

## Guidance Note 6

# Disseminating information

## 1. The protection value of access to information

The right to seek, receive and impart information is a basic human right. It also has considerable protection value. Access to accurate, reliable and timely information helps individuals and communities to make sound decisions, develop sustainable survival strategies, and seek a durable solution to displacement. It also helps to safeguard against manipulation and abuse.

Displaced individuals and communities often lack or have limited access to timely and accurate information. Ensuring their right to information and, in some cases, providing relevant information, can support the efforts and strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities to protect themselves.

Ensuring access to and/or providing information in situations of internal displacement can be challenging, in particular where displacement has been motivated by political factors. Such efforts must be undertaken with care in order to avoid creating tensions or placing individuals and communities or humanitarian actors at risk.

## 2. Possible means for disseminating information

Information can be conveyed and exchanged through a variety of means. The choice will depend on a number of factors, such as the nature of the information, the source, the target audience and the socio-economic and cultural environment.

### 2.1. Among IDPs and other affected communities

- Individual counselling, household visits
- Group meetings; support groups; group counselling; information, awareness-raising, sensitization campaigns
- Community representatives and other multipliers, such as community associations/centres, churches, health staff, humanitarian assistance delivery sites
- Programme-related activities, including education (parents meetings and classroom dissemination) and health care (waiting rooms, vaccination campaigns)
- Family tracing and messaging services, such as established by ICRC
- Media: radio/TV/newspapers, public broadcasts
- Cultural and artistic performances
- Posters, leaflets and newsletters
- Audio tapes, videos or films

### 2.2. With governments and other institutional partners

- Bilateral and multilateral meetings and briefings
- Standard reporting mechanisms, such as situation reports
- Contingency planning, programmes and agendas
- Workshops and seminars
- Humanitarian hubs for humanitarian information-exchanges and networking

- Web dissemination, such as OCHA website of compiled reports; Reliefweb; virtual communities of practice, databases, maps
- Networks of national partners
- Networks and regular venues for local and international agencies and other actors
- Official media, including radio, TV, newspapers
- Specialized/targeted newsletters

### 3. Key activities

Disseminating information for use as a protection tool will entail<sup>1</sup>:

- Determining what concrete information is needed by different stakeholders and for which purposes;
- Selecting the appropriate timing and dissemination channels for the different stakeholders; and
- Avoiding doing harm through information-dissemination activities.

Annex 1 contains a checklist with useful questions to ask when developing an effective and protection-oriented strategy to disseminate information.

#### How we can protect through accessing and disseminating information

##### 3.1 Information that protects


###### *Preventing or mitigating the effects of arbitrary displacement*

- Facilitate sharing of knowledge and information on the dynamics of conflict and the security situation in relevant areas, including on the presence of mines. It may help groups and individuals without regular access to such information save their lives by fleeing elsewhere or taking other protection measures.
- Keep in mind that information related to security, in particular if related to military operations, such as movements of troops, can be extremely sensitive and it should be handled with extreme caution (see *Part II on military-civilian coord.*) 📖
- Encourage the government to share information with the civilian population about its relocation plans, and other decisions that affect them. This will allow the population to adapt their own protection strategies. In these cases:
  - Support information-sharing between the authorities and the population by initiating meetings between them, if required.
  - If a party is unwilling to share vital information with the population, raise this issue with the highest local or central political authority, as determined by the Country Team.
  - Take into account possible implications of such situations on staff safety.
- Inform IDPs and other affected communities about the duty of national authorities to protect and assist them without any discrimination.
- Disseminate information about the location of transit centres or points of delivery of humanitarian assistance to avoid dangerous secondary displacements and enable prompt access to relief.
- Ensure that IDPs and other affected populations understand their right to seek asylum abroad.


###### *Improving protection and enjoyment of rights during displacement*

- Dispel rumours by providing objective and accurate information and, if possible, access to reliable sources of information.
- Discuss and plan with affected communities, information campaigns on protection risks that may affect particular individuals or groups. This can facilitate the timely adoption of specific measures to prevent such risks and to access relief and redress mechanisms quickly when such risks arise. For example: ➡

<sup>1</sup> For guidance on sources, methods and standards for gathering, protecting and evaluating the reliability of information, see Part IV Guidance Note 1 on Monitoring and Reporting, and Guidance Note 8 on IDP Profiling.

