



HOW-TO GUIDE SERIES

GOOD COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE HEART OF
HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN DRC



ICRC

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INTRODUCTION

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is an approach to the humanitarian response of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It places people affected by natural disasters, violence, and armed conflict at the heart of decision-making, strategy development and orientation of activities to protect and assist their communities.

It is also the process of using or establishing two-way communication channels to address people's needs, concerns, feedback, and complaints, partnering with the community to ensure that it can actively participate and guide the ICRC's humanitarian action.

The use of appropriate tools for identifying the needs is necessary to better assess the proposed response and to inform those involved beforehand. Community engagement helps to improve the quality and effectiveness of programs while building community acceptance and trust in humanitarian stakeholders.

The inclusion of the most vulnerable people in communities affected by a

humanitarian crisis, such as women, children, people with disabilities or the elderly, in the design and development of the humanitarian response will contribute to their re-silience and improve the quality and efficiency of the projects being implemented.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has placed community engagement at the center of its 2019–2022 institutional strategy (<https://www.icrc.org/fr/publication/4354-icrc-strategy2019-2022>). Although this approach is common in natural disaster-related humanitarian operations, there are fewer examples in situations of armed conflict and inter-community violence. It is therefore important to document and share good practices to better protect communities and address their needs.

Several programs are being conducted in this regard in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the ICRC has been operating since 1978. In this publication, you will find a few tools to present good practices in community engagement. Each story features testimonies from our colleagues who share the challenges and lessons learned in humanitarian response activities.



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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INVOLVES:

a. Participation and feedback of community members

Community participation is crucial to any community engagement activity. The inclusion of information provided by community members ensures a transparent engagement process with opportunities for listening and feedback on activities undertaken.

b. Providing information as a tool for humanitarian aid (#InfoAsAid)

Transparent, useful, and potentially life-saving information, and quickly conveyed through preferred communication channels.

When shared in an appropriate language and format, this information becomes an integral part of the humanitarian response and leads to concrete actions. (For example, distribution of a drinking water source map).

c. Social Behavioural Change communication

That means gaining an insight into the cultural and social environment of affected populations, using participatory and innovative communication approaches that ultimately lead to change, such as reducing violence against women and girls or adopting safer and healthier practices during epidemics.

d. Strengthening accountability to affected communities

Community engagement is a key component of accountability to people affected by armed conflict and inter-community violence. Communities' concerns must be heard and taken into account. These concerns could be expressed as medical, psychological, or material protection needs. Community participation and inclusion in the design, definition, and evaluation of programs they are involved in ensures the relevance and sustainability of humanitarian action.



HELPDESK: A TOOL THAT ENHANCES PROXIMITY WITH COMMUNITIES

PROVINCE OF MAI-NDOMBE, CITY OF YUMBI


Violence pitted two communities in a hitherto peaceful town. On December 16, 2018, on the banks of the Congo River, houses were burned in Yumbi, some 300 kilometers north of Kinshasa. Some neighborhoods were completely devastated and emptied of their inhabitants. According to the United Nations Organization, which was present in the country, more than 500 people were killed and 16,000 displaced. Some people lost everything: their houses, fishing boats and equipment.

“We can’t feed our families anymore“, said a fisherman. It has been months now since the attacks, but trust between the fishing and farming communities has not yet been restored. In February 2019, many farmers were also suffering, having missed the start of the farming season due to a lack of seed and tools, but also because of the violence that kept them from their fields.

From 13 to 18 March of the same year, ICRC chartered barges that were leaving the port of Kinshasa for Yumbi, a region inaccessible by the Congo River. A two-day trip against the current.

In just a few days and in collaboration with the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CRRDC), 15,000 people received humanitarian assistance to meet their needs for a month.

This food distribution has been efficient, smooth, and very rapid thanks to a broad consultation of the communities, carried out as soon as the humanitarian response was launched. Given the inter-community tensions that still existed during the intervention, the Red Cross teams met separately with the two groups. For 13 days, 20 volunteers of the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo met with the communities at the *helpdesk*.



Despite the challenges, we need to better adapt our response to the needs of the people we serve.



A *helpdesk* to discuss, listen and register people who were to receive ICRC assistance.

