Lifeline Production Manual

A guide on how to make programming for people affected by humanitarian emergencies

BBC MEDIA ACTION

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA AROUND THE WORLD

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The author would like to thank Theodora Hannides and Lisa Robinson for their input.

Front cover photo
Through *Connexion Haiti*, BBC World Service produced daily broadcasts sharing vital information in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2010.
LISA ROBINSON/BBC MEDIA ACTION

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"As well as saving lives, information reduces suffering in the wake of disaster. Tracing lost family and friends, knowing how much compensation you're entitled to or where you're going to live, simply understanding why disaster struck: such information means an enormous amount to survivors left homeless and traumatised."
Markku Niskala, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

What is Lifeline programming for?

The purpose of Lifeline programming is to make content for people affected by humanitarian crises in order to help save lives and reduce suffering.

How can it make a difference?

In the wake of a humanitarian emergency, people need answers to basic questions such as: What happened? Where can we find food, shelter and water? How can we protect ourselves? How can we help injured people? What can we do to avoid the spread of disease? What should we do if a family member is missing?

A lack of information and communication may exacerbate suffering and reduce the likelihood of survival.

Media can reach populations rapidly and on a large scale, providing life-saving information and guidance amid the chaos, strengthening the recovery by helping communities to understand what is happening and what they can do to help themselves.

Evidence[1] shows that by doing Lifeline programming, media can play a role in bringing communities together, connecting affected people to each other and to aid workers and leaders. This can enable survivors to hold relief agencies to account, and also to communicate their own perspectives and needs and share solutions, giving them the motivation and confidence to rebuild their lives.

What is the difference between Lifeline programming and news programming?

Lifeline programming requires a different approach from conventional newsgathering and reporting. It involves sharing practical, actionable information that audiences can use to improve their situation, and also providing encouragement and reassurance. It's about reporting *for* those affected rather than about them. Topics may include issues around safety, food, water, shelter, health, hygiene, trauma and more. The fundamental principles of good, responsible journalism remain the same. Values such as accuracy, impartiality, editorial integrity and independence should underpin your work, as ever.

Practical Lifeline information

Information for audiences must be applicable to their immediate situation. Consider the different angles of a story in an emergency:

NEWS
"Chaos at distribution points... Is aid being delivered properly…? Is there enough food to meet the needs…?"

This does not offer concrete, actionable information affected audiences can use to inform their own decisions about how to get help or help themselves.

LIFELINE INFO
"To receive food distributions, you need to have a voucher. You can register… Vouchers cannot be bought, sold or traded… Food rations will include…"

Audiences can act on this information by following the procedures for distributions and know what they are entitled to receive. This can also help to reduce corruption.

NEWS
"Cholera may kill thousands living in the camps during the quickly approaching rainy season…"

This information does nothing to empower audiences to take action to improve their situation.

LIFELINE INFO
"Cholera is a disease that causes… It is spread by… You can prevent cholera by… Aid agencies are distributing water purification tablets… tablets may taste funny but… Building and maintaining latrines is important because… Different ways of building latrines include…"

This is the kind of information people can use!

Isn't this a bit boring?

And what about those listeners who aren't even affected?

Two points on this:

1. If you are caught up in a crisis and at the risk of disease, malnutrition and death, this kind of information is likely to be the most interesting thing you will hear.
2. It is only as boring as you make it!

As well as saving lives and helping people caught up in a crisis to cope, well-crafted Lifeline programming can make compelling listening for wider audiences, as they learn about the day-to-day challenges that their fellow human beings are facing and how they are dealing with them.

All the usual options and opportunities for creative and engaging programming are still there – in many cases, it's just about how you weave this crucial life-saving content into your reports or packages.

What kind of information do people affected by humanitarian crises need?

This will, of course, vary according to the nature and stage of the crisis. Go further than simply making assumptions about what information people need. One of the easiest ways of finding out what audiences want to know is to ask them. You could, for example, invite them to contact you via your existing social media/telephone platforms to tell you what issues they most want to hear about. Remember that different people will have different needs, so include men and women and different ethnic groups in your research. You should also ask relief providers who have been on the ground what kinds of information needs they have identified and what should be prioritised.

