



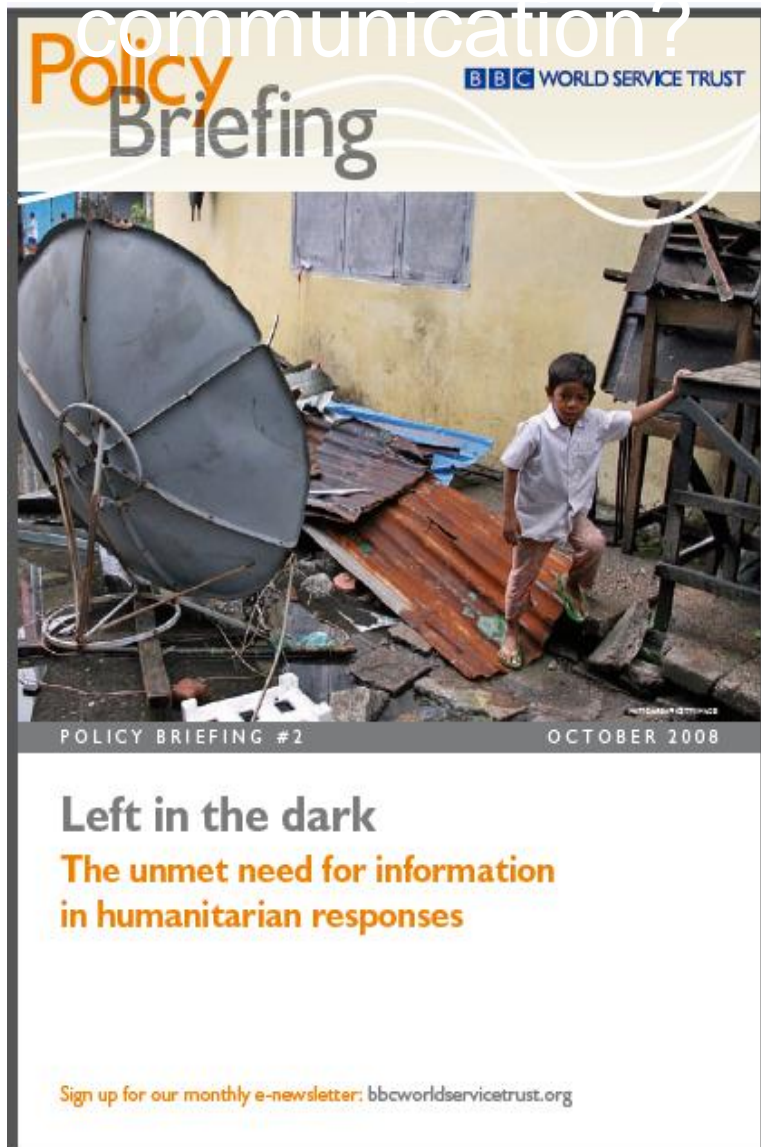
The Role of Communication in Humanitarian Response

James Deane,
BBC Media Action
Presentation to ITU, Nov 2011

Presentation Outline

- ▶ **What is BBC Media Action?**
- ▶ **Why focus on communication in humanitarian responses**
- ▶ **BBC and BBC Media Action interventions since 1994**
- ▶ **Some lessons learned and a focus on radio**
- ▶ **Challenges and problems**

What's happened, where's my family, how can I get help, who is responsible?



“The information needs of people affected by disasters remain largely unmet because the people, systems and resources that are required to meet them simply don’t exist in a meaningful way. The humanitarian system as it stands is not equipped with either the capacity or the resources to begin tackling the challenge of providing information to those affected by crises.”

*Left in the Dark: the unmet need for information in humanitarian responses
BBC Media Action Policy Briefing,
2008*

Mainstreaming Communication into Humanitarian Response



- ▶ ***CDAC Network started in 2009: Now involves most main humanitarian as well as media development agencies;***
- ▶ **CDAC now an established, increasingly recognised component of humanitarian responses**
- ▶ **Infoasaid partnership focused on preparation (mapping of media, message library)**
- ▶ **Made the argument**



From information to communication



Still left in the dark?

