ANNEX 2C

BBC Media Action

BBC Media Action is the international development charity of the BBC. It works with media and communication to help transform people's lives. BBC Media Action works closely with the BBC World Service, but it is funded separately from the rest of the BBC. Like other international NGOs, BBC Media Action relies mainly on grants from donors to fund its projects. This paper represents the specific views of BBC Media Action. It does not speak for the BBC as a whole.

For the past 10 years BBC Media Action has engaged in initiatives that work with radio and television to provide useful and actionable information to people affected by humanitarian emergencies.

Broadcasting humanitarian information to communities affected by conflict requires a completely different approach to conventional news reporting. The latter usually takes the form of factual and analytical reporting of the conflict for audiences that are not directly affected by the crisis.

Lifeline reporting, on the other hand does not seek to report on the conflict per se. It does not engage in the gathering of conventional hard news. Instead, Lifeline broadcasting focuses on providing life-saving information and psychological support for non-combatants whose lives have been disrupted or put at risk by the fighting. It is non-partisan and politically neutral and forms part of the humanitarian response to the disaster.

All Lifeline broadcasts produced or supported by BBC Media Action respect the four humanitarian principles defined by the UN General Assembly in its Resolutions 46/182 of 1991 and 58/114 of 2004:

– Humanity - Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

– Neutrality - Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

– Impartiality - Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

– Operational Independence - Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

Lifeline broadcasting should never take sides. Its purpose is not to give information about the progress of the conflict, such as news about military deployments and the outcome of battles.

Instead, Lifeline broadcasting should provide useful information that helps the affected non‑combatant civilian population people to survive and stay safe. It could include the following types of conflict-related information:

– The identification of safe areas and information about the safest routes to reach them.

– The promotion of safe practices, such as how to avoid injury by mines and unexploded ammunition and how to report any explosives that are detected.

Most Lifeline broadcasting to disaster-affected people in conflict zones deals with information and advice about the same basic human needs that also feature heavily in natural disasters; how to obtain, food, water, shelter and medical treatment, how to stay healthy by observing proper hygiene and sanitation, how to trace missing family members, how to cope with the trauma of the disruption to normal life and how to protect yourself from personal threats, such as sexual attack.

BBC Media Action Lifeline programming also respects the "Do no harm principle". This states that when providing assistance, an aid responder must be careful not to inadvertently cause harm to the intended beneficiaries or to other vulnerable groups by their actions.

Reporters of conventional news may be seen as partisan or hostile by participants in the conflict and may be denied access. They may even become deliberate targets of attack. Journalists who contribute to Lifeline programming run similar risks, since in practice combatants are unlikely to distinguish between them and other reporters.

BBC Media Action staff that operate in conflict zones are required to undergo Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT) before their deployment to maximise their safety in the field. They are usually equipped with satellite telecommunications equipment, such as satellite phones and satellite data modems, to help them maintain contact with their base if normal telecoms links are not available.

Providing timely, relevant and practical information to people who are confused and demoralised by the impact of a crisis on their lives, is in itself a useful form of aid. Broadcast information is particularly useful in situations where physical access is difficult and aid responders may take several days or weeks to reach affected communities. Appropriate information and advice, delivered in a user-friendly way, can help people to cope with the crisis and mitigate the threats that it poses to their wellbeing until physical help arrives. Direct communication via radio or television also helps to reduce the sense of isolation and helplessness that crisis-affected communities experience.

Once aid has begun to arrive, Lifeline programming can tell the affected community how and where to access the help that is available. It can explain how to register to receive aid and where and when distributions will take place. Lifeline programming can also publicise other important services for the affected community. It explains how families which have been split up can contact tracing services to find their loved ones. It can alert women to services that help them deal with sexual harassment and other protection issues. It can explain how people can keep themselves safe from diseases and where they can access medical services.