Following the distribution, ICRC's communication and assistance teams in Yumbi met to discuss and process messages and requests received during these discussions with the communities. *"People in the community did not immediately understand the selection criteria for receiving assistance,"* explains François, a Red Cross volunteer. *"For example, they were not aware that only families hosting IDPs and IDPs themselves would be the beneficiaries."*

Through these *"helpdesks"*, the ICRC and the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were able to collect not only feedback on families' difficulties and needs, but also information on the social situation. The teams took advantage of these discussions to explain the role, limits, and capacity of the Red Cross to deploy an emergency response. Using social networks and traditional media, the ICRC's public communication informed national and international stakeholders on the subject, to encourage mobilization of the authorities.

TESTIMONY OF JEAN-ROBERT, MEMBER OF THE ICRC COMMUNICATION TEAM IN DRC

“We’ve installed small wooden tables with the ICRC emblem on two different locations in Yumbi. The tables were placed in a visible position yet a little apart and under trees to create a peaceful environment to listen and discuss with the community. One table was located near the registration centers of the assistance beneficiaries and another near the distribution site. We were there all day long to meet those who needed to consult with us.

The recruitment of the Red Cross of the DRC volunteers to support us in this activity was done taking into account the existing tensions between the two communities. Using a loudspeaker, the volunteers invited residents to approach them and express their concerns. Some latecomers and those who missed the registrations complained that they were not given any assistance, while others felt that they received too little quantities of supplies or that the assistance, which included rice, oil, and corn, was not adapted to their needs. Through these helpdesks, we were able to learn more about families, their problems and the events that shook up both communities. Following the consultations, families that were forgotten during the registration process were taken in account. Since we could not adjust the support to meet individual needs as closely as possible due to logistical challenges, for the next distributions, we have aligned the content of the package to the consumption habits of families to give them more choice. Also, a quick tracking system has been established to address concerns. To reply to some general questions, we intervened on Sundays in the churches of the city to dispel misunderstandings.

It should be noted that due to a lack of basic necessities in the local market and as a result of violence, it was impossible for us to distribute cash enabling families to quickly purchase what they needed. Food assistance poses challenges in procurement and delivery to such remote areas. We have to make a choice on the content in order to best meet the needs of communities.”

FACTS AND FIGURES



15 000

PEOPLE

received support to meet their food needs for one month.



20

VOLUNTEERS

of the Red Cross following their training collected families' feedback as well as their possible complaints.

TO WATCH



https://twitter.com/ICRC_fr/status/1122042194175647744

LESSONS LEARNED

- Adapt support and assistance as closely as possible to the needs of families based on community feedback.
- Flexibility, by re-evaluating our intervention.

PROVINCE OF TANGANYIKA, REGION OF NYUNZU



The extremely brutal clashes between two communities in the province of Tanganyika have had very serious consequences: houses have been looted, fields devastated, and villages burned to the ground. Kyungu and his family are among the thousands of IDPs who fled their region. Despite the end of the violence, people are extremely traumatized by what they have experienced and refuse to return to their villages. It is in this tense context that the ICRC distributed food assistance and household products in August 2019 in Nyunzu, 180 km from Kalemie, the capital of Tanganyika province. A second distribution of food as well as seeds and vegetable products was carried out by the ICRC two months later. Following the beneficiary registration process, thousands of people gather to receive the

assistance. A total of 33,600 displaced persons received assistance. A complex operation given the security situation in these areas. Many humanitarian organizations were unable to access these villages due to insecurity. For example, no car had been seen in a village of the Nyunzu region for more than 3 years, and no humanitarian aid had been delivered since the beginning of the incidents and violence. When our teams arrived in the area, we had to explain the presence of the Red Cross Movement and get opinions and feedback from the communities. With the collaboration of the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ICRC teams set helpdesks to address communities' concerns.

TESTIMONY OF ERNEST, HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS FOR TANGANYIKA PROVINCE

“Upon arrival, we informed the population, using several communication tools and community relays, on the purpose of our presence and the criteria for receiving ICRC assistance. However, some people did not understand the reason they had not receive a registration card to benefit from our humanitarian aid. We were accountable to them, the least we could do was to provide an explanation. We dedicated a lot of our time providing them with an explanation.

