

Communicating Humanitarian Information in Conflict Areas: The Case of Darfur, Sudan

The BBC World Service Trust is currently broadcasting humanitarian radio programmes and coordinating outreach activities in Darfur. This programme of work has been supported by the European Commission Humanitarian Organisation (ECHO), Ford Foundation, and the British Government Department for International Development (DFID) – Sudan



BBC World Service Trust drama group and producers

The BBC World Service Trust recognises the challenge of communicating humanitarian information effectively. This report outlines findings from interviewing opinion leaders¹ to identify the most effective strategies to communicate humanitarian information to the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and host communities of Darfur². As stated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1998), an internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who has been forced to leave their home for reasons such as religious or political persecution or war, but has not crossed an international border. The future facing this population is characterised by a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity, and poses particular challenges for information dissemination.

Key questions explored in this report are:

- » How is humanitarian information currently communicated to IDPs in Darfur?
- » What are the strengths and weaknesses of current methods of communicating humanitarian information to IDPs in Darfur?
- » How can radio programmes assist in communicating humanitarian information in this environment?
- » What are the key lessons learned for strengthening the impact of BBC World Service Trust humanitarian radio programming in Darfur?

Overview

“IDPs must know their rights, issues and problems. This is most important information because when they know their rights they can request their rights.”

Sheikh, West Darfur

Since the Darfur conflict began in February 2003, Darfurians have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in camps for the IDPs. At the time of this research there were approximately 85 camps spread across the three states of Darfur: West Darfur, North Darfur and South Darfur. These camps range in size, the largest is Kalma in South Darfur with 142,215 IDPs, the smallest is Tulus in South Darfur with 1,200 IDPs.

One of the main challenges of successful camp coordination is to communicate information effectively to IDPs. This is a considerable challenge given the size of the larger camps, the remoteness of the camps in rural areas and the security problems facing the region.

There are two specific needs in the delivery of humanitarian information to IDPs. First, people running camps need to notify IDPs of logistical information such as where food is distributed, how to get water and scheduling of health clinics. Second, to improve camp conditions the IDPs must be given educational information on disease prevention and health promotion.

Project design

BBC World Service Trust broadcasting of humanitarian information

The BBC World Service Trust has launched humanitarian radio programming for IDPs and the host communities of Darfur. There are two versions of the programme, one for young children and one for adults. The programmes provide listeners with up-to-date, accurate, impartial information designed to help them cope with the circumstances imposed by the crisis in Darfur. The programmes also provide a forum where listeners can tell their stories and voice their views on events in Darfur. They use a range of mechanisms to deliver humanitarian information including interviews with IDPs, informative reports, humanitarian news bulletins, drama and discussion time.

¹An **opinion leader** is the agent who is an active media user and who interprets the meaning of media messages or content for lower-end media users. Typically the opinion leader is held in high esteem by those that accept their opinions. Opinion leadership tends to be subject specific, that is, a person that is an opinion leader in one field may be a follower in another field. Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz (1954).

²This research is looking specifically at people in IDP camps. The BBC World Service Trust radio programmes also target host communities, war affected people of Darfur and refugees living over the border in Chad.



The programme for adults, *Salam ila Darfur* (Peace/Greetings to Darfur), runs 5 days a week (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday) at 08.00 and is then repeated at 20.00. Every week the adults' programme focuses on a specific topic and addresses a set of core messages, in line with the priorities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working locally.

The children's programme, *Ursom ala el ard makaanak* (Draw your place on the Ground), aimed at 4 to 12 year olds, is on air at the same time as the adults' programme (08.00 and again at 20.00) on the other two days of the week (Tuesday and Saturday).

Both programmes are produced in Darfuri Arabic, and are broadcast on BBC World Service short wave frequencies at 08.00 local time [9735 kHz (31 metreband), 11820 kHz (25 metreband)] with a repeat at 20.00 [15515 kHz (25 metreband), 17585 kHz (16 metreband)]. Transmissions initially lasted fifteen minutes each, but were extended to thirty minutes in April 2006. The production team, which is half Sudanese, and half Egyptian, operates out of a base in Nyala, South Darfur, with support from the Project Director in Khartoum and the BBC World Service Trust in London.