Radio and television can help aid responders to manage the expectations of the people they are seeking to assist. For example, if a food distribution in certain towns and villages has been delayed by landslides blocking a road or by difficulties in the supply chain, Lifeline broadcasting can explain to the intended recipients why the distribution has been delayed. It can also advise when the delayed distribution is now expected to take place. Without such explanation and reassurance, the affected communities might feel abandoned and frustrated and believe themselves to be the target of deliberate discrimination or neglect. This could lead to ill-will against aid responders and even attacks on aid workers and supply convoys. Such incidents occurred during the 2010 floods in Pakistan. There were several cases of food trucks being stopped and looted on their way to distribution points by villagers from other communities. People resorted to this action because they had not yet received any aid, or any assurances about when they might expect aid to arrive.

BBC Media Action believes that communication with disaster-affected communities should be a two-way process, so, wherever possible, our Lifeline programmes are interactive. They do not just give useful information. They also enable the affected community to make its own voice heard. Radio and television can give crisis-hit people a platform to state their views, express their concerns and give useful information to aid providers. Giving affected communities a voice through Lifeline programming can empower these often demoralised communities and give them a sense of dignity. It can boost the self-confidence of those who are suffering and motivate them to take action to help themselves. Two-way communication becomes particularly immediate and powerful when people can communicate with Lifeline broadcasters via the mobile telecommunications network.

Aid responders can benefit from listening to the concerns of the affected population, articulated through the media. The information received can help aid agencies to identify gaps in the humanitarian response that need to be addressed. It can also highlight points of misunderstanding that should be resolved if the aid operation is to run smoothly. Feedback from the affected community enables aid responders to adjust their operations in order meet the needs of the assisted population more effectively.

Finally, giving the affected community a voice also helps to make aid responders more accountable to those they are trying to assist. Lifeline broadcasting can help the affected community to register complaints. It can help aid agencies to communicate what is being done to address any complaints that are raised. Sometimes aid workers are accused of selling aid items which should be distributed free of charge on the basis of need. Lifeline programming can make clear that all aid is provided free of charge on the basis of need. It can also advise people how to denounce any perceived irregularities and provide reassurances that wrongdoers have been disciplined.

In the longer term, the information provided and the views expressed by the affected population can help policy makers to adjust their planning for future humanitarian responses.

Since 2003, BBC Media Action has produced and broadcast Lifeline radio programmes for audiences ranging from civilians affected by conflict in Iraq, Somalia and Sudan, to communities affected by floods in Pakistan, cyclone damage in Burma and Bangladesh and the devastation wrought by a massive earthquake in Haiti.

Wherever possible, the Lifeline programmes are interactive, giving listeners a chance to ask questions and have them answered on air. They also provide a platform for people to express their views about the difficult situation they are facing.

BBC Media Action's Lifeline programming has its roots in the emergency radio broadcasts for disaster-affected communities produced by the BBC World Service in response to major humanitarian crises since 1994. This kind of special programming was first broadcast by the BBC World Service on short wave to help people in the Great Lakes region of Africa affected by the genocide in Rwanda.

BBC Media Action - which was formerly known as BBC World Service Trust - was created as an autonomous organisation in 1999. Since then, it has often worked closely with the BBC World Service - particularly its 28 local language services - to create and deliver Lifeline programming.

Why radio?

Radio is usually the best way to reach people affected by a rapid-onset humanitarian crisis, even if the target audience relies on television or other media as its main source of news and information in normal times.

Television distributed by terrestrial broadcast, cable or satellite, is often the most widely used source of news and information before a crisis breaks. It is an excellent channel for helping people to prepare for a disaster and become more resilient. But radio is a more robust and reliable channel of communication once a crisis hits. Following a disaster, radio is more likely to continue functioning and reaching its audience than any other media. Radio is also more effective as a medium for communicating with remote rural communities which have little or no access to television, mobile telecoms or the internet.