When we arrived in the region of Tanganyika, we realized that some families were not present during the distribution.

So, what was the problem? As we spoke with the people in Nyunzu, we realized that the fear of leaving their refuge and being attacked was holding them back. If these communities could not come to us, it was up to our teams to go to them. Through the information they shared with us and despite the security conditions, we went to remote villages to reach the families.

Unfortunately, we were not aware of the ideal planting period. We arrived too late for the distribution of beans and corn. We were told that farmers must be consulted well in advance to adapt the seed distribution to the planting schedule. Farmers are the experts! The help desks have been a great success. During the first distribution, we received about 100 people, and more than 2,000 a few months later, during the second round. Unfortunately, some people often use the help desks as an opportunity to try to get more support by misleading us about their status. Every time we have a doubt, we cross-check the information with other families.”

FACTS AND FIGURES

Two distributions were made: the first in August 2019 and the second in October of the same year.



4 788

PEOPLE

received food assistance



1 900

ADDITIONAL PEOPLE

approached the ICRC between the first and second distributions

If some families are afraid to come to us for assistance, we go to them.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Helpdesks have improved our accountability. They enabled us to discuss with communities, explain what our mission was, the purpose of our presence and eligibility criteria to receive assistance.
- Very few fraud attempts have been reported.
- Some polygamous families requested to receive a double food ration, which was not within our criteria. Nevertheless, after verification, women with many children benefited from our assistance.



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SUGGESTION BOXES: A COMPLEMENTARY TOOL TO COLLECT INFORMATION

PROVINCE OF KASAÏ

TESTIMONY OF GHISLAINE, PROJECT MANAGER AT THE DRC RED CROSS

Ghislaine has been mobilized to join the communication team.

“When we started registering families who were victims of armed violence in Kasai, we set up suggestion boxes to collect their comments on the intervention as well as their complaints. We soon realised that this was not very effective and not precise enough. A direct system to discuss with the families and respond to them was more appropriate. Nevertheless, we kept the suggestion box to take into account and record complaints.”



FACTS AND FIGURES




**Between
80 and 150**

**FEEDBACK,
SUGGESTIONS,
AND COMPLAINTS**
received per day.

TO WATCH



[https://twitter.com/ICRC_Afrique/
status/1206600028594282499](https://twitter.com/ICRC_Afrique/status/1206600028594282499)



*Teams involved
in community
engagement activities
should work more
closely with support
teams.*

LESSONS LEARNED

- Integrate a complaint management team at all stages of distribution. This ensures that the teams leading community engagement respond appropriately to beneficiaries.
- Notify community engagement teams in a timely manner of any changes in the content of assistance.
- Adapt community engagement tools to the type of distribution.
- Define in detail the role of each intervention team before the community engagement activity starts.





THEATER: A TOOL FOR PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CHANGE

THE PROVINCE OF SOUTH KIVU, THE HOMBO VILLAGES

Several armed groups find refuge in these high green and wooded hills, crossed by fish-filled rivers, about 100 kilometers from Bukavu in eastern DRC. Within certain groups we note the presence of minors. There are several reasons to their recruitment: out-post guard, combatant, security guard, kitchen or household help or sexual slave.

Deprived of their childhood or adolescence, they often wish to be reunited with their family and their village. When these children are finally freed and leave these groups, they do not necessarily find a family or community ready to welcome them. They may

sometimes face hostile reactions from members of their community as a result of their experience in an armed group.

Thanks to tools such as “*participatory theatre*”, more than 5,300 inhabitants of villages in the Hombo region have been made aware of the return and reintegration of children and adolescents into their families. In the plays, the challenges of these minors and the difficulties of returning to the community were highlighted.





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TESTIMONY OF MARCELLIN, HEAD OF COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH KIVU

“We chose to address this issue in a playful way to raise awareness among a large majority of the population, opinion leaders, traditional leaders, families and finally the children and adolescents concerned. Bringing them together also provided an opportunity for them to exchange and communicate on the issue.

We collaborated with renowned actors from the community to put on a comedy play. Participatory theatre is a traditional means of drawing people’s attention to issues that concern them. The inhabitants themselves take part in the play: they are invited to come on stage, ask questions or answer the actors. In a sense, they become actors during the play.

