


# ANNEX II

## A QUICK GUIDE: HOW TO USE THE MESSAGES WITHIN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

A woman with her back to the camera is wearing a bright green safety vest over a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. The vest has the words "BRIGADA DE EVACUACION" printed in bold black letters. She is holding the hands of children in a line, leading them across a dirt area. In the background, there is a chain-link fence and other children and an adult woman. The scene is outdoors and brightly lit.

**BRIGADA DE  
EVACUACION**

## Quick guide: community engagement and accountability

Community understanding, engagement, ownership and implementation of risk reduction actions is a core component of effective Red Cross and Red Crescent programming. Information shared with communities has the most impact when it is timely, relevant, accurate and tailored to the audience. And most importantly, when it is part of a comprehensive community engagement approach that enable continuous adaptation of messages and activities.

<p>What is community engagement and accountability?</p>	<p>Community engagement is an approach to how we work and a set of activities that support risk reduction and response outcomes by encouraging and empowering communities to take positive action to prevent or reduce risks of hazards by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employing a variety of communication approaches and trusted channels to reach, influence, enable and engage communities with accurate, easy-to-understand information about recognizing, reducing and responding to hazards and risks through trusted communication channels.</li> <li>• Making sure this information is based on people's current knowledge, attitudes, practices and behaviour. This is more likely to be accepted and acted upon (check <a href="#">TOOL 1</a> and <a href="#">TOOL 2</a> for templates and questions for assessments, baselines and monitoring and evaluation)</li> <li>• Building on local capacity by listening to and using community feedback and ideas about how to promote safety and resilience action – it is important to build community ownership of the action.</li> <li>• Using engaging approaches to drive positive behaviours change, like community theatre or radio chat shows.</li> <li>• Setting up systems to collect, analyse and respond to rumours and inaccurate information as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>
<p>Why is community engagement important in disaster reduction and response?</p>	<p>Some lessons from previous experience shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As much as we try to provide solutions, it will be the communities who are the main implementers and leaders in promoting individual and collective action to address the hazard.</li> <li>• Building trust is essential. Once communities recognize us as a trusted source of advice, it will influence if they accept volunteers' advice and act on it.</li> <li>• Communities need to fully understand and embrace the recommendations. If not, they might refuse access to their villages and even attack volunteers and staff members. This is particularly a risk during epidemic outbreaks.</li> <li>• When rumours spread faster than the truth and contradict real information, it can stop people from protecting themselves and undermine our social mobilization efforts.</li> <li>• We need to check how messages are being interpreted by the communities. For example, the message <i>Ebola kills</i> led people to believe it was incurable and so they chose to die at home rather than go to a treatment centre, contributing to the spread of the disease.</li> <li>• Working with communities and getting trusted leaders on board mobilize communities much faster and more effectively than working exclusively through our own volunteers.</li> </ul>

<p>What do I need to remember in relation to community engagement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adapt to the local context:</b> While all messages need to align with approved messages issued by authorities, they should still be tailored to the local context, such as local perceptions, beliefs and practices (see <a href="#">TOOL 10</a>).</li> <li>• <b>Change your messages to adapt to the needs of people as the response evolves:</b> To respond to the increasing knowledge of the population and the feedback they provide, as well as rumours and false information spreading in the area.</li> <li>• <b>Test your messages:</b> Any news materials and messages need to be tested with the community before being widely disseminated to ensure they are well understood and do not contribute to confusion or even potentially cause harm.</li> <li>• <b>Collect and analyse rumours and feedback regularly:</b> This is key to shaping your messages and communication (check <a href="#">TOOL 15</a> or the <a href="#">Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities New good practice guide: dealing with rumours in humanitarian response</a>).</li> <li>• <b>Train staff and volunteers:</b> Not everyone is a natural communicator and some may need help to build up their communication, listening and feedback collection skills (check the <a href="#">TOOL 14</a>).</li> </ul>
<p>Where can I get more help, templates, guidance etc.?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement and accountability page <a href="http://www.ifrc.org/CEA">www.ifrc.org/CEA</a>: tools, templates and tips for rolling out community communication and accountability approaches and activities.</li> <li>• Check, in particular, <a href="#">TOOL 7</a> with more guidance and <a href="#">tools</a> on how to develop a community engagement and accountability plan of action.</li> <li>• Also check the <a href="#">Community engagement and accountability FedNet library</a> for additional training tools and resources.</li> </ul>

## Key community engagement tips

During emergencies and crisis in particular, public fear may rise and rumours can spread faster. Hence, it is important that we engage people and communities in discussing solutions and taking effective action to protect themselves, their families and their communities and respond to risks and hazards.

