. Communities also possessthe right to know how the feedback they provide to the humanitarian agencies translates to changes in the response. It is an important aspects of accountability to disaster-affected communities as it ensures quality response, (IOM, 2014).

Principles of Designing Humanitarian Communications Plan

Drawing a communication plan is not as important as drawing an effective one. Communication is sensitive and persuasive in nature therefore, ample time is required. In other words, for communication operations to be effective, adequate time must be apportioned for developing communications activities, all of which should fall within an overall communications stratagem. Below are some concerns when developing a communications strategy:

- In planning communications operations, it is requisite to consider time as the most important factor and a major determinant of the effectiveness of the strategy. Required time should be channeled to any and all communications activities before inauguration. The process is an all-encompassing one hence experts and associates across methodological sectors and geographical capacities should also be incorporated in the

development, because they all have cogent roles to play in collaborating with benefactors, other establishmentsand sponsors (stakeholders). The entire planning process must not necessarily consume time and be extensively comprehensive; impactful communications activities can be laughed in few days.

- Communications planning should be done simultaneously with operational development and never differently because they work hand in hand.Communicationsevents take place in conjunction with other humanitarian support activities and use the same workforces.

- In planning communications activities. Drafting an effective budget is necessary, it helps in the reduction of risk, among other things, from being compromised or sidelined if funds become scarce.

- Every humanitarian activity relies solely on need assessments in order to establish a baseline and comprehend the local context and most significantly, gaps that needs to be filled either temporarily or permanently. Wall and Chéry, (2010) added that plan for communications research is needful throughout the humanitarian operations, baseline helps in so many possible ways and thatinformation gathered mostly contributes immensely to data monitoring and case study improvement, and may also support organizations improve their programming, as well as sell communications projects and activities to relevant stakeholders(donors).

- According to IOM (2010) "When developing communications plan alongside colleagues outside of communications circle, buildlistening and feedback apparatusesinto wider operational planning from the start,

that is, these apparatuses should not be limitedto communications-related activities. Effective communications underwriteseffective monitoring and subsequent evaluation".

- It is imperative to conduct demographic or social mapping with local establishments or patrons (stakeholders), harnessing local knowledge helps in understandingissues or phenomena that may not be formallynetted, for example, local culture, language and dialect, undocumented migration and marginalized groups. Often local staff members are able to make recommendations based on the experience with tried and tested methods (IOM 2014).

- Put in place mechanisms for exit and transference to local associates when international operations draw to a close. It is imperative that some level of capacity building is initiated into plans and exhibited throughout the operations, for the purpose of increasing the level of sustainability for all activities in the future.

Rudiments of Developing Communications Strategy

Rudiments are fundamental in all aspect of human endeavours. The strategy of all humanitarian communications operations defines the objectives and how to achieve them. According to IOM, (2014), It is developed while or after determining how and which communities to reach, which entities can support and participate in the campaign, and what the local conditions are. Criteria to take into account include:

- Target audience(s) and most vulnerable groups, for example, the elderly, the impaired, women and children;
- How information is currently and traditionally disseminated;
- Where assistance and information are most needed;

- Main issues of concern for affected communities;
- Relevant messages when responding to communities and recurrent key messages;
- Relevant languages to communicate in with affected populations;
- Prevailing environment: politics, economics and safety;
- Possible issues to communicate, including political issues and freedom of speech;
- Identification of other potential stakeholders (e.g. the government and other groups, organizations and institutions) their relationship to the crisis and their participation in or impact on the information campaign;
- Feedback mechanisms;
- Complaints and referral mechanisms;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the campaign.

The Following Strategy can also be adopted for planning communications activities

- Determine Goal
- Identify And Profile Audience
- develop messages
- select communication channels
- Choose activities and materials
- Establish partnership
- Implement plan
- Evaluate and make mid- course Corrections

Documenting Partner Activities

At the end of every project, documentation of activities is indispensable. It helps in keeping tracks of all that transpired for future use and reference. Documentation is properly done using the following steps or guide. Keep it simple, especially in the beginning. Which organizations (who) conduct what activities (what) in which locations (where) and at what instants (when)?The "4Ws" ("Who does what, where and when?") is a simple but

operativetechnique of any coordination activity, including emergency and early recovery communications. Sample 4Ws matrices may be provided by OCHA, which may be adapted to suit any specific situation.
Immediate aftermath of the disaster: Basic information needs of an affected population
During the immediate aftermath of a disaster, people would want to know (IOM 2014):

- What happened?
- Who is in charge?
- Where they can get food, water and shelter?

Creating an atmosphere where basic information can be accessed avertsfright and bequeaths those affected by disaster during an extremely vulnerable period of their lives.
According to IOM, (2014) Moving from life-saving to life-sustaining information. The focus moves towards knowledge in the following areas:

- Sources of food and fresh water supply.
- Availability of medical assistance.
- Prevention of diseases.
- How to access shelter.

It is crucial at this stage to underscore two factors when designing communications campaigns:

- Expectation management. The aim is to forestallmisapprehension in respect of the role and supportobtainable by the humanitarian community, government and other relevant stakeholders.
- Efficient feedback mechanisms. Such apparatusesincrease comprehension of the needs of affected communities, and thus assist infine-tuning information and the humanitarian response holistically.At a later stage of disaster response, information requirements focus on sustainable return, accessing compensation and other longer-term issues, suchas:

- What are people entitled to, especially in view of government response?
- What relief and services are available to them, and, if not, why and whereelse?

According to CDA, (2006), Countless number of individuals articulated their disappointment over insufficiency of enough information about relief and reliefmethods or processes. For some, this meant they did not have, or understand, options." CDA, (2006) added that it is not sufficient for local authorities to afford amenities as determined all through anemergency planning technique. The accessibility of goods and services must be glaringly illuminated so that affected communities can know how to access them and exactly what it is that they are entitled to. Such policies may be related to housing construction and compensation schemes and other indispensable necessities.

CONCLUSION
Communication has been in existence for time immemorial, the extent to which human beings need communication can be equated to their need for food water and other basic amenities of life. This is because communication is paramount in fostering mutual understanding among individuals and also helps in the acquisition of knowledge that drives every aspect of human endeavour. As the world keeps evolving per second per second, its inhabitants also evolve; this has resulted to a lot of issues ranging irreconcilable difference, conflict, terrorism and natural disasters. For the past one decade, it can be clearly asserted that peace has been in coma globally which has resulted to countless loss of lives, properties and people displaced far and wide thus necessitating assistance from humanitarian

actors. In order to combat the menace and troubles bewailing the existence of displaced persons and refugees, communication is key and a phenomenon that must be explored. Based on the aforementioned, humanitarian organizations have over the years been able to coin the concept and department of humanitarian communications to enable them carry out their operations effectively and as required professionally.

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