Following the event, we organized focus group discussions, bringing together community leaders, village chiefs and religious leaders to discuss the best way to deal with the youth. We received enthusiastic feedback from the community leaders on changing families behaviour.

The majority of local leaders were satisfied with the use of the plays. They found that this mode of communication allowed them to better address sensitive issues in their community.”

FACTS AND FIGURES



5 300

PEOPLE

were sensitized to reintegration of former minor combatants into their communities.

Because of its interactive and public nature, participatory theater is an excellent tool for engaging in open and honest conversation with the community.

TO WATCH



<https://twitter.com/RBernhardI/CRC/status/1308729153299058688>

LESSONS LEARNED

- The participatory and fun approach of the plays, combined with consultation tools, has an impact on information gathering through the inclusion of the entire community and its leaders in a public consultation.



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SPORTS EVENTS: A DIALOGUE TOOL TO ENGAGE WITH THE YOUTH

PROVINCE OF MANIEMA, CITY OF SALAMABILA


A unifying football match

“Some neighbourhoods will soon be attacked,” the inhabitants of Salamabila learned from leaflets distributed in the region. With their suitcases closed in a hurry, the inhabitants are once again forced to flee their homes. In this town in the province of Maniema, in the east of the DRC, civilians are the main victims of the escalating armed conflicts. Since 2018, the number of IDPs has continued to rise. Health centres are targeted, often looted. The highly volatile security situation makes the movement of teams and humanitarian assistance very difficult, sometimes impossible.

Despite the violence and displacement, football matches remain very popular in Salamabila. It is therefore through this activity that the ICRC has chosen to raise awareness among

the inhabitants on its action and its mandate in order to be able to implement its activities with the support of the inhabitants. Prior to forming the teams for the football tournament, the ICRC drew the players’ attention to the principles of *“fair play”* and *“healthy rivalry”* in sport. The organisation of the activity was an opportunity to open discussions on the protection problems affecting the population.

On the day of the match, hundreds of people came to the event. Before the event began and at half-time, presenters and actors from the plays presented ICRC’s activities. The organisers, participants and spectators have happy memories of the meeting and discussions on ICRC’s humanitarian intervention.



Despite the violence and displacement, football events are still very popular in Salamabila.

TESTIMONY OF MARCELLIN, HEAD OF COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH KIVU

“Football matches have the capacity to gather a lot of people. We have found that shows, plays and musicians’ performances, organized before, during and after a sports match, require extensive preparation. Comedians and musicians had to be clearly and extensively briefed on the messages to be conveyed to the audience. But we were pleasantly surprised by the result and the success of the event.

In the near future, we would like to organize a female football match on the issue of sexual violence in the city of Minova. The city’s football association is managed by a woman.”

LESSONS LEARNED

- Sufficient time should be allowed for sensitisation and preparation of speakers and cultural groups at the meetings.
- Red Cross volunteers who are included in the organisation of the meetings must be clearly aware of their responsibilities during the performances.



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GROUP DISCUSSIONS: PROXIMITY COMMUNICATION

NORTH KIVU, CITY OF GOMA

Ndosho Hospital

The hospital's war surgery department receives daily casualties from the violence and armed conflicts that are taking place in several regions of the DRC. With the financial support of the ICRC, the wounded are treated there free of charge, mainly with weapons. A caregiver is also financially supported. Two ICRC surgical teams support local surgeons by training them in war surgery techniques.

However, communities, particularly those living far from major urban centers, are not aware of the availability of free health care. In emergency rooms, patients admitted to hospital do not understand why they are given such a privilege.

To explain ICRC's care and support to the hospital the Red Cross in DRC and ICRC teams' visits the sick. Once a week, using "picture boxes" – a set of drawings on canvas supports – the teams explain, during discussions, the ICRC's activities, support for the hospital and the criteria for free hospitalisation. In addition to these weekly activities, volunteers from the DRC Red Cross and the ICRC take advantage of the theme days to organise events for children and adults, whether hospitalized or on duty.



Focus groups provide us with the opportunity to engage in a honest dialog with communities and to improve our activities based on their feedback.