Resource

Topic-by-topic guides for media on humanitarian issues

BBC Media Action has developed topic-by-topic guides on how to cover different core humanitarian issues in emergencies. Visit:

www.bbcmediaactionilearn.com/lifelineprogramming

And look under "Tools for Media"

Here are some examples of general issues on which audiences are likely to need information:[2]

Immediate aftermath of a disaster

At this stage there is often chaos and confusion, and usually no organised relief effort. People only know what they can see around them, and the media can play a major role in helping them understand the nature and extent of the crisis and how best to stay safe. They might want to know:

- What is happening? Why? Where?
- What are the dangers now?
- How can I protect myself and my family?
- Is it dangerous to stay in the area where I am? If yes, where can I go to be safe?
- What kind of help is available, from whom and how can I access it?
- How long is the crisis likely to go on for?

- Where can I find more information?
- What can I do to help my children cope with the trauma?

It is also important to keep an eye out for damaging misinformation that may be circulating and to correct it. In previous crises, earthquakes have led to rumours of nuclear invasion, causing widespread panic, and false information about the expected arrival of a tsunami has caused stampedes, which can cost lives.

Several days after the event

The community will probably have become more organised and certain services may be up and running. Some assistance may have arrived from the government or local organisations (although it usually takes one to two weeks for major relief efforts to become operational).

Key questions may include:

- What food/water/shelter is available and how do I access it?
- How can I register to receive supplies distributed by agencies?
- What medical support is available? Where do I have to go to get it?
- Which agencies are helping (describe logos, how to recognise them, services each provides)?
- What health risks are there and how can I protect myself from them?
- How should we dispose of waste?
- What security risks are there? How can I reduce them?
- A member of my family is missing – what should I do?
- Which communication facilities are functioning?
- Which transport routes are open?
- Is it safe to return home?

Get it right!

As with news reporting, if information is perceived as inaccurate or incomplete, broadcasters will lose their audiences' trust and could do more harm than good.

In a humanitarian emergency, this is even more the case – incorrect information can exacerbate suffering and even cost lives. Imagine the consequences of reassuring villagers that food aid will arrive tomorrow, when it is still several days away, or telling people driven from their homes by conflict that it is safe to return when it is not.

If incorrect information is broadcast, rectify it as quickly as possible and inform the relevant authorities or agencies so they can act to limit the consequences.

Weeks or months after the event

More long-term issues to do with recovery and reconstruction will arise, such as schooling, housing, dealing with trauma, and employment and livelihoods. People will want information on the recovery process and on what options and support are available to help them rebuild their lives.

There may also be questions of accountability: are the efforts of the government and wider relief agencies meeting people's needs? Has aid money been well spent? It might be appropriate to change the format of programming to reflect these longer-term themes (see format ideas below).

Working with the relief effort

Effective Lifeline programming requires regular contact and co-ordination with the relief effort. As early in your work as possible, you should start liaising with international and local organisations, as well as government actors, to find out what is happening and to identify useful information for your audiences.

If they are present, try to **tap into co-ordination mechanisms** such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) or whatever emergency response committee local authorities have set up.

Ideally, aid organisations and local authorities will agree on key information to share with the

The bigger picture

Think also of those listening who are not direct victims of the crisis but may have been affected in other ways. For example, if your programming centres around displaced people in camps, think about the host community, whose own lives and resources may have been affected by the sudden influx of people – often this creates tensions. How might you help them to understand what is happening and what they can do? Or, what about the diaspora? Those who know affected people can often help pass on crucial information, or may want to know if there is any way they can help.

population and you can play a role in communicating this, exercising your usual editorial judgement and caution about accuracy, impartiality and reliability.

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for audiences to be bombarded with conflicting messages about what to do, leaving them even more confused than before. In some cases, communication with affected populations is barely on the relief agenda and people are left in the dark as to what to do and what help is coming. A lack of information leaves space for rumours and wild speculation, which can cause even more damage.

