ICRC panel #T4D2016: "From Face-to-Face to Messaging Apps: Communicating with Communities in Complex Emergencies"

Title (“invited talk”)

Developing Innovative Solutions to Communicate with Communities in Complex Emergencies

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Biography of Presenting Author (80 words):

Katie is the Emergency Lab manager with UNHCR Innovation - with a specific focus on Communication with Communities (CwC). Katie has worked to strengthen CwC across a range of complex contexts for over six years – working previously with Save the Children in Somalia, Myanmar, Ukraine and the Syria response and with the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network in South Sudan, Jordan and West Africa (for the Ebola Crisis). Prior to working within the humanitarian sphere Katie worked with print and broadcast media in West Africa, she holds a Masters Degree in Critical Media and Cultural studies, and an undergraduate degree in Film Making.

Abstract

For the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Communicating with Communities and Protection are inextricably linked. Populations of concern should be agents of their own recovery - and improved dialogue with these communities ensures they have a better sense of connectedness and dignity and the ability to hold UNHCR to account. If they have access to the information they need through the most appropriate and trusted channels they can make informed decisions to protect themselves and each other. However, complex operating environments - including contexts with live conflict - require a deep understanding of local dynamics and social structures. Solutions to improve information sharing, provide a platform for the ‘voiceless’, to manage complaints and counter rumour must be grounded in these realities.

UNHCR operates in such highly politicised and militarized environments; situations with grave violations of human rights and IHL, misinformation, rumour and inherent mistrust. Ensuring protection, transparency and accountability in these situations is paramount.

Communicating with Communities - including the adoption, or not, of technologies - therefore requires a deep understanding of local dynamics and social structures. Solutions to improve information sharing, provide a platform for the ‘voiceless’, to manage complaints and counter rumour must be grounded in these realities.

In 2014, over 42,000 people were displaced every day; and the number of people displaced by war increased by 13% from 2013. Ensuring that mobile populations have equitable and non-discriminatory access to protection and assistance programme and have a say in decisions that affect their lives is key.

In such contexts, how do we ensure that the voices of communities – including the most marginalised and vulnerable – are identified and amplified through consultation and dialogue? How can we best identify and build upon local capacities and technologies, to ensure that existing information and communication channels are complemented? Against such volatile backdrops can we support existing and forge new partnerships to improve the effectiveness of communications with communities?

UNHCR Innovation - through creation of the Emergency Lab is working with refugees, colleagues in the field and partners to identify solutions to these complex set of challenges. The Emergency Lab has a specific focus on Communicating with Communities and provides a platform for innovators within and outside UNHCR to test and prototype ‘people-centred’ solutions to common challenges. Recognising the need to share learning across the humanitarian sector, and wider, UNHCR will draw on recent examples and experience from Emergency Operations in complex contexts including Europe, Ukraine, Iraq and Yemen.

During the session we hope to unpack some of these questions further, exploring the following topics:
• Ethical data collection, management and protection
• Innovative partnerships and how to maximise collaboration with technology providers
• The role communication and connectivity plays in protection outcomes
• The use and misuse of information in protection emergencies
• Information ecosystems and the role of technology for displaced populations

**Keywords:** This section should contain maximum 3-5 keywords that are written in Times New Roman font, 10pt size, and separated with commas.