Methodology

Research design

In-depth face-to-face interviews with 35 opinion leaders were conducted across Darfur. The opinion leaders fell into three sub groups:

- » **Decision Makers** - directors of international aid organisations responsible for organising and implementing humanitarian aid across Darfur.
- » **Camp Coordinators** - working for international aid organisations, responsible for the day-to-day running of the activities of specific services within the camps.
- » **Sheikhs/ Elders** - senior males who have been selected by their community to represent the views of IDPs.

The three groups identified above were selected for interview as they are the main providers of humanitarian information in the camps. They are also well positioned to comment on the effectiveness of communication from the perspective of the IDPs.

The in-depth face-to-face interviews were carried out in IDP camps and NGO offices in the first three weeks of July 2006 across the three states of Darfur. These interviews were conducted by Sudanese researchers who are members of the Research & Learning team of the BBC World Service Trust.

Figure 1: Map of Sudan illustrating the three states of Darfur (West, North and South Darfur)



A total of 31 different international organisations delivering humanitarian aid participated in the research. All of the decision makers and camp coordinators were responsible for either coordinating or delivering a range of different services - health care, education, family reunification, nutritional advice and welfare.

	West Darfur	North Darfur	South Darfur	Total
Decision Makers	2	5	6	13
Camp Coordinators	6	6	6	18
Sheikhs/Elders	1	1	2	4
Total	9	12	14	35

Table 1: Distribution and profile of research participants across West, North and South Darfur

Camp Coordinators and Sheikhs were interviewed at two chosen camps in each state. In two of the camps Sheikhs refused to be interviewed as they believed it would put their security at risk. At the time of the research in July 2006, there were severe security problems across all three regions of Darfur. As a result, the research team was heavily reliant on the support and protection of a range of humanitarian organisations operating across Darfur.

Interviews were conducted in either Arabic or English as appropriate and audio recorded. They were then transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed employing thematic and content analyses to identify topics and establish key learnings.

Key findings

Current approaches to communication in the camps

There are two main ways in which inter-personal communication is employed to facilitate information flow. First, NGOs deliver information to Sheikhs who then disseminate via sub-Sheikhs to IDPs. This system operates in all camps. Second, NGOs communicate directly to the IDPs using a variety of methods which are more localised and specific to the particular organisation.

Sheikh system

This system builds on the traditional social hierarchy within Darfur. An elder is chosen as the Sheikh or tribal representative for his community. The Sheikh is then responsible for championing the views of the members of his community.

Initially the Sheikh's primary responsibility was to liaise with the NGOs regarding the food requirements of the IDPs. With time, the Sheikhs became the NGOs' main point of contact with the IDPs and are now involved in all aspects of camp life.

"If I have information to disseminate to the IDPs in the camp I have to have a meeting with the Sheikhs so that they can distribute the information".

Camp Coordinator, North Darfur

The research uncovered the system whereby the Sheikhs liaise with the NGO representatives. The flow of information is channelled through a structured system from the NGOs to the intended audience, the IDPs. This system is illustrated in **Figure 2**. Typically the NGOs meet with the Sheikh Leaders. Then the Sheikh Leaders disseminate the information from these meetings through three levels of Sheikhs (Sheikh Council, Sub-Sheikhs, Sheikh Centres). Using the same system, Sheikhs give feedback from the IDPs through the three levels of Sheikhs back to the NGOs.

