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Early Warning For All:
Supporting inclusive access
to information
A good practice example from Cambodia

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Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

WFP
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Purpose

This learning paper is part of a series documenting good and promising practice examples of disability inclusion mainstreaming in WFP activities. This paper focuses on evidence generated through participatory community workshops on Early Warning messages in Cambodia.

As a flagship country for Early Warning for All, Cambodia is implementing sophisticated mobile phone-based messaging alongside other formats. By using evidence-based principles to support access to information for people most at risk of exclusion from information sharing, we show that low-tech (paper-based) communication supports can complement hi-tech systems, and support the accessibility of existing community information sharing practices. The communication materials used were refined with input from community members, WFP colleagues working on Disaster Risk Management, and a cooperating partner. This paper describes the concepts of 'information vulnerability', relational risk information sharing, the frameworks promoting multiple formats of information sharing, and presents a synthesis of the evidence underpinning the approach taken. Lastly, the results of community testing are presented.

What was the initiative?

Early Warning for All (EWFA) aims to ensure that everyone has access to life-saving information about hazardous weather or climate events in a way that allows them to take action. Cambodia is a pilot country for EWFA and WFP is the lead agency for this initiative. In addition, the Country Strategic Plan centres the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda, meaning that the country office was particularly interested in activities that could increase the inclusion of the groups most at risk of exclusion and marginalisation. In the context of EWFA, those most at risk of being 'left behind' are those who experience the greatest barriers to accessing information.

Recognising that people have different access needs when it comes to information, existing guidelines and frameworks emphasise the need for multiple formats for messages (Sendai Framework Pillar 3; IASC guidelines 2019; Sphere standards 2018; UN Resolution 77/240; see appendix 1). WFP Cambodia realised that although there were many formats of information being used for early warning, there was a gap in insuring information access and understanding for the most marginalised.

Why was a 'low-tech' paper-based format considered useful?
There are people who remain at risk of 'information vulnerability' even when more than one typical format of information sharing is used. Early Warning for All risks becoming Early Warning for Some if it is not intentionally inclusive. Intentional inclusion includes using formats accessible to those who are at risk of being excluded from information sharing through mass messaging formats such as text message systems, social media, or loudspeaker & radio campaigns. Low-tech paper-based formats can complement hi-tech or mass communication systems for those at risk of information vulnerability.

Information vulnerability

Information vulnerability refers to difficulties in **accessing and/or understanding** information that is accurate, relevant, trustworthy and timely. Some people may be at particular risk of information vulnerability, particularly if the information is shared in formats that are not appropriate to their cognitive, communication, literacy or language needs. This risk of information vulnerability can be reduced by using multiple formats, including low-tech human-supported sharing of information.

Who is at risk of information vulnerability?
- Persons with disabilities (who also experience more barriers to education, leading to limited literacy)
- People with limited literacy (in many contexts women have lower literacy than men)
- Minority language users, including Indigenous Peoples
- People without access to a mobile phone

For example, a rural female headed household in which the woman has limited vision, and does not own a mobile phone. If the information is explained to her using easy to understand communication supports, then her risk of information vulnerability is reduced, and she can also share the information with her dependents.

A person with limited literacy will be at risk of information vulnerability if the only information available is via a text message. If the same information is easily available through a recorded message, or using easy to understand material, then their risk of information vulnerability is reduced.

Last mile information sharing: Field research in Cambodia

In research conducted as part of the partnership between Trinity College Dublin and WFP, community members and village leaders emphasised the importance of face-to-face sharing of risk information, particularly for groups considered vulnerable. Previous research has suggested that for every one community member who receives an early warning message through a mobile phone message, that message will be shared with an additional seven people. This face-to-face information sharing is consistent with relational models of risk communication.

Relational models of risk communication recognise that community members are active in peer-to-peer sharing of information. In many contexts this may entail planned, face-to-face or house-to-house cascades of risk information, but some degree of peer discussion and spreading of information is typical across contexts. Communication accessible materials act to increase the accessibility of face-to-face information sharing. This approach is well suited to contexts where relational information sharing is occurring and valued by the community.

