



## Resilience and humanitarian response

Helping people deal with risk, respond to change and cope with emergencies



**BBC**  
**MEDIA ACTION**  
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA  
AROUND THE WORLD

How communication supports resilience and humanitarian response

Resilience is the capacity to respond positively to life’s most serious challenges. At its most fundamental this means getting enough food and water, securing an income, coping with long-term strains, or surviving a disaster.

In many parts of the world this is hard to achieve. Legal and political frameworks may be weak and the prevailing social norms may be restrictive. Conflict can separate families, jeopardise livelihoods, and threaten life itself.

At BBC Media Action, the BBC’s international development charity, we believe that media and communication can help people become more resilient and recover more swiftly from disaster. Timely and reliable information helps people to anticipate set-backs, learn skills, boost their livelihoods and gain a better understanding of their rights. Person-to-person discussion, media debates and compelling human stories bring issues to life and give people the chance to hold decision-makers to account.

BBC Media Action brings resilience issues to life through media  
JEAN LOPEZ-BAPTISTE



We make programmes and conduct audience research in 28 countries. This ranges from producing radio drama and organising outreach to improve people’s skills and knowledge to working closely with humanitarian organisations to make emergency broadcasts in the aftermath of disasters.

In many countries where we work, there is limited access to education, the infrastructure is poor and reliable sources of information are scant. Media and communication can help the process of building resilience – by providing information and encouraging the exchange of ideas. It can also inspire and motivate people by sharing stories of people who have overcome challenges.

A great advantage of mass media is that it can reach out and touch one individual “left in the dark”, and it can also galvanise, connect and inform people on a much larger scale. Our goal in using media and communication to build resilience and support emergency response is to help people pull themselves out of poverty and better realise their potential as individuals, as families, as communities and as nations.

Focus areas

BBC Media Action has identified four priority areas where media and communication can make a significant contribution to strengthening resilience and humanitarian response:

- 1 Food and water security
- 2 Economic security and opportunity
- 3 Disaster risk reduction
- 4 Emergency response

Our projects help boost people’s livelihoods and strengthen economic security  
JEAN LOPEZ-BAPTISTE





## Radio for change Tanzania

**Mohammed Hammie**

Community radio presenter, mentor and trainer



I work for Pangani FM, a local radio station in rural Tanzania. I know how important radio is to the people here; it's a vital source of information. I help train local journalists to improve their news reporting skills and I also make short radio features for my local station as well as for *Haba na Haba* (Little By Little) a national show produced by BBC Media Action in partnership with BBC Swahili. *Haba na Haba* takes regional content from stations like Pangani. It helps draw national attention to local issues, share solutions, and enables people to be heard.



A man collects water from a communal pump in Mwera, Tanzania. Following a report by Pangani FM, the village's water supply was restored.

BBC MEDIA ACTION

One month I highlighted the plight of the people of Mwera village. They were having problems with their water supply. The communal water pump suddenly stopped working – it had been cut off due to a local dispute. As most houses do not have their own piped water this was an immediate and pressing problem for everyone. One villager called Pangani FM to let us know what was happening and to ask for help, so I went to find out more. I interviewed people who aired their concerns and it seemed the local dispute was too hard to resolve at village level.

But within two days of the broadcast going out, the water supply had been turned back on. By drawing attention to the problem, the villagers had ensured those in authority got to hear about their crisis. Putting public pressure on those at a higher level had resolved things fast. Helping people realise their rights is why I work with BBC Media Action.

**Funder**

UK Department for International Development (DFID)

## Rebuilding lost knowledge Sierra Leone

**Mariama Khai Fornah**

Producer and trainer



Before the country's civil war of 1991–2002, cocoa was a major export crop for Sierra Leone. But during the war many farms were destroyed, together with knowledge about cocoa production built up over generations. By the time the conflict ended, cocoa exports had dropped by just over 60%. Farmers and the next generation returning to their homes found themselves struggling to repair their lives.

Radio is a key means of reaching people living in remote areas. Sierra Leone suffers from high levels of illiteracy but approximately 80% of the country's population has access to a radio.



Our programmes reach out to cocoa farmers

BBC MEDIA ACTION

BBC Media Action implements a combination of radio programming and distance learning that targets 140,000 current and potential cocoa farmers in eastern Sierra Leone.

A 15-minute radio drama – employing local actors – called *Ngoi Ya Lende* (Unity Boat) is broadcast in the regional language of Mende. Some of the characters follow best practices in cocoa production and succeed. Other characters don't and their cocoa harvest fails. Farmers are given crop pricing, weather and marketing advice from a weekly cocoa news bulletin as well as the chance to question experts during a radio phone-in discussion programme.

The drama and discussion programmes follow the cocoa production calendar. Programmes also discuss how farmers can stay healthy and how women can run cocoa farms.

For those who want formal training with certification, Njala University is running field schools and a distance learning course.