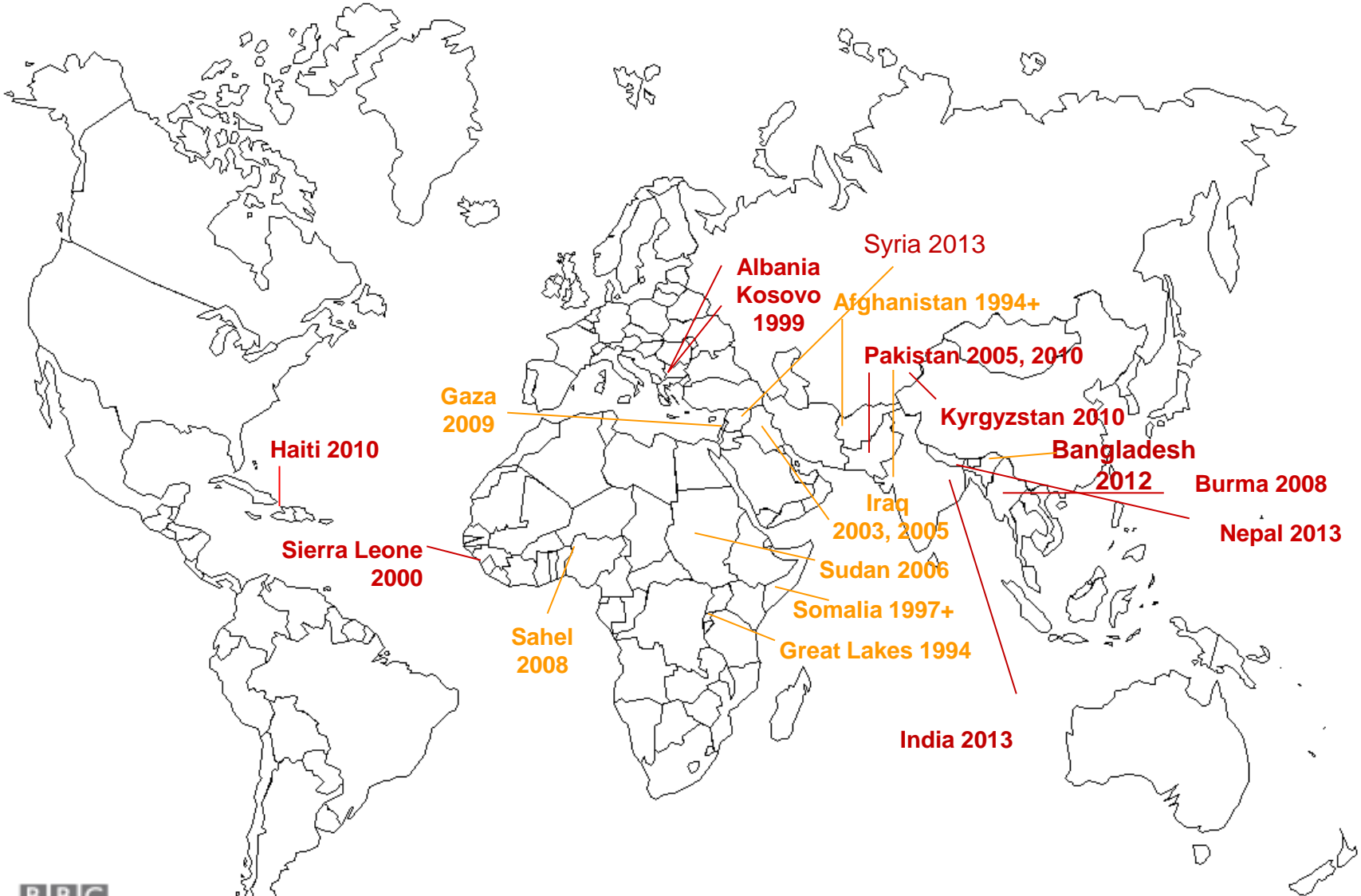
How people in emergencies use communication to survive – and how humanitarian agencies can help

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“In 2008, the main danger was that people affected by humanitarian emergencies would continue to be left in the dark when disaster struck, deprived of the information that would help them to understand what was happening and what they could do to survive. In 2012, it may now be the humanitarian agencies themselves who risk being left in the dark. As growing access to new technologies makes it more likely that those affected by disaster will be better placed to access information and communicate their needs, a key question arises: are humanitarian agencies prepared to respond and engage with those who demand better information?”

Still Left in the Dark?: How people in emergencies use communication to survive
BBC Media Action Policy Briefing, 2012

BBC Media Action and BBC World Service Humanitarian Response Initiatives



How we work: National and Local Interventions



- **Working with 28 BBC language services:**
 - **Shortwave capable of reaching across a country where other infrastructure destroyed (e.g. 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Burma via BBC);**
 - **Through BBC FM networks (Pakistan 2010).**
- **With local partners (Cyclone Mahasen, Bangladesh; Nepal Floods, Cyclone Phyllin, Odisha)**
- **With other partners (Frontline SMS, mobile networks)**
- **Lifeline preparation and training and DRR**

Some Lessons Learned: which medium?



- **Depends on need and context**
- **Radio remains a favoured medium:**
 - **More robust, resilient and reliable when infrastructure – including telecoms infrastructure - damaged;**
 - **Reaches people at scale especially in rural and remote communities;**
 - **Can be interactive and two way;**
 - **Highly portable, easy to power and can be accessed by phone;**

Some Lessons Learned: which medium?



- **Television excellent for disaster preparedness, but dependent on electricity and not easily portable.**
- **Mobile increasingly critical**
 - **especially in getting information *from* people as well as *to* them: increasing challenge for humanitarian agencies to respond to messages of help and for information.**
 - **in conjunction with traditional media for two way comms**
- **Internet fragile and lacking in resilience**
- **Context is everything.....our response in India in media dark areas and heavily focused on mobile**

The changing face of broadcasting



- **BBC's international broadcast audience on FM increased by 5% in three years to 2013;**
- **Shortwave audience declined by 26% to 62.7m over same period**
- **Humanitarian response needs to be in local language**
 - **Nigeria English language audience: 6.9 m; Hausa audience 19.5 m**
- **BBC global audience in 2013 higher than it has ever been (256m) – but principally driven by mobile (250% increase in Nigeria)**

Some Challenges



- Research and evaluation: Humanitarian Response the weakest area of impact measurement
- Are communication systems becoming less resilient?:
 - Our focus is increasingly local and interactive but FM networks less resilient and reach less people;
 - Boosting signal strength
 - Installing more relay transmitters
 - Setting up new FM stations in times of emergency, esp for isolated communities (suitcase radios)