

The Communication & Community Engagement Initiative

Towards a collective service for more effective humanitarian responses



UNICEF, OCHA, IFRC, and other partners, under the auspices of CDAC Network, have established the *Communication and Community Engagement Initiative*. It aims to organise a collective service to address the need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to communications and community engagement with affected people.

The Grand Bargain “participation revolution” commitments, the IASC Accountability to Affected People commitments, and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) all outline that in order to meet this goal, three essential components must be part of any response throughout the entire humanitarian programme cycle:

- ⇒ **Participation**
- ⇒ **Information sharing** with affected communities
- ⇒ **Feedback and complaints**

While organizations and clusters have made efforts towards progress in this area, coherent and coordinated information is still not provided to affected communities in a systematic way, and the design of humanitarian responses remains insufficiently informed by the views and feedback of affected people.

The **goal of the initiative** is to help improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian and health emergency responses, through a harmonised, timely, systematic and predictable collective service for communication and community engagement with affected communities throughout all phases of the humanitarian programme cycle.

How could a collective approach add value?

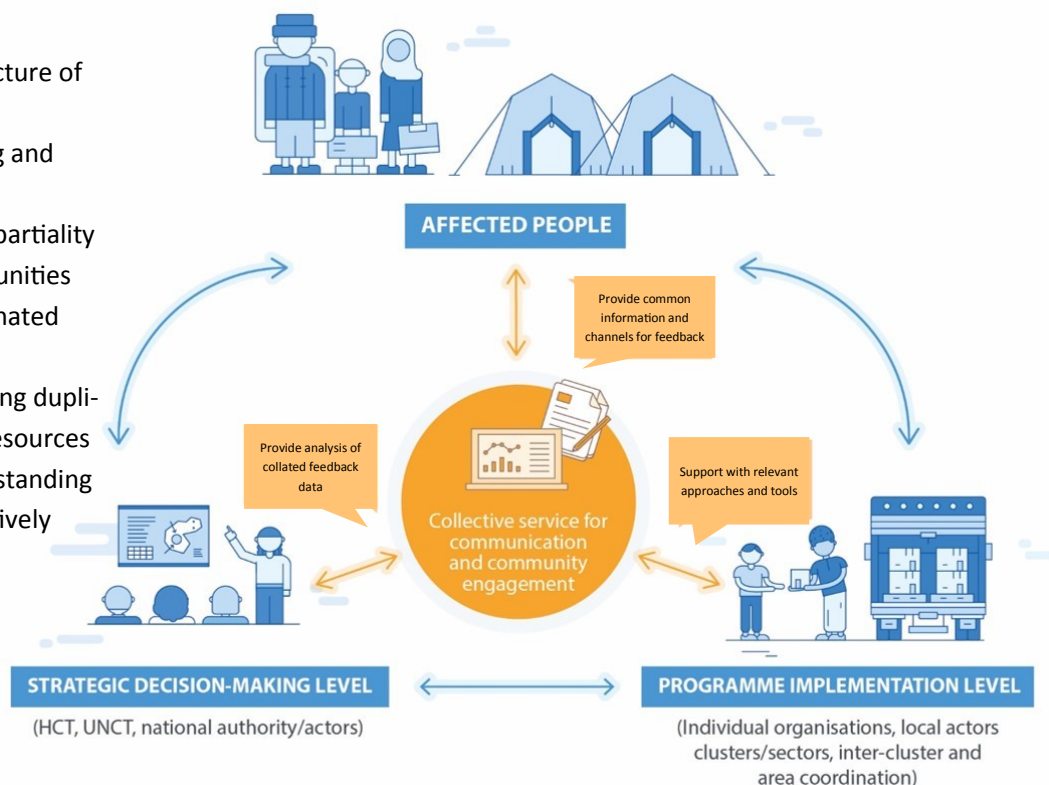
- **At country level** the collective service will build on existing tools and approaches already implemented by aid and media development actors. It will fulfil several key functions:
 - * Identify communication needs and applicable communication channels
 - * Coordinate the provision of appropriate and relevant information to affected communities
 - * Regularly monitor rumours and perceptions from affected people about aid quality
 - * Compile and analyse qualitative and quantitative data about aid quality and effectiveness
 - * Produce and circulate information to aid providers to support operationalisation, strategy, and decision-making processes
 - * Ensure appropriate communication and community engagement is included in country-level preparedness activities
 - * Convey impacts of participation and engagement on decision-making processes and aid provision back to the affected communities
- **At global level** the collective service will:
 - * Provide the necessary **technical assistance** to country programmes;
 - * Supply **guidance, tools**, and facilitate sharing of **best practice** examples
 - * Maintain **standby capacity** with trained specialists;
 - * Support country programmes to include communication and community engagement in their **preparedness activities**



Some benefits of a collective approach

Based on experiences in Haiti, the Philippines, Nepal, Somalia, during the Ebola crisis in West Africa, and more

- Provides a more complete picture of people's needs and concerns
- Ensures consistent messaging and communication
- Prevents single organization partiality
- Avoids overburdening communities with a multitude of uncoordinated approaches
- Improves efficiency by reducing duplications and sharing limited resources
- Contributes to greater understanding of trends and issues by effectively utilising data and analysis



Emerging lessons from recent experiences

- Build on **existing practices** that were in place before the emergency and include communication and community engagement in **preparedness activities**.
- Avoid top-down approaches and promote **two-way communication**. Listening to the perspectives and concerns of the population is as important as the provision of appropriate information.
- Balance use of technological tools (SMS, radios, TV, etc.) with **face-to-face communication** and **proximity with the populations** to avoid over-reliance on technology.
- Utilise **multiple communication channels** based on an analysis of existing means of communication which are continually tested and validated with the communities.
- **Integrate feedback into response and decision-making mechanisms**.
- **"Closing the feedback loop"** by communicating back to affected people continues to be a weak point in humanitarian responses.

What would success look like?

Over the course of the next three years, the initiative will work towards improving quality of aid, effectiveness of aid provision, and accountability through a harmonised, collective approach.

- ⇒ Communities will have access to appropriate, timely, and coordinated information
- ⇒ Affected people will have accessible and equitable opportunities to participate and provide input into decision-making processes
- ⇒ Aid providers will consistently use feedback and data to continually adjust and improve responses