**Funders**

The European Commission

GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit),

ICCO (the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation)

BBC Media Action's Catalyst Fund

## Preparing for cyclones Bangladesh

**Mazharul Islam**  
Head of projects Bangladesh,  
governance and resilience



In May 2013 news of an approaching cyclone reached BBC Media Action's office in Dhaka. Our team got to work immediately, collaborating with government, humanitarian agencies and the wider media sector to alert people to the coming storm. Radio announcements were aired by six coastal community radio stations, two independent stations and the state broadcaster. These short broadcasts gave details of when to take shelter, what to take along and how to safeguard seeds and livestock.



Filming emergency television  
messages in Dhaka, Bangladesh  
BBC MEDIA ACTION

Three "evacuate now" public service announcements were prepared in case the situation deteriorated. We also worked with the state broadcaster Bangladesh TV as well as cable and satellite stations to air 90-second TV announcements. They included key information about water purification and first aid. We also translated the information for broadcast on loudspeakers inside camps for Burmese refugees in the country's south-east.

And in the end, when the storm tore across the country without devastating consequences, we all breathed a huge sigh of relief. Towns and villages were lashed with heavy rain and fierce winds but the impact could have been a lot worse.

We achieved a huge amount – radio announcements broadcast many times in three languages and a TV public service announcement watched by millions. The contacts we made and the lessons we learned will help us refine our response if – or, more likely, when – Bangladesh faces natural disasters in the future.

**Funder**  
UK Department for International Development (DFID)

## A radio lifeline Burma

**Tin Htar Swe**  
Head of Burmese service  
BBC World Service



When the Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released in 2010 after 15 years of house arrest the first thing that struck people was how well informed she was. And she told us why: "When I was officially 'un-free' it was the BBC that spoke to me."

Radio is a critical information source for many millions. The BBC Burmese service has a weekly reach of around 8.4 million and this is a radio service that is not just for news; it has played a critical role in humanitarian crises in our country too. In 2008 when Cyclone Nargis hit the lower delta region of Burma we knew that our listeners in the area would be desperate for information.



Cyclone Nargis killed an  
estimated 140,000 people across  
Burma and affected millions.  
PAULA BRONSTEIN | GETTY IMAGES

BBC Media Action and the Burmese service joined forces and began broadcasting lifeline programming. Over nine months we produced 135 daily broadcasts. In the wake of disaster, radio can reach people faster than the rescue services can arrive at the scene. A sense of reassurance is important too – radio can serve as psychological support for traumatised populations. Our daily broadcasts and the familiar voices of calm and engaging presenters offered hope as well as practical advice.

Our programmes also engaged in dialogue with those affected: people on the ground helped us with insights, told us what they needed, and helped us strengthen and tailor the content of programmes to suit them.

Our lifeline programmes not only provided information, they prompted debate and fostered collaboration. Whether you are an aid worker or a technology expert radio is a hugely powerful way of providing humanitarian support.

**Funders**  
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How resilience can be supported by media and communication

This illustrated example – which draws on the work of BBC Media Action and its partners – demonstrates the role played by media and communication in strengthening food and water security.





### Understanding audiences

We know that what works well in one part of the world does not necessarily work in another. To ensure we design the most relevant projects, research underpins our work.

- Formative research helps us understand the complex situations that influence people's resilience and helps us reach them in emergencies
- Pre-testing and piloting ensures media and communication outputs meet our audiences' needs
- Monitoring audience responses helps us adjust projects accordingly
- Evaluating our projects allows us to measure impact and shape future approaches
- Sharing our findings helps us inform the wider sector



Gathering people's experience of climate change in Nepal  
BBC MEDIA ACTION

Climate Asia is the most comprehensive study to date of people's everyday experience of climate change in seven Asian countries. Using data from more than 33,500 interviews it paints a detailed picture of how people in Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam are coping with erratic rainfall, droughts, coastal erosion and other environmental challenges. By making this unique survey data available to all, we can help governments, donors, media and non-governmental organisations produce better-targeted and more effective communication about climate change. BBC Media Action in Bangladesh is producing powerful TV to help viewers understand and adapt to the climate-related changes affecting their lives.

Visit the Climate Asia data portal:  
[bbc.co.uk/climateasia](http://bbc.co.uk/climateasia)

**Funder**

UK Department for International Development

### Reaching out to partners

Wherever possible we work with partners to create the greatest impact. We know that media and communication is rarely the entire solution – we work with others to help build sustainable development. We also help develop skills and tools to help partners to use media and communication effectively to build resilience and strengthen emergency response.

- 1 **Local media organisations**  
We increase their understanding of the issues people face in developing resilience. We also build their skills to make quality programming that addresses resilience and humanitarian response to emergencies.
- 2 **Government, development, and aid agencies**  
We demonstrate how they can apply media and communication to improve their work as well as working in partnership with them.
- 3 **Civil society organisations**  
We offer them support and training in media and communication skills that benefit the local community as well as working in partnership to deliver activities.