If it looks as if communication with affected populations isn't on the agenda, try to change that! Remind relief co-ordinators that information will strengthen the aid effort and ask them to identify useful information for populations.

Always make it clear to contacts within the humanitarian community that you are doing Lifeline programming, not standard news reporting. Public information officers usually focus on providing information for the media *about* rather than *for* affected communities. If you explain that your work is aimed at supporting the aid effort, you will be more likely to get the kind of information you need. You may have to ask to speak to someone who is directly involved with the relief effort on the ground to get the information you need.

The United Nations cluster system

The humanitarian system is organised into "clusters". Clusters are groups of humanitarian organisations in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, such as water, health, education, nutrition.

The clusters are a way of helping aid agencies to co-ordinate with each other and share information.

You should be able to find technical experts within each of these clusters who can provide information and advice for audiences on the theme of their cluster.

For example, if you wanted to know about what to tell audiences about how to access safe drinking water, you would approach the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) cluster.

For big emergencies, you can often find cluster contact points by going to the relevant country page here:

www.humanitarianresponse.info

You can learn more about the cluster system here:

www.humanitarianresponse.info/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach

Communicating Lifeline information

- **Repeat** key information regularly, especially in the early stages. Bear in mind that when people are traumatised, they can have trouble retaining information.
- Present information in a **simple, clear** way. You're a journalist, so you already know that this is important, but for Lifeline programming it's especially important. People will be acting on your information and need clarity at a confusing time.
- Present audiences with **solutions**, instead of just focusing on problems. Give people positive examples and advice.
- Where possible, present information as a **call to action** – too often people faced with a humanitarian emergency are treated as passive recipients, who are expected to sit and wait for help. But, with a bit of guidance, they are the best-placed people to improve their situation.
- Make sure the advice you share is **realistic** – don't tell people to boil their drinking water if they have no fuel. Talk to aid experts to find solutions that are actionable and appropriate for the context.
- Encourage people to **share** the information with their friends, family and community.
- Provide **contact points** for further information – websites, addresses, phone numbers, service kiosks.
- **Don't sensationalise.** ("This must be the most devastating disaster ever!") Stick to the facts.
- Consider those who may have **special needs**. Women, children, the elderly and disabled often face additional challenges in a humanitarian crisis.
- **Attribute sources.** In the chaos of a crisis all kinds of rumours can emerge. Double-check facts and say where they came from.
- Create a **sense of community**. Invite plenty of contributions from audiences. People will suffer less if they feel that they are not alone.
- Use **real-life examples** of how people are coping to inspire others to do likewise.
- **Promote hope** – simple things such as an encouraging, reassuring tone can make a difference.

Examples of calls to action

"Community committees need to be formed to support with different areas of camp life, such as water, health, shelter and education. Contact XXX for more information."

"If you have been injured, keep your wounds clean and seek treatment as soon as possible. Call XXX to find out where your nearest health facility is."

"Humanitarian aid is free! No one has the right to touch you or demand any sexual actions/favours from you in return for assistance."

"If you have been raped or sexually assaulted, visit your local health facility as soon as possible. You can then be treated against sexually transmitted infections including HIV. You can also get emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy and receive support and advice. This care is confidential."

"Older people and the disabled should get shelter before everyone else. Make sure they are close to water distribution points, latrines and kitchen facilities, as well as the health centre. As a camp resident, you can help by making sure they don't feel isolated or unsafe, and that they can evacuate their shelter easily."

Taken from the CDAC Network online message library

Do no harm

Information is power, and there are many ways in which you could inadvertently harm your audience, even though you are committed to helping them. This is why you need to think very carefully about the content you are putting out on air. Have a think about the following scenarios.

Example 1

You work as a local radio journalist in a region of conservative values. Recently, there has been a wave of intense fighting between armed groups and rape is being used as a weapon of war. You learn of a medical charity that is setting up a mobile clinic to treat victims of sexual attack so you decide to run an item on your Lifeline programme telling people where to go for help if they themselves have been sexually attacked. The item stresses the importance of seeking treatment.

