

[SE01-HUM]

From Face-to-Face to Messaging Apps: Communicating with Communities in Complex Emergencies

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Brief Bio

Session Leader(s)

Jacobo Quintanilla is ICRC's Community Engagement Advisor. He has been working at the intersection of media, communications and technology in the humanitarian sector for the last 10 years in more than 20 countries with a passion for communication as form of aid in its own right. He is 2012 PopTech Social Innovation Fellow and also serves as Technical Reviewer for the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) and in the judging panel on Best Use of Mobile in Humanitarian Situations for the GSMA Global Mobile Awards.

Abstract

*Short description,
including alignment with
conference themes and
objectives*

The communications landscape in developing countries is undergoing profound changes. In Yemen or Myanmar for example, those changes are having deep implications not just on how local communities self-organize and coordinate among themselves, but also for humanitarian responders. Aid organizations are progressively understanding the impact of these changes in their operational models, highlighting the urgency to better understand local information ecosystems, invest in new partnerships and more meaningfully engage with the very same communities they endeavor to protect and assist.

Over the last five years, progress has been made setting up two-way communications with communities affected by natural disasters, both using traditional and tech tools. From face-to-face interactions, to collaborating with digital volunteers or by using messaging apps, humanitarian organizations are trying to more systematically listen to communities' and to provide them with life-saving, useful and actionable information about vital services available.

However, conflict situations add to the complexity and present particular challenges such as insecurity and limited physical access, disrupted energy and telecommunications infrastructure, communities' limited access and skills to use technologies, data protection and misinformation and propaganda.

How is technology enabling humanitarian organizations to better engage with communities caught up in conflict situations? What does the aid sector need to learn from the public and private sectors, from tech groups and from the media? And looking ahead, how are the communications landscape going to change over the next 5 years and where does that leave the aid world?

Description

Proposed discussion focus

Talking about communicating with communities in conflict environments is a very tough reality check. There is an important element of uncertainty that makes the planning for any kind of communication much more complex. In a natural disaster we know that things will improve, in conflict situations, we really don't know.

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Description (Cont.)

However, disaster affected communities today do not expect only humanitarian services and response. In fact, they expect to be listened to and demand greater interaction with and accountability from governments, humanitarian agencies and the media. In the years to come, communities will increasingly judge aid agencies regarding the quality of the engagement and their ability to listen and to change the way they operate.

Based on the area of expertise of the panelists, during this session we would like to debate around the following topics:

1. Shifting power dynamics, information ecosystems and the role of technology
2. Energy and connectivity
3. Partnerships with tech groups and the private sector
4. Community mobilization and expectations management
5. The role of digital volunteers
6. Data protection
7. The future of communications

Target Audience

Technologists, private sector, humanitarian organizations and donors