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Women, girls and boys at risk of sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, or abuse:</b> the community should be informed of the equal rights of women and girls to access national and international protection and assistance efforts; the fact that humanitarian assistance is provided free of charge; equal rights to participation; the methods used by trafficking networks; and national institutions responsible for the care and protection of victims of trafficking and exploitation and for preventing and responding to such abuses;</li> <li>- <b>Men, children, adolescents at risk of forced recruitment or forced labour:</b> the community should be informed of organizations or national institutions mandated to protect against forced recruitment or forced labour, the existing legal framework, and legal aid projects focusing on this issue.</li> <li>• Provide information on the availability of legal aid projects or information centres, and on existing procedures for issuing replacement identity documents, procedures for land, housing and property restitution, and support for family reunification.</li> <li>• Raise the profile of national and international assistance and distribution programmes and eligibility criteria for housing, food, water, sanitation, medical care, education and work opportunities or commercial activity in local markets.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Facilitating or promoting durable solutions</b><br/>(see Part VI)</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all internally displaced persons are aware of the principle of voluntary return and the right to settle in another part of the country.</li> <li>• Provide information on the situation in areas of return/settlement elsewhere, including security, availability of assistance, availability of food, housing, water, work, pension and social benefits, health and education, the state of infrastructure, the condition of housing, and land and property ownership and use.</li> <li>• Assess and inform the displaced populations of conditions of travel along transit routes (the presence of mines, water sources and medical centres) to the areas of return or resettlement.</li> <li>• Disseminate information among affected populations on the right to vote, participate in community/public/government affairs, and freedom of association, religion, thought and conscience – all without being subject to discrimination.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>3.2 Avoiding harm</b></p>   |   |
| <p><b>Averting misinformation</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the accuracy and reliability of information received. This may require research, analysis and cross-checking of information from various sources.</li> <li>• Remain aware of politicized media or interlocutors, particularly in conflict situations.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Managing sensitive information</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before sharing sensitive information with communities at risk or local authorities, always undertake a thorough appraisal of the potential impact of your action on the protection of individuals or groups among the civilian population and humanitarian staff.</li> <li>• Only share sensitive information if it helps protect persons of concern. No risk should be taken that could expose individuals.</li> <li>• Build in adequate procedural and substantive safeguards, particularly with regard to confidential data and protection of sources, when developing information-gathering and -sharing methods.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Avoiding concentration of information</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that information reaches persons of different ages, sexes and interests. Even though it could seem more expeditious to rely on a few persons or structures in the community to transmit information, such as IDP leaders, adults, men, seek a diversity of multipliers.</li> </ul>  |



- Spend substantial time in communities of concern in order to have access to different groups and individuals, broaden possibilities of dissemination, and identify further information needs.
- Make efforts to reach remote or dispersed IDPs and affected communities, including IDPs in urban settings or living in areas that are inaccessible to humanitarian workers.
- The timing and location chosen for disseminating information must be reconciled with family and work obligations, and with access to transportation.
- Adapt the content and modalities of information to individuals of different ages, sexes and backgrounds and any group with specific needs. These can be individuals with physical conditions that limit their mobility as well as children, minority groups, and single-headed households. For example:
  - **Women IDPs (often including teenage girls):** Not only should women have access to information on an equal basis as men, but they might also require specific types of information, such as information relating to mine action; rather than focusing only on the main roads, which might be most useful for male IDPs, focus also on the areas where women collect firewood, grow crops, fetch water, and wash clothes.
  - **Children and youth** must be kept informed, (through their relatives, communities, teachers or others), on decisions that may affect them or are made on their behalf. In particular, they must be consulted and informed about alternative living arrangements and tracing activities available to them. It is essential to adapt the method of dissemination to the age, gender and backgrounds of children so that they understand key messages (see Part II.3). 

**Socio-cultural awareness**

- Ensure that the location or method chosen for disseminating information does not stigmatize or otherwise deter persons from accessing the information:
  - Information regarding domestic violence may be disseminated discreetly at medical clinics, day-care centres, and training events.
  - Information and assistance for HIV/AIDS patients and survivors of gender-based violence is best provided in a manner and place where persons are not afraid of being identified. Mobile information and counselling clinics are often useful.
  - Messages should be worded in culturally appropriate terms. Be aware of the potential misunderstandings caused by “word-by-word” translations.
- Remain aware of how the specific age, sex and political, ethnic or religious affiliations of national colleagues, interpreters or local partners can influence the receptivity of IDPs to the information provided.



## Resources

- *Humanitarian Disasters and Information Rights: Legal and Ethical Standards on Freedom of Expression in the Context of Disaster Response*, Article 19, 2005. [www.article19.org](http://www.article19.org)
- *Operational Protection in Camps and Settlements: A Reference Guide of Good Practices in the Protection of Refugees and Other Persons of Concern*. UNHCR, 2006 (Chapter 4 on Information Dissemination). [www.refworld.org](http://www.refworld.org)
- *Left to their Own Devices: The Impact of Informal Informational and Communication Networks on Security in Tanzanian Refugee Camps*, A.R. West and L.W. Wambugu, Article 19, 2003. [www.article19.org](http://www.article19.org)

## **Annex 1**

### **Checklist for Information Dissemination**

- What information is needed by IDPs and other affected populations at this stage?
- What will be the protection impact of this information?
- Who should transmit this information to them? Is it the task of humanitarian actors, or should you encourage and support local authorities to do so? Will this choice affect the target audience's perception of neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors?
- How will IDPs and other affected communities help design the dissemination strategy?
- How will NGOs and other partners be involved to ensure clear and consistent messages and to avoid overlap of efforts and resources?
- Which channels will be used to disseminate the information? Are they the most appropriate to ensure the safety and avoid stigmatization of the targeted audience?
- How will the dissemination of information be made sustainable and not remain a one-off exercise?
- How will the strategy ensure that the information reaches those with specific needs or those most marginalized within the IDP community?
- How will the illiterate be informed?
- Is the information being shared reliable?
- Is it culturally appropriate?
- Are the messages delivered in a respectful, unequivocal and non-patronizing manner?
- Can the audience provide feedback to those disseminating the information?
- What media sources will be engaged: radio, print, posters, megaphones, teachers, community leaders?
- How will the host community be engaged? Would it be helpful to conduct an information campaign to raise awareness of the challenges and risks faced by IDPs?