Why develop a communication plan?

Communication is essential to accountability

By communicating about CRS and our work, we can improve our programs and show respect for the people we serve. Good communication helps us do the following things:

- **Establish trust** between CRS, partners and the community.
- **Manage expectations** so that people know what CRS and partners can and cannot do. This can improve staff security and reduce the risk that rumors will arise.
- **Encourage participation and collaboration**. An informed community will be more able to participate in programs. It will also be able to provide feedback and engage in meaningful dialogue about the program.
- **Ensure that the right people know about services and entitlements.** Participants should also know how to access these resources.

The international relief and development community has identified a number of practices for good communication. Catholic Relief Services follows the Emergency Capacity Building Project's definitions for its programs. Many other agencies follow the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership standard.

Build communication into programs from the outset

Effective communication will not happen by accident

Managers need to actively support communication activities. For best results, communication should be incorporated throughout the program cycle, including in the following stages:

- **Program proposal.** Be sure to include a communication plan in both the narrative and the budget.
- **Implementation plan.** Don't forget to allocate communication responsibilities to specific team members.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning.** Include communication activities here so staff will consider communication to be an important way of working and so the program can make improvements based on what it has learned.

Teams need the right mind-set

Team members should understand the purpose of communication. They should have a real desire to engage in dialogue with community members and to empower them through the program. Otherwise, the communication plan will have little effect.

Teams need the right skills

Effective communication is a skill. Even with the right mind-set, team members need certain competencies to engage with communities and "translate" information into easily understood messages.

How else can we promote accountability?

In Haiti, CRS built on international standards to develop an accountability framework. It describes in detail six key elements of accountability:

- Leadership for strong accountability to program participants and communities
- Design, monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Prevention of abuse and sexual exploitation as part of programs
- Active information sharing and communication with program participants and communities
- Strong community participation and clear targeting criteria
- Feedback mechanisms for program participants and communities

The framework is available in English, French and Spanish. You can download it at http://www.crsprogramquality.org/publications/tag/Haiti-Accountability-Framework/.

Examples from the field

People affected by emergencies want basic information

A survey of 630 refugees in the Kenyan Dadaab camps found that more than 70 percent of newly arrived refugees lacked information on how to register for and access aid. A similar numbers of people said they needed information on how to locate missing family members. The vast majority of refugees interviewed said they considered access to information "very important" to their lives in the camps.[6]

Communication helps improve collaboration and staff safety . . .

In Sindh, Pakistan, CRS established representative community committees to help implement projects and to facilitate information sharing between the community and CRS. The committees and the community had access to staff phone numbers and a dedicated hotline for feedback and complaints. Northern Sindh has a history of sporadic tribal conflicts, so communication with the committees has been vital for alerting staff about recent outbreaks of fighting. For example, committee members recently alerted staff that there was a conflict and that it wasn't safe to visit. Committee members notified staff when it was safe to visit again.

By sharing how to communicate with CRS and taking the time to earn the respect of the community, develop a strong relationship and respond to community feedback, CRS protected staff. The community felt comfortable contacting CRS and knew how to get in touch.

. . . and it builds trust with authorities

Arman Datuk Marajo, a subdistrict secretary in West Sumatra, Indonesia, says that CRS earned his trust by working with his office: "CRS often met with us in this (sub-district) office to discuss their program. They consulted with us, especially when they started the project. It is a very good initiative. We appreciate how CRS was proactive to counter some of the questions people in the communities had about them being Catholic. Issues and misunderstandings were clarified effectively. During the coordination period, CRS asked for our consent and shared their plan. It is a good thing. The government here supports CRS."

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6   Matt Abud, with Jacobo Quintanilla and Deborah Ensor, *Dadaab, Kenya: Humanitarian Communications and Information Needs Assessment Among Refugees in the Camps; Findings, Analysis & Recommendations* (n.p.: Internews, 2011), http://www.internews.org/research-publications /dadaab-kenya-humanitarian-communications-and-information-needs-assessment-amon/.