Television is difficult to access if the electricity supply has been disrupted or if the disaster-affected community has been displaced. When people leave home in a hurry they are unlikely to take a heavy television set with them. They are much more likely take a small transistor radio, which can run on batteries, or a mobile phone. Many mobile phones can be used to listen to FM radio broadcasts with the aid of earphones. The earphone cable acts as an aerial for the built-in radio. In many Asian countries, such as Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, a large proportion of regular radio listeners routinely tune in to FM stations on their mobiles in normal times, especially when they are on the move.

Radio is also more resilient to the disruption of normal telecommunications networks than the internet. The latter relies on sophisticated communication networks which often fail in an emergency. Furthermore, in most developing countries, internet usage is still concentrated amongst the educated and relatively affluent urban elite. It can only be accessed easily by educated people who are literate in a language used on computer keyboards and who know how to use a computer or smart phone. The internet has a much lower penetration rate amongst the urban poor and often fails completely to reach remote rural communities. Yet these marginalised segments of the population, which often have low literacy rates, are invariably the people who are hit hardest by humanitarian emergencies. Information disseminated via the internet is unlikely to reach them directly.

Internet access across the world continues to develop, but for now, its reach among the communities that are most vulnerable to disaster is limited. Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, the internet infrastructure is more likely to suffer damage and dislocation than the studios and transmitters of broadcasters.

Audience surveys conducted by the BBC consistently show that people prefer to listen to radio on FM. This gives better sound quality than medium or short wave. Today, more than half the regular listeners to the BBC World Service and its 28 language services tune in to BBC radio programmes on FM. The BBC has its own FM relay masts in many large cities. In other cities and in many smaller towns and rural areas radio audiences listen to BBC programmes relayed on FM by local partner stations. These relay partners range in size from small community radio stations to national broadcasters with a nationwide network of relay transmitters.

The number of people who listen to the BBC's international broadcasts on FM has increased by 5% to 82.3 million in the three years to mid-2013, according to BBC audience survey data. However, the global short wave audience of the BBC declined by 26% to 62.7 million over the same period.

The BBC Swahili Service no longer broadcasts on short wave at all. Today it reaches its 17 million regular listeners in East Africa exclusively on FM.

BBC World Service radio audiences by channel in 2013

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **BBC World Service radio – all languages** | **Audience total** | **Audience percentage** |
| All radio channels  | 144.8 million | 100% |
| FM (including relay partners) | 82.3 million | 57% |
| Medium Wave | 14.8 million | 10% |
| Short Wave | 62.7 million | 43% |
| Internet | 830,000 | 0.6% |

*Source: BBC Global News estimates based on audience survey data.*

*NB The percentage audience shares do not add up to 100 because some listeners tune in to the BBC on more than one channel.*

People generally prefer to listen to radio programmes broadcast in their own language that focus on issues of immediate relevance to the environment in which they live. Broadcasters which offer this option are usually preferred over those which offer programming that is broader in focus and delivered in a second language in which the audience is less fluent. In Nigeria, for instance, where English is the official language of government and business, far more people listen to the BBC Hausa service than to the BBC's Africa Service in English. According to BBC audience survey data, 6.9 million people listened regularly to the BBC in English in Nigeria in 2013, whereas 19.5 million tuned in to the BBC Hausa Service. Hausa is the main language spoken in northern Nigeria.

The preference for locally relevant information delivered in local languages is especially strong at times of crisis. People need practical information that they can use immediately to mitigate risks and access the services of aid providers in their immediate vicinity.

Disaster-affected communities need to know rapidly where they can obtain food, clean water, shelter and medical services. They also need advice on how to stay as safe as possible in their local environment. Such information is most valuable when it is local and specific in nature, rather than national and generic. For example, a local radio station can give detailed information about which health centres and hospitals in the district are still functioning and where local farmers can go to get seeds and tools. This sort of detailed local information is beyond the scope of a national broadcaster to deal with.

Lifeline Programmes therefore attract the most attentive audiences and have the greatest impact when they are broadcast on FM and contain a large amount of specific local information.