1. **Do not only tell people what to do:** Recognizing **the community as experts is key to helping them in reducing risks.** Telling people what to do, however scientific, does not always work. Engaging them through two-way communication is more effective than taking the discussion from a top down *do not* to a partnership of *can* with communities is key.
2. **Get peers and leaders to talk:** People are more likely to pay attention to information from people they already know, trust and who they feel are concerned about their wellbeing. People live in unique social-cultural contexts, with relationship dynamics, and their own perception of risks, and trusted sources of advice, that influence if they accept advice or not.
3. **Disseminate accurate information immediately:** Disseminating information about an epidemic or another hazard immediately will help mitigate concerns and promote prevention actions.
4. **Promote awareness and action:** Action-oriented risk communication and community engagement typically contains information targeted to communities, including:
  - a. an instruction to follow, for example, if infected, go for treatment immediately
  - b. a behaviour to adopt, for example, wash your hands frequently to avoid transmitting the bacteria, [check the health promotion material regularly](#)
  - c. a response to take, such as, going for treatment, following guidance on where and when to access services, i.e. treatment is free of charge and available at health facilities.
5. **Establish participation and feedback approaches:** Asking people what they know, want and need, and involving them in designing and delivering activities improve the effectiveness of our community interventions and sustain the changes we promote. It is important to give opportunities and open channels of communication for people and communities to ask questions and debate issues of concern.
6. **Ask for feedback:** Feedback helps Red Cross and Red Crescent shape communication and programmatic efforts. For example, if communities are asking lots of questions for example, about the risk of a disease to children, it is important we address those concerns through all our social mobilization activities. Feedback provides an early warning system that allows issues to be resolved quickly, before they get worse. The Red Cross and Red Crescent also has a responsibility to listen to and respond to complaints – even if we cannot address some of them, people still appreciate being listened to and acknowledged.
7. **Test your approach:** Pilot-testing messages and materials with communities' aims to ensure that messages are understandable, acceptable, relevant and persuasive. It will also help prevent the dissemination of either meaningless or potentially harmful information. It should also be noted that too much dissemination might have adverse effects.
8. **Accountable to those we seek to help:** One way to achieve greater accountability to the communities we work with is a more systematic and coordinated approach towards communicating with at-risk communities and acting on their feedback to us, i.e. people might not agree and complain about certain volunteers' activities.

9. **Changing behaviours takes time:** Telling people to go for treatment in case of symptoms is not enough during an epidemic – we need to understand why they do certain things and what the barriers are to safer practices and sustain our communication with them based on this analysis. It is key that we analyse (if available research has been done) or gather information on peoples' knowledge, attitudes and practices and offers innovative, engaging tools to support prevention and response programmes.
10. **Building public trust in the Red Cross and Red Crescent:** Open, honest communication is a mark of respect, which builds trust between the Red Cross and Red Crescent and communities.
11. **Be open, honest and timely:** Communicate clearly and timely what we know or not know about the disease and focus on the action that people and communities can take to tackle the disease.
12. **Stay informed on the latest news and work with others:** approaches, recommendations and information may change as more is learned about a hazard or risk. Check regularly information coming from ministries or other organizations like OCHA, WHO and UNICEF. It is also important to make sure information shared by the Red Cross and Red Crescent does not contradict the government and partners' information as this only adds to confusion and mistrust in communities.
13. **Red Cross cares:** It is easy for people affected by an epidemic outbreak or living in extreme poverty to assume society has forgotten about them. Community engagement strategies can have powerful psychological benefits.
14. **Use new and innovative ways of communicating with people and communities:** The explosion in access to mobile phones, the Internet and social media has changed the way people communicate. Communication is no longer top down – people can speak publicly and directly with and about the Red Cross, and they expect us to listen and engage them in all we do (check [TOOL 8](#) for more tips on the communication channels).