

# HO 2.4: Information and Communication Questions in Rapid Needs Assessment

Adapted from: Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities. [Information and Communications Questions in Rapid Needs Assessments](#). 2014.

## Phase 1 (first 72 hours)

It is important to understand the best way to communicate with communities. Collect information about:

- Which areas have lost phone, radio and TV coverage
- Which cellphone networks, radio and TV stations are still working
- Which areas have lost power
- How people are currently receiving and sharing information

Information about the impact of a crisis on existing media channels can be found in several ways:

- Direct observation, for example, by looking for damaged cell towers, tuning in to radio stations to check which are still on air and checking cellphone signals
- Calling national regulatory bodies, mobile phone companies, journalist networks, radio and TV stations in the affected area, and any media development agencies in the country. Information about major media organizations in some countries can be found in CDAC's Media Landscape Guides: <https://www.cdacnetwork.org/media-landscape-guides>
- Call non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with programs in the affected area to ask about their access to communications channels.
- For information on cellphone connectivity, contact the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster or national/international associations of telecommunications companies—such as the [GSMA](#)

## What can be done with this data?

- Think about how your organization will communicate with the crisis-affected population, given how the communication infrastructure has been affected.
- Make sure the information you have collected on communication channels and infrastructure is shared with national and international humanitarian structures/mechanisms.

## Phase 2 (first two weeks)

Include the following five questions in any rapid needs assessments.

### Question 1

- What are the main channels of communication available to the community now? (Rank top three only, 1 = most useful)
- What channels did you use before? (Rank top 3 only, 1 = most useful)

Leaflets	Television	Radio	Newspapers	Magazines
Social media	Cellphone (calls)	Cellphone (SMS)	Loudspeaker	Internet
Religious leaders	Government	Friends and family	Health professionals	Music
Posters	Community leaders	Theatre	Other	Do not know
Billboards	Word of mouth	Film	Refused	

### Question 2

- What is preventing you from getting the information you need now?
- Are there groups in the community finding it hard to get information? Why are they finding it hard? (This is a deliberately open-ended question: note the answer alongside Question 2.)

No access to electricity	I do not trust where the information is coming from	My device is lost or damaged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ TV</li> <li>■ Radio</li> <li>■ Computer</li> <li>■ Cellphone</li> </ul>
Cell network is down	TV/radio station is no longer running (specify what happened)	
Information is in the wrong language	I cannot buy credit	
Information is written but I cannot read	Other	
Do not know	Refused	

### Question 3

- Which sources of information do you trust the **most**? (Rank top 3 only, 1 = most useful)
- Which sources do people trust the **least**? (Rank top 3 only, 1 = most useful)
- Are there any groups that trust different sources of information, e.g., men/women/older or disabled people? Which ones are they? (This is a deliberately open-ended question: note the answer alongside Question 3.)

Television (specify channel)	Government	NGO workers
Radio (specify station)	Community leader	United Nations (UN) staff
Print media (specify)	Other community members	Other (write in)
Internet (specify site)	Religious leaders	Do not know
Social media (specify)	Armed forces	Refused
Health professional	Police	

### Question 4

- What more do you need to know?  
(Note: This question is often misinterpreted to mean general needs rather than information needs. It may need further explanation, but avoid leading the respondent.)

News on what is happening here	Weather
News on what is happening at home	How to get healthcare/medical attention
Finding missing people	How to get help after attack or harassment
Security situation here	How to stay safe to prevent attack/harassment
Security situation at home	How to replace personal documentation (e.g., identification [ID], birth certificate)
Communicating with people who are in a different place	How to get access to education
How to register for aid	How to find work
How to get water	How to get transport
How to get food	How to get money/financial support
How to get shelter/accommodation or shelter materials	Information about possible return to place of origin
Information about nutrition	Information about relocation
Food prices	Other (write in)
Local crop/livestock prices	Do not know
How to get cooking fuel/firewood	Refused

## Question 5

- How would you most like to communicate with aid agencies, e.g., to ask a question, to complain or to make a suggestion? (Rank top 3, 1 = top preference)

Face-to-face (at home)	SMS	Social Media (specify site)	Tweet
Face-to-face (office/desk)	Email	Suggestion box	Other
Phone call	Letter	Radio/TV show	Do not know

## What can be done with this data?

- Use the information collected to develop a communications strategy. This should include the aims, objectives, target audiences, key messages, communication methods and feedback channels. This will help to make sure communication activities are included in your overall response and that you have the right content and method/channels for different audiences.
- A useful resource for developing message is the CDAC Message Library: <https://www.cdacnetwork.org/message-library>.
- Discuss how you can get information to affected communities and how you can help communities communicate easily with your agency. You may have to work with local media stations, community leaders, volunteer networks and other trusted sources of information. (*Note: check beforehand who runs each station and if a partnership with them could threaten humanitarian principles.*)
- If a communication coordination mechanism exists (for example, a communication working group), make sure you share your communication data and activities.
- Find out if you can join a communication coordination mechanism with other actors. This can help avoid repeating or contradicting messages from other organizations, as this can lead to confusion. Examples include a telephone hotline, inter-agency community consultations, or collaborating to sponsor a radio program for affected communities.

## Phase 3 (3–4 weeks)

More detailed assessments may take place in Phase 3. This may be done by individual organizations or by multiple agencies or clusters. This can help humanitarian agencies design better programs based on the needs of communities.

Two-way communication between organizations and communities will change along with the situation on the ground. In some humanitarian contexts, the damaged communication infrastructure can be repaired quickly. In other contexts—such as conflicts—it may take longer. It is therefore important to check often what is working and trusted and what is not.

The media development agencies that make up the CDAC Network have agreed to use common assessment tools. These tools, available on the CDAC website, can be used by any humanitarian agency. For information on these tools or to find out more about conducting in-depth communications assessments, see: <https://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance>.