Humanitarian crises usually affect certain parts of a country rather than its entire population. Wherever possible, BBC Media Action supports the production of Lifeline programming that is produced locally within the crisis zone and is tailored to meet the needs of crisis-affected people of the surrounding area.

Increasingly, we are helping partner radio stations with significant audiences in the crisis zone to produce their own Lifeline programmes adapted to local needs.

In 2013, BBC Media Action adopted this local and collaborative approach to Lifeline programming in Bangladesh and Nepal. In Bangladesh we helped two community radio stations launch a daily Lifeline programme in Barguna district, a coastal area which was heavily damaged by Cyclone Mahasen in May. In Nepal, in June and July, we helped three radio stations in Kailali district to produce special programmes to help the local population deal with floods caused by intense monsoon rainfall in the Himalayas.

This focus on helping local radio stations to produce their own Lifeline programming is relatively new. It reflects the recent creation of capacity within selected BBC Media Action country offices to provide this kind of support.

Previously, BBC Media Action focused mainly on producing Lifeline programmes in-house for broadcasting to an entire country, even though only part of that country might have been affected by a humanitarian emergency. Typically, these Lifeline programmes were broadcast by one of the BBC 28 language services. This guaranteed the programmes a large audience in the country concerned. However, this audience did not necessarily include a large proportion of the crisis‑affected population. To remedy this situation, the Lifeline programmes were often offered to other partner stations for rebroadcast.

This national approach, in partnership with the BBC language services, remains useful when disaster strikes an entire country, as during the Pakistan floods of 2010. On that occasion, the BBC Urdu and Pashto services ran three daily Lifeline bulletins to meet the information needs of those affected by the flooding, with support from BBC Media Action.

Sometimes, beaming Lifeline programming into a country from abroad on short wave is the only feasible way of getting vital information to the disaster-affected population quickly. This situation typically arises when direct access to radio stations within the disaster-affected country is difficult or impossible.

This was the case in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis devasted southern coastal areas of the country in 2008. The BBC Burmese service responded to the crisis by producing a series of five-minute bulletins on humanitarian topics. These were beamed into the country on short wave, but were not relayed by local radio stations within Burma. These were all state-controlled at the time and the Burmese government was not willing to relay programming produced by the BBC. However, these short wave broadcasts still managed to reach a large audience within Burma, including many of those affected by the cyclone. The BBC Burmese service estimated that it had a regular audience of 8.3 million people in the country at that time. The government of Myanmar has since begun to liberalise access to the air waves as it has embraced a process of democratisation. This should make it easier for BBC Media Action to produce and broadcast Lifeline programming in partnership with local radio stations in the event of future emergencies. Burma is one of the countries where BBC Media Action plans to roll out Preparation for Lifeline activities in 2014.

The increasing geographic reach of mobile networks in developing countries and high levels of mobile usage among all sectors of the population usually allow mobile telecommunications channels to be used in combination with radio to create an effective two-way system of communication.

The mobile revolution of the past decade has made it cheap and easy for radio listeners everywhere to call into phone-in programmes. If they are literate, they can also send SMS messages to a radio station to give information, ask questions and express opinions. According to the GSMA, the global association of mobile telecoms operators, 46% of the world's population owned a mobile phone in 2012. This figure was expected to rise to 53% in 2017, as a further 700 million people signed up as mobile subscribers, mostly in developing countries.

SMS messages, which are cheap and can be sent over networks operating at low levels of capacity, are particularly useful as a channel of feedback from the affected community in an emergency. If the mobile network has been damaged and its traffic carrying capacity has been reduced, SMS messages will often get through whereas voice calls will not. In the immediate aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Chile, the government urged people to use SMS messages rather than voice calls to check up on their friends and relatives for this reason.

Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) services make it easy for people who cannot read or write to phone an information line and listen to one or more recorded messages. IVR systems can also be configured to allow callers to leave a recorded message of their own.

