ANNEX 5E

BBC Media Action - Use of new broadcasting techniques

Suitcase radios allow new FM stations to be set up rapidly in disaster situations where all local broadcasters have been put off air. Once the suitcase radio, another suitcase containing the transmitter and a bag containing the antenna have been brought to the broadcasting location, along with a small petrol driven generator to supply power, the radio station can be assembled and put on air within 45 minutes. BBC Media Action would normally aim to deploy and operate a suitcase radio in collaboration with local broadcasters whose own studios and transmitters have been put off air by the disaster.

Several non-radio techniques have been developed to enable Lifeline programming and the essential messages that it contains to reach audiences well beyond the normal broadcast coverage area of a radio station. One such technique is to play recorded radio programmes over a loudspeaker to groups of people in a public place, such as a village meeting place or market. BBC Media Action has already used this strategy successfully in Bangladesh.

Following Cyclone Mahasen in May 2013, BBC Media Action supported the production of a 20‑minute daily Lifeline programme by two community radio stations in Barguna district. The broadcast range of each station was only 17 km. However, some of the Lifeline programmes reached thousands of listeners up to 40 km away thanks to a three-way collaboration between the community radio stations, BBC Media Action and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society. Red Crescent volunteers played recordings of selected Lifeline programmes over loudspeakers to meetings of villagers in public places in 16 far-flung communities outside the radio coverage area. They were listened to with great enthusiasm by these off-line audiences.

Another way of extending the reach of Lifeline programming is to systematically transmit vital information contained in the broadcasts by SMS to people beyond the broadcast range of the station. Text messages can be sent from the radio station to focal points in the community, who then transmit the information by word of mouth to their neighbours. Alternatively, or in addition, members of the public can be allowed to self-subscribe to an SMS news update service provided by the radio station. Obviously, there are strict limits to the volume and complexity of information that can be transmitted in a 160 character SMS message. However, the format is ideal for transmitting early warning messages and for communicating service announcements - such as the location, date and time of a medical clinic or food distribution.

BBC Media Action set up a successful SMS information system for ActionAid in Isiolo County in Northern Kenya in 2011, through its infoasaid ([www.infoasaid.org](http://www.infoasaid.org)) partnership with Internews. Infoasaid established an SMS-based two-way communication network between the ActionAid regional office in Isiolo town and some 250 village relief committees. These committees organised food distributions and cash for assets work programmes in rural communities up to 200 km away. Each relief committee was equipped with a simple mobile phone and a solar charger to keep the handset constantly available for use. Actionaid disseminated messages to these contacts using FrontlineSMS software installed on a lap-top computer. FrontlineSMS ([www.frontlinesms.com](http://www.frontlinesms.com)) is free SMS management software that can be downloaded from the internet. It is widely used by radio stations all over the world to manage incoming text messages from listeners and conduct opinion polls by SMS. It would be easy for radio stations to use the FrontlineSMS or other similar types of SMS management software to provide a news alert service for people beyond their normal broadcast coverage area.