Question:

If you broadcast the name of the organisation and the location of the clinic, might that cause harm to anyone?

Answer:

If you broadcast widely the name of the organisation and the location of the clinic you may be risking the safety of both victims and staff, especially as your listeners could include those who originally committed the acts of rape. People who are seen going to the clinic may be stigmatised or even attacked again.

It would be safer to suggest, for example, that listeners contact local health clinics for more information on how to get the right help. Aid and health workers could meanwhile spread information about the clinic in a more targeted way, for example face-to-face through women's groups or by placing leaflets at hospitals.

In other, less volatile contexts it might be fine to broadcast the address of this kind of clinic, but always check with the service provider whether they are happy for you to share the details of their activities, and also check exactly what details.

Also think carefully about the phrasing you use. "Rape" can be a strong word – it might be better to use less direct language to describe the service.

Example 2

You are broadcasting across a famine-struck region with a population of about 5 million people. You learn that an aid agency is planning to distribute food in five villages tomorrow. You want to tell your audiences about the locations and times of the aid delivery so that they know how to access it.

Question:

Are there any risks in broadcasting this information?

Answer:

Quite possibly. Broadcasting information across the whole affected region about a single, small distribution for a select group of people could cause damage. Huge numbers of people might descend on the location where the distribution is taking place causing chaos and possibly resulting in violence. In a conflict-affected area, the trucks might even get hijacked and the aid diverted. In some contexts, it might be fine to share information about food distributions, but make sure you think through the risks and check with the aid agencies concerned beforehand.

Impartiality

Lifeline programming can run the risk of being seen as partisan, especially if the humanitarian crisis is conflict related. Be scrupulously impartial and neutral about how you gather, deliver and target Lifeline information.

Also be wary of attempts to manipulate you by those wanting to use the crisis to further their own political or sectarian interests.

For example, a politician might state: "Cholera has been brought to the area by XXX ethnic group."

Your focus should be on the useful information for your audience, for example: "There has been official confirmation from the Health Ministry of an outbreak of cholera in the region. If you have frequent watery diarrhoea or vomiting, you should go to a doctor or clinic immediately. Prompt treatment is effective and could save your life."

Format options for broadcast

The most suitable format and amount of airtime allocated for Lifeline programming will depend on many factors, including the phase, scale and severity of the crisis, the broadcast channel (for example, a local station targeting a very specific area vs a channel which spans a whole country, where not all listeners will be affected by the crisis), and what fits in best with existing programming and audience preferences.

Lifeline information can be specifically flagged up as part of a special Lifeline section of output, or more integrated into existing programming, for example as an add-on to a standard news report about the situation or magazine programme. Lifeline information might be presented through:

- **Information bulletins** – a presenter simply explains what has happened and offers clear instructions on what to do. This is often suited to the immediate aftermath of a sudden major emergency.
- **Interviews** – suitable subjects might be humanitarian experts involved in the relief operation, doctors, psychologists, etc. The voices of those directly affected can be included if appropriate (see "Interviews for Lifeline" below).
- **Illustrated bulletins** – including field reports, packages and interviews.
- **Spots or public service announcements** – short segments of Lifeline information on single topics, interspersed with regular programmes.
- **Magazine programmes** – with a range of the above, perhaps including phone-ins if appropriate.
- **Drama** – a useful tool for dealing with complex or sensitive themes, usually best suited to longer-term programming in the later **stages of a crisis.**

- **Debate programmes** – again, better suited to the later stages of a crisis, these can be useful for holding those responsible for relief and reconstruction to account.

Formats – Case study: Nepal earthquake response

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal in April 2015, killing thousands of people and leaving many more homeless. This Lifeline programming case study illustrates how different programme formats can be used to address different needs at various stages of a humanitarian emergency.