IVR services also offer a feedback channel for radio audiences in Asian countries, such as Bangladesh and Nepal where the mobile network does not support the script of the alphabet used by the main national language. This technical obstacle makes it difficult for the general public in these countries to use SMS messages, even if they can read and write. Those who do use SMS messages in Bangladesh and Nepal are mostly well educated people who have learned English and are able to write in Latin script.

SMS and IVR systems can be useful channels of communication in their own right, but they are particularly powerful in an emergency when used in combination with radio. However, it should be noted that in many large countries with poor infrastructure and scattered populations, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia and South Sudan, large swathes of the rural population still remain beyond the reach of a mobile signal. For them radio is especially important as a link with the outside world.

Challenges

Very little rigorous research has been undertaken so far to evaluate the impact of Lifeline programming on the overall effectiveness of aid delivery. This is partly because it is very difficult for media development organisations to undertake baseline research at the start of a rapid onset emergency. However, anecdotal evidence and after action reviews undertaken after some interventions indicate that Lifeline radio programming is capable of producing a significant impact.

In 2006, BBC Media Action launched a special Lifeline programme in Darfur Arabic for the conflict-affected population of Sudan's Darfur region. This daily programme, broadcast by the BBC World Service on short wave, also reached Darfuri refugees in Chad. One UNICEF officer in the Darfur town of Nyala noted that the child immunization rate at local camps for displaced people doubled after immunization had been promoted on the BBC Lifeline programme.

Today, wherever possible, BBC Media Action endeavours to produce Lifeline Programming that is:

– Local in focus;

– Broadcast on FM;

– Interactive - allowing the target audience to feed-back information, questions and concerns, usually via the mobile telecoms network.

However, practical problems often arise which make this formula difficult or impossible to implement in practice.

Firstly, FM broadcasts have a very limited range. Many community radio stations operate low‑powered transmitters with a broadcast range of less than 20 km. Even high-powered FM transmitters seldom reach further than 150 km. In mountainous areas, the range of FM broadcasts may be further limited by the nature of the terrain. And in sparsely populated areas, such as the arid and semi-arid zones of the Sahel and East Africa, many communities are simply beyond the reach of FM radio broadcasts.

Some technical solutions to these problems exist, but they have seldom been tried, partly because of contractual and regulatory issues.

These possible solutions include:

– Boosting the transmitter power of existing FM stations to increase their range - This process is slowly taking place in Bangladesh, where all 14 existing community radio stations have applied to increase their maximum permitted transmitter power from 100 to 250 watts. However, gaining official authorisation to increase transmitter power rapidly in the heat of a crisis remains a stiff procedural challenge in most developing countries.

– Installing relay transmitters for existing radio stations on mobile phone masts to open up new areas to FM coverage - Something similar has been done successfully in Liberia, where mobile networks began to construct base stations in the interior after the 1990‑2003 civil war, at the same time as new community radio stations were being opened in rural areas. Many of the new community radio stations co-located with mobile base stations in order to mount their transmitters on the mobile tower and power their studios with the mobile operator's generator set at the base. This collaboration saved the community radio stations the expense of building their own mast and running their own generator. Mounting FM relay transmitters on mobile masts to extend the range of existing radio stations is a technique that has not so far been trialled in an emergency.

– Setting up new FM radio stations from scratch to cater for isolated communities that were previously without FM coverage, such as camps for refugees and displaced people - The media development agency Internews ([www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org)) did this successfully in Chad from 2005 onwards. Internews established three new FM radio stations serving camps holding more than 200,000 refugees from Darfur and the host population of eastern Chad. More recently, Internews has also partnered with the Kenyan radio station Star FM, to set up a special Somali language radio station in the Dadaab complex of refugee camps in eastern Kenya near the Somali border. This station serves the information needs of Dadaab's 400,000 residents.

