



THE CAMEROON RED CROSS PARTNERS WITH LOCAL RADIO STATIONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Cameroon Red Cross

Investing in disaster preparedness is worth it - both in terms of human lives saved and economic returns. In this story we learn how the Cameroon Red Cross' investment in preparedness for communication in emergencies has been key to providing a timely and appropriate response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



CAMEROON

Using community radio to reach out to a large audience and address rumours

In 2019 and 2020, with the support of the IFRC and BBC Media Action¹, the National Society started training staff and volunteers in community engagement and accountability and reached out to media and government partners with trainings on communication in emergencies, building strong connections with community radio stations. As COVID-19 started spreading in Cameroon, recognizing the key role radio stations could play to engage with large audiences throughout the country, even in lockdown situations, Red Cross volunteers were trained to host interactive radio programmes and collect feedback from listeners². Targeted messaging is elaborated to address specific misinformation, in close coordination with the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders. Particular attention is paid to the large number of languages and dialects spoken in the country.

To deliver these messages, the Red Cross works with community leaders such as cultural or religious leaders, teachers or traditional healers who, because of their influence and knowledge of the community, are usually highly regarded and considered trusted sources of information. The National Society has also resorted to mobile caravans to deliver targeted awareness messages to people less likely to listen to the radio. As a result, volunteers have reported that once rumours have been addressed in a given community, they tend to stop circulating. With the support of Fondation Hirondelle, the Red Cross also engaged in a partnership with Viamo, a social enterprise using mobile technology for large-scale information sharing, which resulted in over 2 million text and voice messages in just a few weeks³.



PREPAREDNESS AREA & COMPONENT RELATED

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT



Communication in Emergencies

KEY STATS



25 radio stations engaged between March and December 2020

240 radio spots produced to address misinformation about COVID-19, between March 2020 and March 2021

Over 2 million scripts and messages broadcasted between March 2020 and March 2021



6,500 community feedback collected between March 2020 and March 2021

150 instructors trained in Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) between September 2020 and February 2021

Over 1,000 volunteers briefed on Risk Communication and Community Engagement between March and December 2020

1 In the framework of the Community Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program (CP3), see <https://www.ifrc.org/epidemic-and-pandemic-preparedness> for more information about the program and IFRC tools related to epidemic preparedness and response
 2 The following video provides information about Cameroon Red Cross' response to COVID-19: <https://youtu.be/iz7TQ0vy5Og>
 3 <https://www.hirondelle.org/en/our-news/1464-cameroon-community-radios-on-the-frontline-to-counter-misinformation-on-covid>

Coordinating with other key partners

The Cameroon Red Cross has coordinated efforts with local and national partners, including the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF to prepare for and respond to epidemics – in particular cholera outbreaks that have affected the country since the 1970s. UNICEF and the Red Cross have for example organized joint trainings on epidemics prevention and control, including the promotion of hygiene measures. The very first meeting of the national Public Health Emergency Operations Center for COVID-19 was hosted by the Red Cross, and led to the development of a joint national response plan to fight the pandemic. As first responders, Red Cross volunteers were prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination and are supporting the government with the ongoing immunization campaign.

Keys to success



- Discuss the role of the National Society in public health emergencies with the government and other key stakeholders at the national and local levels.
- Start implementing awareness-raising activities as early as possible to contribute to decrease the spread of outbreaks.
- Make use of existing community communication channels, including community radios, opinion leaders and other trusted sources of information, to reach the widest possible audience.
- Collect information needs, feedback and rumours and adapt communication strategies to meet the needs of each community.



“For some rural communities that do not receive CRTV National Radio - which is the government radio - the local radio station is their only reliable source of information”.

Mr. Hyacinthe OLINGA, Director of communication and humanitarian values promotion, Cameroon Red Cross

For more information:

- Cameroon Red Cross Society: <http://croix-rouge.cm/>
- National Society Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/disaster-preparedness
- Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness: www.ifrc.org/epidemic-and-pandemic-preparedness

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