Emergency broadcasts

At first, people needed immediate, practical information to help them survive, so hours after the quake, BBC Media Action began Lifeline broadcasts that went out on a newly established shortwave frequency, as well as on BBC Nepali and several hundred partner stations. They included information on what had happened and advice on immediate measures people could take to protect themselves from further harm (for example, the risks from aftershocks, staying out of damaged buildings and away from fallen power cables, etc.).

Milijuli Nepali – magazine show

In the days and weeks after the quake, there was a need for more in-depth information and exploration of the issues, and a space for affected people to share their stories and solutions. So BBC Media Action launched *Milijuli Nepali* (Together Nepal) – 15-minute radio magazine programmes broadcast twice a day. Each programme provided people with in-depth **practical, actionable information – on shelter, sanitation, food, water, health and employment – for survival and recovery.** *Milijuli Nepali* producers also travelled the country gathering stories of hope, resilience and community spirit to share with their listeners. Inspirational features included a local engineer from Dholka who shared tips on building earthquake-resistant homes, a tailor from Ramechhap district who reopened in a new shop just a week after her old one was destroyed, and a mother who safely delivered her baby in a temporary shelter with the help of her mother-in-law and neighbour.

Katha Maala – drama

In later stages of the response, BBC Media Action worked with partners to launch a radio drama called *Katha Maala* (Garland of Stories). The main character, Maala, was an earthquake survivor. In the aftermath of the earthquake, she was making her living selling milk to earthquake-affected communities. A proverbial "nosy neighbour", she spent her days visiting people at their homes or in temporary shelters and sharing useful and practical anecdotes and advice to help people cope with shelter, water and sanitation challenges. The drama aimed to encourage people to better cope with post-disaster problems and prepare for the challenges of the monsoon and winter seasons. Drama was a useful tool for keeping audiences engaged and also inspiring them to take control of their circumstances by hearing about characters like them as they went about organising themselves and finding solutions to problems.

Sajha Sawal – television and radio debate show

In addition, in the weeks and months after the disaster, people affected by the earthquake also had questions and concerns that they urgently wanted to raise with the country's authorities.

Launched in 2007, BBC Media Action's *Sajha Sawal* (Common Questions) is a weekly political debate programme, broadcast across Nepal on radio and TV, which allows community representatives, including people from marginalised groups, to ask tough questions of their leaders.

Special episodes were made focusing on the aftermath of the earthquake and the relief and recovery processes. Ordinary people were given the space to challenge leaders and raise their concerns about issues such as their children returning to school, planting new crops to restore their livelihoods, and the recovery of the tourism industry.

Interactivity

Lifeline programming is not just about giving out information. It must also provide a space for those affected by the crisis to have a voice. This is important for:

- Allowing survivors to express their needs and concerns, and ask questions, so that their issues are better understood and addressed
- Helping you to identify issues that are important to your audiences, enabling you to make content that is very relevant for them
- Enabling people to share their solutions (often the best and most workable solutions come from communities themselves – not aid experts)
- Creating a sense of community and connectedness, so that people feel less alone
- Strengthening the feeling of ownership of Lifeline programmes, hence building listenership
- Helping to identify gaps in response, and to hold governments and relief organisations to account
- Helping to identify and correct misinformation and rumours that are circulating among the population

Some options for interactivity

From the field – of course, there is no substitute for being on the ground to gather first-hand information and talk to people face-to-face. Don't forget to keep on your Lifeline hat, and focus on what will be useful for affected audiences.

SMSs, emails and voice messages – you can invite people to SMS or leave voice messages on a dedicated number.

Live phone-ins – doing this within the first few days of a crisis might not be appropriate, as the lines might not be working, or you would be most likely to get calls from people in a state of extreme distress, confusion and desperation. Phone-ins might be better suited to the

later stages or recovery phase of a crisis, when the time is right for people to reflect on their situations and to hold the relief effort to account.

Social media tools – Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Viber and others can be a rapid and cheap way of gathering and sharing information.