TESTIMONY OF ODETTE BATASEMA, MEMBER OF THE COMMUNICATION TEAM IN GOMA

“The International Day of the African Child is celebrated every year on June 16. For the year 2019, we have organized a theater play for injured children in recovery. The idea of organizing these events came from “focus groups”, which are discussions with patients. It was patients who suggested celebrating the Day of the African Child with the presence of famous actors and the organization of a drawing competition for children. Through poems, drawings, dances and theater, children who are sometimes psychologically affected had the opportunity to express their fears but also their dreams.

This year, after consultation with patients, the decision was made to incorporate a cultural dance show from the five major tribes of the region. However, theater activity is still very popular in the community.”

LESSONS LEARNED

- It is crucial to include women, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities in our engagement with communities.
- Simply listening to the community is not enough. There is a need to include them in the project conception as well as the choice of themes and activities.





RADIO: AN INFORMATION NETWORK IN RURAL AREAS

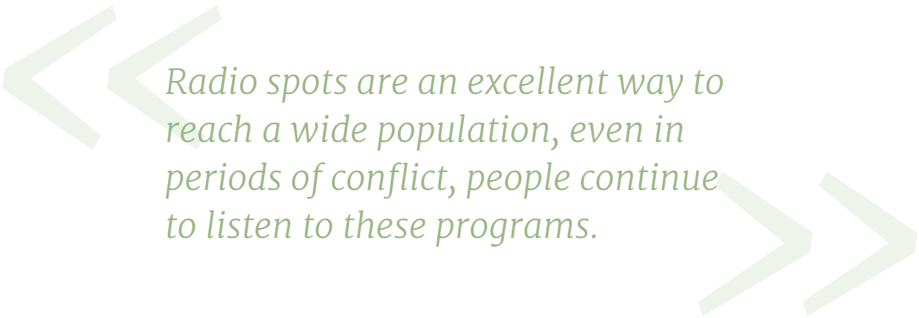
ITURI, CITY OF BUNIA

In March 2020, a two-month information campaign was launched in Ituri, northeastern DRC, during which ICRC messages were broadcast on radio stations.

The deteriorating security context in this area in recent months is making it difficult for communities to reach humanitarian organizations, and the number of displaced persons and returnees has increased steadily.

The messages, lasting two or three minutes, were broadcast on the six radio stations in the region covering the towns of Bunia, Nizi, Tchomia, Kpandroma and Mambasa, up to 180 km west of the provincial capital. Three times a day, the inhabitants were able to hear information on the ICRC's family reunification activities and on its principles of neutrality,

impartiality and independence. These programmes, being interactive, also allow the audience to send SMS messages or call the switchboard to ask questions. In addition, an ICRC number was provided during the broadcasts, offering the possibility for listeners to call for more information, share their views on the work of the ICRC or initiate a family tracing request for reunification. To reach as many households as possible, the radio spots were broadcast in three languages spoken in the region: Swahili, Lingala and Badha, a dialect spoken mainly by IDP families. A first broadcast had already taken place at the end of 2019 in Bunia. This time, these new radio spots have extended well beyond the provincial capital.



Radio spots are an excellent way to reach a wide population, even in periods of conflict, people continue to listen to these programs.

TESTIMONY OF ALAIN, A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM TRAVELING IN THE REGION TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN

“The volatile security situation in Ituri has limited ICRC activities to downtown Bunia. Since radio broadcasting remains a powerful communication tool in DRC, we chose this medium to sensitize cities that are not accessible to us. Radio spots are an excellent way to reach a wide population; even in times of conflict, people continue to listen to these programs. In this area, the challenge was of technical and sometimes logistical nature: most radios have few means of broadcasting, charged batteries when electricity is available only last for an hour and there are many breakdowns due to lack of maintenance. It often takes endless time to replace defective parts and securing funding to support radio stations remains a colossal work.”



FACTS AND FIGURES



RADIO SPOTS

a day on 6 stations
for 2 months



EACH MESSAGE

lasts 2-3 minutes

TO WATCH



[https://twitter.com/FatimaSator/
status/1249012312507285504](https://twitter.com/FatimaSator/status/1249012312507285504)

LESSONS LEARNED

- Liaise listeners with ICRC services and operational teams for information.
- Prepare and train Red Cross volunteers in the DRC to disseminate messages correctly in languages that are not spoken often.





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