



SYSTEMATIC REVIEW POLICY BRIEF

Communication for Development Interventions in Fragile States: A Systematic Review

What factors affect communication for development interventions in fragile states?

The review examines a wide range of contextual and program factors that frame, affect and constrain communication for development (C4D) interventions undertaken in fragile states. Understanding these factors can help to improve future development and humanitarian practice and the formulation of communication approaches that can be utilised in future conflict or complex emergency situations.

Why a focus on factors and not ‘what works’?

While a wide range of C4D initiatives can be undertaken in conflict or emergency situations, an understanding of the context in which they occur should drive both their direction and content. No ‘one-size’ fits all approach works for C4D interventions because of the wide range of factors that influence C4D design, such as available communications infrastructure, audiences’ media preferences or the type of issue being addressed. Due to the lack of quality evidence on ‘what works’ within fragile states, the review focused on what factors need to be considered as part of C4D design and implementation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Early intervention is critical.** Understanding the communications environment within fragile or disaster-prone states is a priority as it can inform what interventions can realistically be undertaken during complex emergencies.
- **Long-term support to communication interventions is required.** C4D initiatives may address multiple issues within the same context, such as reducing conflict, explaining stabilisation processes or support humanitarian assistance efforts. These issues can occur over a long period of time. Evidence highlights that long-term C4D commitments help to build trust and are more effective.
- **New methodological tools and communication frameworks need to be developed.** These should allow for the rapid and ongoing assessment of communication contexts and the development of holistic crisis communication frameworks that integrate conventional communication channels (radio, television, print) with new ones, such as social and mobile media.

What factors were identified in the systematic review?

Factors identified in the review include a range of approaches, facilitators, obstacles and outcomes.

Approaches identified include: (i) behaviour change communication; (ii) capacity strengthening; (iii) civic education; (iv) edutainment; and (v) participatory approaches.

Facilitators identified include: (i) culturally appropriate media content; (ii) understanding the cultural context; (iii) understanding the institutional context; (iv) state media; (v) telecommunications; (vi) multi-channel communication; (vii) participatory media; (viii) sustainability planning; (ix) long-term commitment; (x) building digital or media literacy; (xi) gender equality; (xii) local ownership; and (xiii) local participation.

Obstacles identified include: (i) contextual constraints; (ii) digital divide; (iii) information divide; (iv) state media; (v) media bias; (vi) hate media; and (vii) weak evaluation and evidence.

Outcomes identified include: (i) conflict reduction, peacekeeping, reconciliation.

The summary and full version of the review (see links below) discusses each of these factors in detail. Such factors need to be recognised and addressed by practitioners in design, implementation and evaluation in order to maximise the potential for C4D effectiveness. Understanding the importance these factors is of clear relevance to bilateral and multilateral donor program officers with a mandate for reviewing and approving C4D initiatives in fragile states.

From factors to principles

Analysis of the various factors identified in the review supports the need for principle-based C4D interventions. These factors support a broader set of C4D principles, which include:

- (i) The use of **formative research** to examine knowledge, attitudes and practices and to understand the information needs of people at risk in conflict situation, as well as summative evaluation that is learning-centred and feeds back into program delivery;
- (ii) Recognising that **audiences/stakeholders are diverse** and have different needs based on factors including gender, age and ethnicity, occupational category and socio-economic standing;
- (iii) Understanding that diverse audience/stakeholder groups need **information that specifically targets them**; using popular media formats and multiple communication channels to ensure wide exposure to relevant information;
- (iv) Prioritising **behaviour change messages**, i.e. messages that advocate an action or access to a resource or service, within communication;
- (v) **Linking** communication strategies to **physical service provision** and delivery, (i.e. humanitarian aid, security services);
- (vi) **Working** with and **through communities**, community structures and local organisations (i.e. participation);
- (vii) **Advocating** to positively influence key stakeholders and to help formulate a supportive policy environment.

Policy and practice implications

A number of broader policy and practice implications relevant to future support for C4D in fragile and conflict-affected states can be drawn from evidence identified by this review.

Methodology

‘Systematic reviews are a rigorous and transparent form of literature review. They involve identifying, synthesising and assessing all available evidence, quantitative and/or qualitative, in order to generate a robust empirically derived answer to a focused research question’ (ODI, 2012).

Our approach:

- **Searching:** 22,665 studies were identified through searching 9 major academic databases; 8 relevant websites; citation tracking; and suggestions by personal contacts;
- **Reviewing:** 239 papers were retried for detailed examination;
- **Assessing:** of these, 83 papers were assessed for their methodological quality;
- **Analysing:** of these, 26 studies, were identified as methodologically rigorous and were selected for detailed analysis.

Early Intervention: in fragile states (i.e. during periods of latent conflict) is potentially easier - in terms of understanding contextual and institutional factors, as well as media/ICT uses and preferences or aspects of digital and information divides - than in open conflict scenarios. Early mapping of information and communication contexts, linked to concurrent conflict analyses can play a role in informing C4D interventions. Putting in place the necessary research, establishing communication partnerships and building communication capacity constitutes a priority for bilateral, multilateral and non-government organisations.

Long-term Commitments: that support C4D initiatives during and through latent, conflict and post-conflict scenarios have better potential to build a useful/useable knowledge base, sustainable capacity and enhanced levels of social trust than short-term interventions. Conflict reduction and peace-building are complex processes that require long-term investment if they are to achieve appropriate outcomes. Longer funding cycles for C4D interventions can help to build more meaningful partnerships and capacity strengthening activities, as well as reduce the transaction costs for those involved in designing, implementing, evaluating and approving C4D interventions.

Methodological Tools: could usefully be developed and trialled in order to help facilitate the participatory assessment of existing media and communications environments, media uses and preferences, media and communications policy and legislation, capacity development needs, institutional opportunities and constraints and the identification of key messages that

support civic education, conflict reduction and peace-building. Any new methodological tools developed need to be responsive to different context scenarios and conditions (although early intervention, as stated above, is desirable), providing a range of assessment options from the rapid to the longer-term. Ideally, the application of such tools would generate not only knowledge that is critical to understanding which forms of C4D should be promoted, but also to building inclusive partnerships for implementation.

General points about the findings revealed by the Systematic Review

The quality of the evidence base relating to C4D interventions in fragile states is relatively weak. This is a reflection of the difficulty associated with conducting rigorous peer reviewed evaluation and research in conflict-affected states. In addition, the balance between conventional media (television, radio, print, interpersonal communication) and new media (social media, mobile phones, Internet), was heavily skewed in favour of conventional media and reflects the emerging nature of evidence on, for example, the role of social media in conflict.

Further reading

A summary of the systematic review can be found at:

http://www.adelaide.edu.au/accru/projects/c4dfragilestates/SR_Summary_22_02_2013.pdf

A full version of the systematic review can be found at:

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/accru/projects/c4dfragilestates/SR566final.pdf>

Additional reading:

DFID (2000) *Working with Media in Conflict and Other Emergencies*. DFID, London, UK.

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