Interactivity – issues to consider

- Think about the suitability of the different interactivity options based on the situation. What works well in one context might be totally unsuitable for another. This might include considering:
  - What technology/infrastructure is functioning?
  - What resources will be required to manage this approach?
  - Is the target audience literate?
  - Do people use their mobiles for SMS or voice only?
  - What two-way channels are audiences already familiar with: for example, are radio phone-ins or social media sites popular? What channels will be effective at reaching the most isolated and vulnerable?
- Avoid creating unrealistic expectations. If you are inviting people to contact you with their concerns, make it clear that you are offering them an opportunity to voice their needs, but you are not able to solve their problems or direct aid.
- Some of the information you receive might be valuable for authorities or aid agencies involved in the response. If you have the resources, think about how you might synthesise the key issues coming from audiences and share them.
- Gather and share encouraging examples of communities pulling together to serve as a model and inspiration for others.
- There is a risk that you will be inundated with calls or messages. Before inviting people to contact you, think carefully about how you can manage the influx of information and make sure you have a system for gathering and organising information, as well as enough people to process it.

- If you choose to use social networking sites, think carefully about how you will moderate the content. While such sites offer an extremely useful platform for people to communicate their needs, consider the risks of people posting incorrect information on your pages.

Interactivity – Case study: West Africa Ebola response

During the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in 2014–15, BBC Media Action worked with partners to do special Lifeline programming for Sierra Leone and Liberia, including magazine show Kick Ebola, radio drama and public service announcements. They used instant messenger app WhatsApp, Facebook, call-ins and SMS services to exchange information with audiences, allowing people to support each other through the crisis and submit questions and contributions.

At the time of broadcasting, Kick Ebola's Facebook page had 11,697 followers, which was the biggest Facebook news group for Liberians. In Sierra Leone, a WhatsApp service created for the programme had over 15,000 followers.

Research into the programming showed that:

- Social media was highly effective at giving audiences a voice and enabling the programme to address emerging issues and concerns in real time.
- People appreciated being able to hear the voice of ordinary people and being able to contribute to the local radio stations (people were prepared to phone in to such programmes despite the costs of phone credit).
- The majority of respondents (around 85%) agreed that Kick Ebola gave listeners an opportunity to voice their concerns.
- Audiences felt that being able to share their opinions and concerns would increase the visibility of their issues among responders.
- Programme-makers were able to monitor social media to understand the issues that mattered to people and any popular myths, which could then be addressed online and on the radio.

Interviews for Lifeline

As you choose your interviewees and questions, remember that the end product in Lifeline programming is for, not about those who are suffering. Aim to include interviewees who can share useful information, or offer some kind of guidance or encouragement. Remember that people may be traumatised and vulnerable. In some situations – particularly conflict – it may be unsuitable to include voices of people who are directly affected and may even put them at risk.

Ask Lifeline questions that will result in answers which provide solutions or encouragement for affected people. Here are some examples of helpful and unhelpful questions:

Unhelpful questions

To survivors:

You lost your children, you must be devastated?

What was it like when your house collapsed?

To aid experts:

How much money is needed for the humanitarian response?
(The answer to this is unlikely to be one that people who are directly affected can act upon.)

Is this the worst crisis you have ever witnessed?

Helpful questions

To survivors:

What ways have you found to cope with the distress you have been through?

Tell us about the new temporary shelter you have built and what you did to make it sturdy and safe?

To aid experts:

What can people do to stay safe and healthy right now?

What should people do if they can't find a member of their family?

What advice would you give to the people who feel that they might be suffering from psychological trauma?

Some Lifeline interviewing DOs and DON'Ts...

DO select the right interviewees. Check the credentials of the experts you speak to and be sure that they are good speakers, able to express ideas and advice clearly for audiences.

DON'T go into the interview unprepared. Research the topic area beforehand, decide what you want your audiences to get out of the interview (e.g. "I want them to learn why and how to make water safe to drink"), and plan which questions to ask in order to get that information.

DO explain to the interviewee why you are interviewing them and what you want to get out of the interview – if you do this you will be much more likely to get what you need.

DON'T ask experts questions on subjects beyond their areas of expertise.

