

CASE STUDY

How a resettlement program in Haiti used a communication plan to improve results

In Haiti, CRS helped families that were living in camps after the January 2010 earthquake to move into safer accommodations in neighborhoods. As part of the program, small groups of families received training to strengthen their life skills. Topics included how to resolve family conflicts and how to manage money. CRS social workers supported individual families to help them develop their own plan for how they would move out of the camp. Finally, the program offered families a choice of a one-year rental subsidy, a new transitional shelter or a repaired home.

Developing a communication plan

The program manager recognized the importance of developing a communication plan: CRS needed to ensure that it clearly and consistently communicated the right messages at the right time. Otherwise, the camp might receive a sudden and unmanageable influx of people.

While preparing to implement the project, the program manager and program officer developed a communication plan and communication materials. The field team of 15 staff was briefed on the plan during their program induction. They practiced answering questions that might arise during family registration.

The program incorporated communication activities in the implementation plan for each camp. As a result, information sharing became an integral part of program activities.

Implementing the plan

To reduce the risk that new families would move into the camp, CRS did not announce the program in advance. Instead, the first interaction occurred when the CRS team registered the families. The team wore CRS T-shirts and ID cards so they were easily identifiable.

Within a few days of the registration, CRS and a representative from the mayor's office held an introductory meeting with the camp committee, followed by a town-hall-style meeting for camp residents. The meetings explained the program and told families how they could contact CRS. After the town-hall meeting, CRS staff stayed in the camp several hours to answer questions and hand out flyers summarizing the program.

Throughout the program, staff were in the camp every day, providing ample opportunity to answer camp residents' questions. In addition, families and community members could contact CRS through a free hotline to ask questions, provide feedback or make complaints about the program.

Revising the plan

As the program continued, the team saw a need for additional communication activities:

- **Meetings with small groups.** Since it was too difficult to answer individual questions during the town-hall meeting, the team added a day of meetings with small groups before starting the life skills component. During these meetings, team members answered everyone's questions and repeated the program's messages. This small-group format was critical for information sharing, and it helped prevent rumors about the program.
- **SMS messaging.** When there were delays or problems, the program used SMS messaging to communicate with families in the camp. This demonstrated the program's commitment and quelled rumors. For example, when the program needed to suspend activities because of security incidents, the team sent the following message to participants in Creole: "CRS informs you that due to pressure and demands from a group of people in the camp, we are obliged to suspend the program until the pressure and demands stop. For questions, call 277 for free." Then the team sent a second message that expressed its commitment to working in the neighborhood and its hope to return once the pressure ceased.
- **Testimonials.** Team members invited former program participants to speak at the town-hall meeting. The former participants provided testimony that CRS kept its promises in other camps. This gave people another reason to trust CRS.

Results of the plan

The program manager observed that using a strong approach to communication improved the program in the following ways:

- **More knowledge.** Participants better understood the program. They had more knowledge about the program's criteria for selecting participants, and they better understood how to benefit from the program once selected. This was critical for managing expectations. It helped prevent perceptions that CRS wasn't keeping promises. It also prevented arguments about who should benefit from the program.
- **More trust and participation.** Camp residents heard consistent messages multiple times and in different ways. This helped families believe the messages were true, which improved their participation and enthusiasm.
- **Quicker implementation.** By making sure the camp residents were 100 percent clear about the program before starting the activities, the team was able to quickly move into the actual programming. Because the families understood what their options were and what they needed to do, they were able to plan ahead for their lives and quickly move out of the camp.