In Cambodia, a flagship country for Early Warning For All, the theme of relational information sharing was highlighted across the field research that informed this learning note. At the same time, the potential to enhance the accessibility of this relational processes was highlighted, including to maximise the right of persons with disabilities to receive information on an equal basis with others.

> *"When we get the information, we speak to those at most high risk of the floods and they spread the message."*

> *"Normally the information comes from the local authority, and the village chief goes house to house to spread the information."*

> *"The local authority shares the information to the community and then it is shared door to door."*

> *"The other channel is peer to peer or family. If the person has an intellectual disability, then usually we communicate to the family member and skip out direct communication."*

What are communication accessible support materials?

Communication accessible materials are low-tech, paper-based documents designed to support face to face conversation (i.e. relational information sharing). These are **not** designed as posters or flyers for distribution. Communication accessible supports use evidence-based principles to make the information easy to understand. Intended to support a conversation, these materials are ideal for contexts where relational information sharing is part of the typical risk information process.

Established evidence shows that specific principles (see appendix 2), when applied to print materials, improve the accessibility and interpretability for many groups at risk of information vulnerability. The principles work by either:

Reducing the effort involved in processing information.

or

Providing additional 'clues' or 'hints' as to the meaning.

Producing these materials still allows flexibility for the designer, so long as the principles are systematically applied.

The improved communication accessibility benefits persons with cognitive, communication and intellectual disabilities, those with limited education and literacy levels, and minority language users. Where sign language interpretation is not available for Deaf persons who sign, the materials are also more accessible, although sign interpretation remains the most appropriate format.

What was the impact?

Using visual analogue scales and communication supports, community members with and without disabilities were asked about two formats of a standard risk information message. The first format was without communication accessible support (a text-message format), and the second used communication accessible principles. Community participants with and without disabilities rated the following questions on a five-point scale, from *'not at all'* to *'completely'*, with improvements across all four domains. (See Appendix 2, page 10 for an example of the communication accessible format).

Question	Without communication accessible format (average)	Communication accessible format (average)	% of change	
How much do you trust this information?	3.84	4.08	6.25%	⬆
How easy is it to understand this information?	3.16	3.88	22.78%	⬆
How confident are you to share this information?	3.12	4.08	30.77%	⬆
How ready are you to take action?	3.68	4.16	13.04%	⬆

Understanding the information

"When I see the picture and the word together then it helps me to understand."

*"This boosts the understanding of the person receiving information.
It could even be used in the village meeting."*

Trust

"If this message comes from someone we don't recognise then we won't trust it, unless we know they were sent by the village chief or the commune."

"It depends on who provides the information. But the fact that they have the information and have come house to house means that they were sent, and so we will believe as it seems they were sent by the local authority."

Sharing the information

"It will be easy to share this information if there are people who have difficulty understanding or hearing because the pictures are there."

"I am confident to share this information because I understand it."

*"This is very helpful for people who can't hear or speak.
They can point to these pictures."*

*"This is very helpful for people who can't read.
They can refer to the picture while the village chief explains it."*

Conclusion

The use of multiple formats for information sharing is a well-established principle but not yet widely used or tested by humanitarian or development actors. WFP can better harness the relational risk communication that exists at community level by supporting the integration of low-tech communication supports as a complementary format for risk information. By supporting government and other actors to put communication accessible support materials into the hands of community leaders and volunteers, who take a critical role in Early Warning, information will be more consistently accessible and understandable by groups at risk of vulnerability. In Cambodia there is a well-established community practice of doing such information sharing face-to-face. Communication accessible materials, designed based on the evidence-based principles outlined, optimise the accessibility of these encounters and have the potential to ensure that messaging is consistent and inclusive.