People gather on a boat in Bangladesh's Natore District to take part in a meeting to discuss climate change.  
PANOS PICTURES | G M B AKASH





### Reaching and engaging audiences

Our projects are multi-pronged and designed to make best use of the media and communication platforms available to vulnerable and marginalised people. This might be radio, television, print and social media as well as mobile technology, street theatre, group and one-to-one discussion. Media production is our most visible area of work but we know its impact is greater when audiences can talk about the issues raised. We choose media formats – from discussion programming and public service announcements to comedy, drama and reality television – based on their relevance to our audiences as well as their power to communicate the subject in hand.

- Radio is often accessible to rural audiences and people with low levels of literacy
- Television is a powerful means of demonstrating new techniques
- Mobile phones are often the only way to inform hard-to-reach audiences
- Drama can tackle sensitive subjects in an engaging way
- Reality programmes show how problems can be solved from the bottom up
- Discussion programmes give people a chance to learn from and support one another
- Face-to-face and group discussions can share practical and tailored advice and support



Hasha Kalcacha uses mobile phone information services to decide when to harvest and sell her produce in Kenya  
PANOS PICTURES | PIERIS BENATAR

At BBC Media Action we:

- Select platforms and formats that appeal to audiences and meet project objectives
- Ensure programmes are interactive to encourage audience involvement and local ownership as well as to elicit feedback
- Work in partnership with local civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, governments and others to develop activities that prompt discussion and support change

### Targeting the right people

We recognise that people are influenced by their social networks (such as families, partners, friends, and colleagues), their communities, and the wider society. And that, in turn, society is shaped by these groups and individuals as well as systems within it.

In designing our activities, we consider those who are highly at risk or vulnerable to threats as well as those in the community who can influence their well-being and shape the opportunities they have. Our work aims to inform:

- People such as rural farmers, small business owners and entrepreneurs, urban migrants, families living in areas at risk of hazards, or individuals affected by crisis
- Practitioners who support those people, including media professionals, civil society workers, agricultural extension workers, business people, government officials and staff in international agencies
- Media organisations, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, universities and government agencies among others
- Social customs and norms, as well as public policy and public services



### 10 ways media and communication can strengthen resilience

- 1 Provide information and build knowledge:** people need information to make informed choices about risk, adversity and how to respond to disaster.
- 2 Improve confidence and motivation:** to solve collective problems people often need to feel part of a wave of change. Media and communication activities can share positive examples of how people have taken action in their lives to inspire and reassure others.
- 3 Build skills:** media and communication can help audiences to develop life skills, make decisions and solve problems. It can also point people towards local opportunities as well as helping people build hands-on technical skills.
- 4 Spark innovation:** media can share innovative approaches with millions of people at a time, while media and communication activities can spark new ideas among individuals.
- 5 Explore social norms:** communication can support people to challenge traditional practices. For example, in some societies, women can only leave their home if accompanied by a male or elder; this can stop them seeking shelter in a disaster. Community-wide discussion can help people make decisions that may at first feel strange or counter-intuitive.
- 6 Alter risk perception:** how people feel about risk and what they expect to happen as a result of taking action can influence the extent to which they embrace new approaches, consider opportunities and mitigate potential disasters. Media and communication can help broach sensitive topics and can present issues in accessible ways.
- 7 Strengthen social networks:** resilience to shocks and stresses can be strengthened by social, political, economic and cultural networks. Media and communication can play a role in connecting people and practitioners.
- 8 Prompt person-to-person discussion:** communities, individuals and practitioners need platforms to discuss existing problems, share ideas, and seek solutions. Media platforms and communication activities can convene and amplify community discussions.
- 9 Expand public dialogue:** public meetings with high-level decision-makers are often inaccessible to rural, time-pressed and resource-poor people. Media can broker discussion on issues such as land rights, urban development, or the ability of public infrastructure to support economic development or manage risk.
- 10 Enhance accountability:** media and communication can help people hold leaders to account, facilitate participation and encourage transparency.



Sierra Leone: Resilience is the capacity to respond positively to life's most serious challenges. BBC Media Action uses media and communication to strengthen resilience and improve humanitarian response to emergencies in parts of the world where this is badly needed.  
BBC MEDIA ACTION



## A worldwide team

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international development charity. We believe in the power of media and communication to help reduce poverty and support people in understanding their rights. For more than a decade we have been working to help transform lives in some of the poorest, hardest-to-reach parts of the world. Our projects reach over 100 million people in 28 countries where media can be used to inform, connect and empower. The global reach and reputation of the BBC strengthens our work. But we are not funded by the licence fee. BBC Media Action is legally, financially and operationally independent from the BBC.

## Support us

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Front cover image:  
A girl carries water in a camp  
for internally displaced people,  
South Darfur, Sudan  
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