DO ask clear and simple questions, one at a time.

DON'T ignore the answers. Listen fully to the interviewee and follow up on anything interesting or important they raise – sometimes journalists stop listening to the speaker as they are busy focusing on their next question.

DO repeat/recap important information from the interviewee's answer, to help clarify and reinforce the message with audiences (for example, "So just to be clear, you said, people must call 111 if they have Ebola symptoms, which are high fever…")

DON'T let interviewees get away with jargon or confusing information. If the answer you are getting is unclear or irrelevant, interrupt and ask the interviewee to be clearer, or to focus more on information directly relevant to audiences. If you are pre-recording you can just stop the interview, explain what you need, and re-ask the question.

DO fact-check any information coming out of the interview which you are not sure about.

DON'T assume that aid workers and people in uniforms are not personally affected by the crisis. They may have also lost loved ones or colleagues, or be emotionally vulnerable because of the suffering they are witnessing.

Interviewing people who have been affected by the crisis

- Ask the person's permission before interviewing them, explaining the purpose of your interview and where it will be broadcast. Don't insist if you get a "no". For some, sharing their story may be therapeutic, for others it may be harmful.
- Ask yourself: even if this person is willing to talk, is there a risk that interviewing them may still harm them in some way?
- Find a space where they are comfortable.
- Show empathy.
- Don't bombard them with questions.
- Speak slowly, listen carefully and be patient. People who have been traumatised can have difficulty processing information – allow for long silences and gently repeat questions if necessary.
- Consider your body language: in stressful situations, people need to feel they are being listened to and understood. Try to reflect this in your body language.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- They may ask you to help them directly with their situation – don't make false promises about helping them if you do not intend to.
- Ask permission from parents/guardians to interview children.
- Don't ask children to describe a traumatic experience. It can inflict additional emotional scars.
- Finally, don't neglect your own health. Look after yourself. Sleep, eat and seek help if your physical or psychological well-being has taken a hit. dartcenter.org has advice and resources for journalists covering tragedy.

Additional resources

BBC Media Action www.bbcmediaactionilearn.com/lifelineprogramming
Site with tools and resources for aid agencies and media on Lifeline communication.

BBC Media Action www.bbcmediaactionilearn.com/course/view.php?id=46
Online course on Lifeline programming for media.

Humanitarian Response www.humanitarianresponse.info
A UN OCHA-led online platform which consolidates core country-specific information and contacts. It includes the latest humanitarian reports, meeting schedules for different clusters and contact details for different specialists in the response.

CDAC Network www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/
Information, resources and research on communication with disaster-affected people.

ReliefWeb www.reliefweb.int
Humanitarian information and analysis, maps and graphics to illustrate humanitarian crises.

IRIN www.irinnews.org
News and analysis on humanitarian crises and issues.

International Crisis Group www.crisisgroup.org
Includes Crisis Watch, a monthly early warning bulletin offering updates on the state of the most significant situations of conflict around the world.

The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response www.sphereproject.org/handbook/
The Sphere Handbook is one of the most widely known and internationally recognised sets of common principles and universal minimum standards for the delivery of quality humanitarian response. Many humanitarian agencies use it to guide their work.

Dart Center dartcenter.org
Articles, expert interviews, journalist-to-journalist advice, tip sheets and other resources for journalists covering violence and tragedy.

Endnotes

[1] Hannides, T. (2015) *Humanitarian broadcasting in emergencies: a synthesis of evaluation findings*. BBC Media Action research report [online]. Available from: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/pdf/research/humanitarian-broadcasting-in-emergencies-2015-report.pdf

[2] These have been drawn from: Internews (2010) *Humanitarian reporting in Pakistan: Journalists' handbook* [online]. Available from: http://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/HumanitarianReporting_JournalistsHandbook_Pakistan_.pdf

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This manual was prepared thanks to funding from the UK Department of International Development which supports the humanitarian work of BBC Media Action. The content of this manual is the responsibility of BBC Media Action and does not represent the views of any donor supporting the work of the charity.

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