The development of suitcase radios has made it much cheaper and faster to set up new FM stations, from scratch very quickly. Suitcase radios are literally a mini radio studio, complete with a music library, audio mixing and editing equipment, microphones, headphones, a laptop and a mobile phone, packed into a suitcase. They are used in conjunction with a small generator set, a small low‑powered transmitter and portable transmission antenna that can be mounted on a tall building or tree. This light and portable kit can be assembled and put on air in less than one hour. Even with a relatively low-powered transmitter, suitcase radios are able to broadcast programmes on FM over a radius of up to 15 km - enough to cover the urban area of a large city. Suitcase radios can either be used to launch a new emergency radio station, or to put existing broadcasters back on air rapidly if their installations have been damaged or destroyed. First Response Radio (<http://firstresponseradio.org>) successfully used a suitcase radio to re-launch local FM radio broadcasting in Banda Aceh in Indonesia after the surrounding coastal area was devastated by the 2004 tsunami, putting all local TV and radio stations off air. BBC Media Action has a suitcase radio on standby in Kathmandu to provide emergency broadcasting facilities, in partnership with the Nepalese government and local broadcasters in the event of catastrophic damage to the city following a major earthquake.

However, despite the technical feasibility of extending the broadcast reach of existing FM stations or setting up new FM stations from scratch, restrictive regulation, slow bureaucratic processes and political sensitivities can combine to make the upgrading of radio transmission capacity a slow and expensive process, even in the midst of a major humanitarian emergency. The only way to reach FM-deprived communities quickly by radio, in such instances is on medium wave or short wave broadcasts from existing radio stations based outside the disaster zone.

In states where broadcasting is tightly controlled by the government and in states affected by conflict, political considerations may prevent aid responders from using local FM or medium wave radio stations based inside the country for Lifeline programming.

In such cases, short wave broadcasts beamed in from abroad are still the most viable alternative. Audience research in Darfur by BBC Media Action and other broadcasters, such as the Sudan Radio Service (SRS), has shown that where FM broadcasts do not exist or are tightly controlled by the government, short wave broadcasters transmitting humanitarian information from abroad still manage to achieve significant audiences.

In Syria, where the United Nations estimates that more than 100,000 people have died in two years of conflict, humanitarian organisations were still struggling in August 2013 to establish a politically neutral radio or TV channel capable of reaching ordinary civilians affected by the fighting.

So far, the only alternative to short wave that had been tried inside Syria was internet radio. In June 2013, several media development and press freedom organisations, including Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), International Media Support (IMS) and Canal France International, helped to launch a Paris-based internet radio station staffed by Syrian journalists called Radio Rozana ([www.rozana.fm](http://www.rozana.fm)), reaching people with access to the internet. Other media development organisations were meanwhile planning to set up radio stations to serve Syria refugee camps in neighbouring countries, particularly in Jordan.

Where disaster-affected communities do not have access to radio receiver sets, or where it is desirable to encourage the formation of collective listening groups to discuss the content of special programmes, it is possible to distribute solar/wind-up radios for collective listening. These radios are robust and do not require mains power or batteries to operate. The larger models are powerful enough to allow groups of up to 40 people to listen at the same time. Some of the latest models have a built-in record and playback facility. This allows programmes to be recorded live and played back to local audiences at other times that are more convenient for collective listening.

The purchase and distribution of several thousand solar/wind-up radios can be an expensive and time-consuming business. However, since 2003, USAID has distributed more than 200,000 solar/wind-up radio sets in South Sudan[[1]](#footnote-1) and three adjacent areas of (North) Sudan that are affected by conflict. That amounts to approximately one radio set for every 50 people in the region.

In mid-2013 the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) told aid agencies accredited to apply for funding under its Rapid Response Facility[[2]](#footnote-2) that it would seriously consider the possibility of establishing a stockpile of solar/wind-up radio sets for immediate distribution in a rapid-onset emergency.

1. USAID - Radio for a new nation <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/democracy-human-rights-governance/radio-new-nation>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Announced at meeting between DFID and RRF partners in London on 6 June 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)