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**How to plan and produce effective emergency response programming for farmers** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***What is an emergency for farmers?***

An emergency is a situation in which extreme natural or human-made conditions—including droughts, floods, earthquakes, severe storms, mudslides, disease outbreaks, conflict and violence, pest infestations, and other disasters—severely disrupt life and call for immediate action.

***What is an emergency response program for farmers?***

Emergency communication and disaster relief programming for farmers is radio programming that helps farmers to:

- prepare for the emergency,

- survive as well as possible during the emergency, and

- consider ways to change their farming practices so that future emergencies cause less damage to their farms and livelihoods.

***How can emergency response programming help me serve my listeners better?***

* It prepares listeners with detailed information about a predicted emergency.
* It provides listeners with important information about services that are available to help them cope during and after an emergency.
* It helps communities share their coping strategies before, during, and after the emergency.
* It helps communities identify activities, including farming activities, that they can act on before, during, and after an emergency to reduce the risk and impact of similar emergencies.
* It can provide valuable feedback to emergency aid and relief providers.

***How can emergency communication and disaster relief programming help me produce better programs?***

* It helps me understand how my community responds in stressful situations.
* It helps me identify officials and organizations where I can get valuable information for my listeners.
* It helps me identify citizens who can provide calm and useful leadership in stressful situations.
* It gives me an opportunity to help many farmers discuss their situation, and decide what steps they should take in the short and longer terms to improve rural resilience.

***How do I get started?*** (Learn more about these and other points in the *Details* section below.)

1. Understand the different stages of an emergency, and the programming required in each stage.
2. Contact the right people in organizations that can provide you with the information you need to broadcast. Ensure also that you are in contact with any national or regional coalitions or groups of agencies and institutions which take the lead in emergency situations.
3. Keep your listeners at the centre of your programs.
4. Avoid sensationalism.
5. Plan ahead, but be prepared to adjust your programming if other more urgent needs arise.
6. Plan for your station’s operational survival during an emergency.
7. Use formats that are appropriate for the information you want to convey and the appropriate stage of the emergency for your listeners.

***Details***

**1) Understand the different stages of an emergency and the programming required in each stage**.

An emergency goes through three different stages. Your farmer-listeners will need different types of information and different ways of interacting with the radio station during the different stages. To produce appropriate programming, you need to know which stage the emergency is in. It’s important to note that these stages typically overlap, and that one area you broadcast to can be in one stage and another area in another stage.

* **Pre-emergency stage**:

This is the stage when the emergency is being predicted or identified. Reach out to organizations that monitor environmental conditions and forecast the development of the emergency. Get the best information you can about what might be coming to your area, what the predicted impacts are and how severe they could be, and what farmers can do to reduce the impact of the emergency. Then, during your regular farmer program, share that information with your listeners, and encourage on-air discussion to help farmers understand what might be coming and what they could be doing now to reduce serious impacts.

For example, when a drought was predicted recently in Ethiopia, radio stations informed their farmer-listeners about the prediction and recommended that they harvest water and plant fast-maturing seeds, and provided them with the information required to do so.

Depending on the type of emergency, the pre-emergency stage can last for a few months (for a drought) or just a few hours (for an earthquake).

It is important to broadcast forecasts at the right time. If forecasts are not aired long enough in advance for your listeners to respond accordingly, they are not very useful. If forecasts are aired too early, the information might not be specific or reliable enough to be useful. Also, if you do not continue to monitor and report accurately on the possibility and risk of the emergency, you may lose the trust of your listeners.

* **Emergency stage:**

This is the stage when an emergency has arrived and your listeners are feeling its force. Your station should provide a special daily program for *all* listeners that provides information and allows listeners to discuss how the emergency is impacting them, and what they are doing about it.

In addition, your station should broadcast short, regular bulletins throughout the day providing the most up-to-date information about:

- The progress of the emergency (for example, Is it at an early stage? Will it get worse? What can be expected over the next days and weeks? Are the emergency conditions becoming less severe?)

- Weather conditions related to the emergency.

- In cases of violence or conflict, regular updates on the status of the situation, and the response of police and other authorities.

- Special services available for people impacted by the emergency.

These bulletins should be repeated regularly to ensure that they are heard by all listeners.

While these special daily programs and regular bulletins are aimed at all listeners, your regular farmer program should also concentrate on immediate concerns during this stage:

* What kind of help is available—whether food or water or medical assistance, or other resources
* Who is providing that help
* Where exactly farmer-listeners should go to find the help; and
* How to recognize those who are giving it, as well as where to find more information

In cases such as drought, where the emergency is predicted and lasts for a considerable period of time, you can devote some time to phone-ins and discussions. During these segments, farmers can share their anxieties and other feelings related to the emergency, and can also share information about how they are coping with the emergency conditions. Stations can invite farmers to send their stories and feedback via various means, including SMS. In Ethiopia, stations sometimes visit farmers on their farms during emergencies rather than conducting phone-ins. This has the double advantage of ensuring that broadcasters get a close look at the challenges the farmers are facing, and it doesn’t require farmers to spend money on air time.

Emergency stage programming should continue as long as the emergency has an immediate impact on your listeners.

* **Post-emergency stage:**

This is the stage when the most severe emergency conditions have passed, and farmers have time to think about the future and about how they might try new farming practices that reduce the risk of damage from future emergencies.