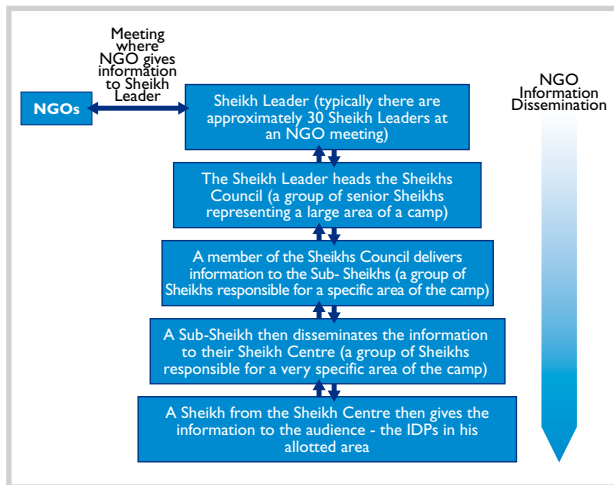


Figure 2: Information Dissemination from NGOs to IDPs through the Sheikh System

Communication by NGOs

In addition to the Sheikh system, NGOs employ a range of approaches to communicate information directly to the IDPs. These include:

- » **Face-to-face meetings/discussions with the IDPs** - these are arranged by NGOs to distribute and discuss information with specific community groups. Examples of these are meetings with youths to discuss issues concerning HIV and AIDS and group discussions with women to talk about hygiene issues.
- » **Visits to IDPs** - NGO workers visit the dwellings of IDPs. This is a one-to-one meeting where NGO workers give practical information and offer advice on its implementation.
- » **Poster and leaflet distribution** - due to the low literacy in the camps the print materials tend to be more pictorial in nature and targeted to groups who have higher rates of literacy e.g. children at school.
- » **Activity days** - these are days where a series of events is organised in order to deliver information on a specific topic in an interactive way e.g. a cholera awareness day.

Strengths and weaknesses of inter-personal communication

The Sheikh system is recognised by the decision makers and camp coordinators as an effective vehicle of disseminating information for the following reasons:

- » **Organisation** - it is a structured mechanism for delivering information to all the IDPs in a camp.
- » **Credibility** - Sheikhs have high social status and are therefore a trusted source of information.
- » **Integration** - utilising the Sheikh system in the NGOs' work strengthens relations between the NGOs, the Sheikhs and the IDPs.

However, the structured and organised nature of the Sheikh system presents some challenges:

- » **Accuracy of information** - because the information is channelled through the four levels of the Sheikh system the possibility of distortion when it reaches the audience is increased.
- » **Immediacy** - it is difficult to quickly relay information from NGOs through the four layers of Sheikhs to the IDPs.
- » **Inclusiveness** - all Sheikhs are men. The paradox is that much information is gender specific e.g. maternal child health, hygiene, coping with the aftermath of rape. Using the Sheikh system is not always appropriate.

The variety of interpersonal communication methods employed by NGOs such as community meetings and home visits is very effective for disseminating informative messages to IDPs within camps as they:

- » **Involve and engage the audience** - NGOs are able to deliver information to the IDPs directly and therefore a dialogue between them and the NGOs can develop.
- » **Consistency of information** - as NGOs are directly responsible for delivering the information the quality of the technical content is assured.

These interpersonal methods used by NGOs have the following limitations:

- » **Labour intensive** - visiting IDPs' is time-consuming and expensive and therefore only a small proportion of IDPs can benefit.
- » **Access** - the difficult security situation in Darfur often results in NGOs having to withdraw workers from areas where their safety cannot be assured.

The value of radio as a medium to communicate humanitarian information

In the context of this combined method of distributing information - using the Sheikh system and smaller scale interpersonal methods, there is consensus amongst opinion leaders that radio can play an important role in providing humanitarian information and supporting the wider humanitarian effort in Darfur. Radio can complement the shortcomings of current interpersonal communication methods:

- » **Extended reach** - broadcasting humanitarian information over radio facilitates the dissemination of information to inaccessible populations. This includes all IDPs in the camps and other war affected people that NGOs and Sheikhs have found difficult to reach.

"Radio is good because it reaches about 70% of the people of Darfur so most people can get the news this way."

Decision Maker, Darfur

- » **Consistency of information** - radio enables the same information to be shared across multiple locations and multiple audiences.
- » **Credibility** - IDPs tend to view radio as a credible source of information. Moreover, the BBC World Service was universally thought of as a provider of unbiased content whereas local radio broadcasters were not as relied upon as they were thought to have their own political agenda.

