

MODULE 2 COMMUNICATING WITH BENEFICIARIES AND COMMUNITIES

PART 1 Why we need to Communicate with Beneficiaries and Communities?

This module will be broken up into 6 parts. These include:

- 1 Why do we need to communicate with beneficiaries and communities?
- 2 Communications planning
- 3 What the communities need to know about organisational engagement
- 4 Communications tools
- 5 Communications assessment
- 6 Supporting communications

We begin with part 1 of Module 2, which will explore why we need to communicate with beneficiaries and communities.

Reasons why we need to communicate with beneficiaries and communities.

There are six main reasons:

1. Be aware of the consequences of communication failures

There is the fact that failure to communicate could result in your arrival being viewed as threatening by local communities, thus endangering both you and your team as well as the intended beneficiaries.

A lot of humanitarian work is conducted in conflict zones or following natural disasters. In these environments, tensions are often high, and security is volatile and so having a good communications plan will help the community as well as yourself, and help to put everyone at ease.

2. Adapt, evolve and improve projects

Another reason why community and beneficiary engagement is essential is to enable project adaption, evolution and improvement. Later in this course, we will look at community and beneficiary feedback loops and complaint response mechanisms. These facilitate a good communication strategy and can help aid staff to improve their project planning, preparations, methodologies, and implementation strategies.

3. Enhance beneficiary engagement for effective project delivery

Perhaps the most significant reason why beneficiary and community communication is necessary is that fundamentally, your assessment and project planning will not work as well if you do it alone, without the involvement of the people you're trying to help. While this might sound obvious, it's a common mistake that needs to be rectified.

4. Consultation with beneficiaries helps empower them and build trusting relationships

Another motivation for the beneficiary and community engagement is empowerment and sustainable trusting relationships. If you consult and communicate with communities then you give them the opportunity and a safe space in which to voice their thoughts. This can help to build confidence between your organisation and the people affected by a disaster. In essence, this builds a bridge between the provider of aid and the recipient of aid and engenders more equal power relations.

5. Mitigate project difficulties through communication

Engagement with communities and beneficiaries can also help to mitigate project difficulties. Sometimes these are inevitable e.g. in conflict situations there are often unexpected attacks, and in disaster response situations, there are often emergencies that need addressing. In times such as these, if you don't have a communications link with the community you are supporting, you will not be able to manage or coordinate your responses.

6. Engage with beneficiaries to enable learning and project development

Finally, engagement with communities and beneficiaries is essential to learning. For you to learn about the community, their habits and customs, and their needs, you must communicate with them. Information sharing between the two of you can help to establish realistic mutual expectations of what they can expect from you and what you can expect from them. By sharing this information, future difficulties and misunderstandings are far less likely to occur.