Appendix 1

Key Frameworks referencing multiple formats of information

Key frameworks: Multiple formats of information as best practice

Framework	Indicative guidance on multiple formats to meet the needs of communities (emphasis added)
Sendai Framework	To promote the collection, analysis, management and use of relevant data and *practical information and ensure its dissemination, taking into account the needs of different categories of users, as appropriate* (Priority area 1, para 24a) To promote national strategies to strengthen public education and awareness in disaster risk reduction, *including disaster risk information and knowledge*, through campaigns, social media and community mobilization, *taking into account specific audiences and their needs* (Priority area 1, para 24m) To invest in, develop, maintain and strengthen people-centred multi-hazard, multisectoral forecasting and early warning systems, disaster risk and emergency communications mechanisms, social technologies and hazard-monitoring telecommunications systems; *develop such systems through a participatory process; tailor them to the needs of users, including social and cultural requirements, in particular gender; promote the application of simple and low-cost early warning equipment and facilities; and broaden release channels for natural disaster early warning information* (Priority area 4, para 33b) Number of countries that have *accessible, understandable*, usable and relevant disaster risk information and assessment available to the people at the national and local levels (Target G-5)
Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2019)	"Information [should be] provided *in multiple accessible formats* (oral, print, sign language, easy-to-read/plain language, etc.). <u>*Human assistance*</u> *[should be] provided to those who need it to access information*"
Sphere Standards (2018, p.207)	The Sphere standards require that information should be "in languages *and formats accessible to people who cannot read or who have communication difficulties*"
UN Resolution 77/240 'Promoting and mainstreaming easy to understand communication for accessibility of persons with disabilities'	*'*Calls upon Member States to take appropriate measures […] including by providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in *accessible formats* and using technologies *appropriate to different kinds of disabilities, such as easy-to-understand communication […]*

Appendix 2
Principles when designing materials for communication accessibility

Words and sentences

Be clear on your key messages before you start

Use 1 idea per sentence and keep sentences simple

Emphasise key words through bolding

Font and layout

San serif font (in Roman alphabet),
or simple unembellished font in other writing systems

Equivalent of at least size 14 in typical San Serif font like Verdana
(on A4; proportionally larger on larger prints)

Use white space

Segment information, either visually or for longer key messages by
using relevant headings (aim for maximum of 3 headings per page)

Images and use of colour

Use **informative** pictures to illustrate key word / concept
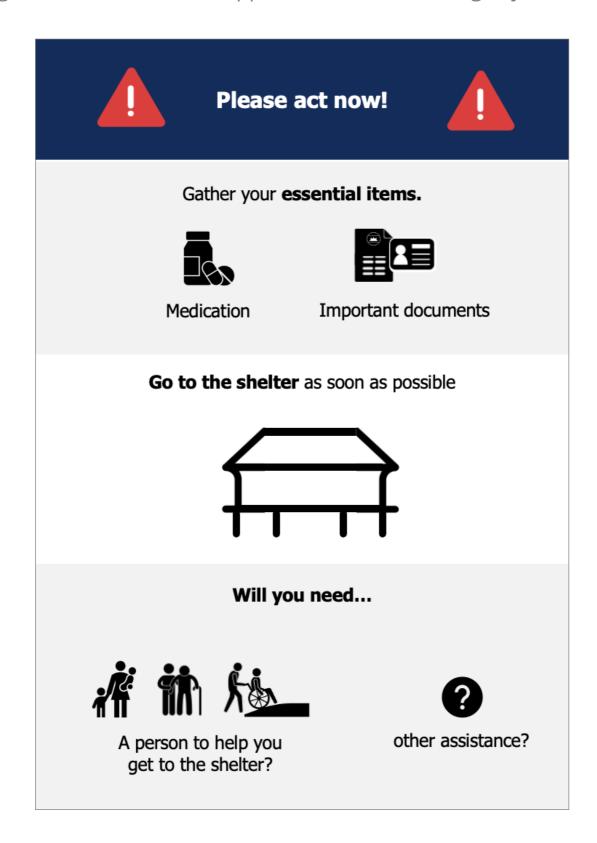
Use consistent colour where it adds meaning

Use consistent style of images

Colour contrast > 4.5: 1

Example

A page of communication support materials outlining key actions

Please act now!

Gather your **essential items.**

Medication

Important documents

Go to the shelter as soon as possible

Will you need…

A person to help you get to the shelter?

other assistance?

Trinity College Dublin Research Team: Caroline Jagoe Sherman and Claire F. O'Reilly