"A BBC broadcast has high popularity in the camp; it provides reliable and unbiased news."

Sheikh, West Darfur

- » **Versatility** - radio supports a range of different formats. Its content can therefore be modified to respond to different target groups at different times. Also, opinion leaders recognise that communication is particularly effective if it both informs and entertains its audience. Radio can meet these needs through delivering a mix of informative reports, drama, music and discussions.
- » **Immediacy** - radio enables information to reach all of its audience simultaneously. This is particularly useful in emergency situations when logistical or organisational information needs to be relayed to IDPs quickly.

"IDPs need to be told important information quickly sometimes, radio is good for that."

Camp Coordinator, North Darfur

The majority of interviewees recognised the potential for radio programming to maximise its impact by working closely with humanitarian organisations operating in Darfur. The optimal situation would be where the work of the NGOs and Sheikhs is directly integrated with the radio broadcasts in a strategic way.

However, the effectiveness of a more strategic approach is dependent on IDPs and host communities having access to radio. There are no concrete figures on radio reach, but interviewees reported that access varied from camp to camp from about 30% to 70%.

Key lessons learned

The IDPs in Darfur are a unique audience. Their current situation is one of uncertainty as a consequence of being uprooted from their home communities and support networks. As such, their need for humanitarian information is great. This research has highlighted the existing methods of interpersonal communication for disseminating humanitarian information to IDPs in Darfur; and to examine the role which radio can play in this context.

Radio can reinforce information disseminated by current methods. To do this, radio broadcasters must work with Sheikhs and NGOs to ensure the information is relevant to the audience.

Radio can complement existing methods by giving the people of Darfur a broader perspective through airing the testimonials of IDPs and organising discussion programmes whereby listeners can hear the views of IDPs across Darfur.

The BBC World Service Trust will continue to use radio as a means of broadcasting humanitarian information in Darfur. Building on this research, a programme of outreach and audience research is planned to understand the needs of the IDPs and to increase the impact of the radio programmes.

Focus group discussions - a series of focus group discussions are currently being conducted with IDPs to assess audience responses to the format, content, and broadcast schedule of *Salam ila Darfur* and *Ursom ala el ard makaanak*. Discussion groups are being conducted by BBC World Service Trust researchers with key target audiences - elders and Sheikhs, women (20-35 year olds), men (20-35 year olds), youth (13-18 year olds) and young children (6-12 year olds) in camps across West, North and South Darfur.

Listening groups - these groups are being organised across Darfur to increase the reach and impact of the programmes. In partnership with NGOs, 2,000 Freeplay Lifeline radios will be distributed. Groups will be organised where IDPs listen to a programme and a facilitator then provokes discussion. It is hoped that these sessions will increase the impact of the information broadcast on the programmes both amongst attendees of the groups and through attendees spreading information to other IDPs by word of mouth.

About the BBC World Service Trust

The BBC World Service Trust is the independent, international charity set up by the BBC, which uses media to advance development. Through its Media Development and Development Communications Groups, the Trust works around the world to:

- » Raise awareness of development issues among mass audiences and opinion-formers.
- » Influence attitudes, awareness and behaviour amongst poorer communities through a wide range of educational programming on poverty-related topics.
- » Build capacity in the media sector in developing and transitional countries.

This work is underpinned by formative, monitoring and impact research, which is managed by the Trust's *Research and Learning Group*. Research professionals based in London and ten project offices in the field staff

the Group. The *Research Dissemination Series* aims to contribute to the fields of media development and development communications research through summaries of the *Research and Learning Group's* work. As such, the target audience of the series includes research practitioners, technical advisors and project managers who commission and use such research.

We welcome feedback on these publications and invite readers to share their own experiences and learnings. Please visit our website (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/researchlearning/>) for more detailed research reports and further information about our projects and the work of the BBC World Service Trust.

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