Regular bulletins are no longer needed, but you can deal with farmers’ issues in the immediate aftermath of the emergency by either continuing to broadcast a daily farmer program or specifically target farmers’ needs during a daily post-emergency program for all listeners.

This type of programming for farmers should continue as long as needed to give farmers an opportunity to:

- celebrate bravery and record good coping practices,

- evaluate the effectiveness of emergency services and what needs to be done better, and

- identify, discuss, and try out improved farming practices

This stage can also last from a few days to several months, depending on the nature of and the severity of the emergency.

This is a time when you want to share stories of resilience and innovative practical solutions. This is a good time to hold community discussions on the impact of the emergency, and on how to build support. These discussions can identify gaps in services or resources, and talk about ways that farmers can best adapt to the current situation and reduce the risk from future emergencies.

**2) Be in regular contact with the right people in organizations that can provide you with the information you need to broadcast.**

You need reliable information in order to broadcast effective farmer programming during an emergency. Start by building relationships with key people in government ministries and organizations that can provide that information, for example, the ministry of agriculture, the meteorology agency, organizations involved with disaster control and prevention, government communication offices, agriculture research centres, NGOs working on disaster programming, and other radio stations.

Whenever possible, contact crucial people and organizations and speak to them regularly *before* an emergency develops. You can sustain these connections by occasionally inviting them to be guest experts on your program to speak about topics of interest to your listeners. In the middle of an emergency, ministries and aid agencies may not have time to search for and evaluate communication partners that can help them. By keeping close relationships with them all year round, you will become a natural ally when the emergency is unfolding and the government or the aid agencies want to inform the public.

**3) Keep your listeners at the centre of your programs**

In every program, make sure the information is accurate, expressed in clear and easily understandable language, up-to-date, and focused directly on the listeners’ needs at each stage of the emergency. State clearly how your listeners can communicate with you and what type of information they can get from you. And whenever possible, interview farmers, and hold phone-ins and panel discussions to find out what information and aid farmers need, and to air best practices of how farmers are coping with extreme circumstances.

**4) Avoid sensationalism**

Sensationalism means using shocking or exaggerated language or inaccurate stories to provoke greater interest or reactions from listeners, often at listeners’ expense. In an emergency, sensational comments can cause unnecessary panic and distress.

**5) Plan ahead, but be prepared to adjust your programming if other more urgent needs arise**.

It is rare that an emergency is limited to one particular phenomenon. Different factors contribute to the overall emergency. Emergencies may begin as one thing—for example, an earthquake—and trigger or be transformed into something else—for example, a fire or a flood. A major key to producing effective emergency response programs is having the ability to recognize these shifts and adapting your programs accordingly. For example, if you have been reporting on your listeners’ experience with droughts for several months and then flash floods hit the area, then this new factor must be included in your programming.

**6) Plan for your station’s operational survival during a crisis**.

In order to remain useful to your listeners during an emergency, you have to stay on the air! Prepare a good plan of action to ensure that your station keeps broadcasting. Your plan should consider energy supplies, staffing needs, food and water supplies, etc., so that you can continue to serve your listeners and stay safe yourselves.

**7) Use formats that are appropriate for the information you want to convey and that correspond to the current stage of the emergency**.

You can use many different formats during ***emergency communication and disaster relief*** programming for farmers, and knowing the best ones to use at a particular stage is key to making useful and relevant programs. Here is a list of formats and the circumstances in which you could use them during emergency response programs.

* **Interviews**: Interviewing people from organizations that are working on the ground and people who are directly affected by the emergency is a great way to get accurate and up-to-date information. Interviews with organizations should cover critical and useful information, practical and easy steps to improve the situation, and guidance on available services and where they can be accessed. Interviewing affected people allows them to share their concerns and shows other impacted listeners that they are not the only ones living in difficult circumstances. Interviews should also give encouragement to listeners and highlight the practical ways people are coping with the emergency.
* **Phone-ins**: Phone-ins allow people to ask questions about their immediate needs and get immediate answers from a qualified person. For this to be effective, it is important to have an informed guest who can speak on a variety of topics and concerns with you in studio or on a reliable phone line. Phone-ins allow listeners to hear about others who share their concerns, and hear other people’s innovative solutions. Stations can also provide 24-hour toll-free phone lines which allow listeners to express concerns and ask questions related to the emergency. The station can run a regular promo to promote use of the toll-free service.
* **Bulletins**: Bulletins are short, to the point, and offer clear information about how the emergency is developing and about special services being provided. They are also an opportunity to recap critical information. For example, Kenya’s meteorological service aired radio alerts about El Nino rains in 2015. The alerts were used by authorities to clear trash from drainage systems and urge people to move from low-lying areas susceptible to flooding.
* **Spots or Public Service Announcements (PSAs)**: These are an excellent way to convey one simple message and repeat it regularly. Spots can be either simple, well-crafted announcements or mini-dramas. They are typically less than one minute in length, and always use, clear, accessible language. For example, the rainy season may arrive sooner than farmers expect because of the changing climate. When this is predicted, stations can broadcast a PSA which alerts farmers to the situation and recommends that they be prepared to plant their crops earlier.
* **Dramas**: Dramas, while complex to produce, can be useful in the pre-emergency and the post-emergency stages. They can be a great way to tackle sensitive issues and taboos. Having fictional characters talk about these issues often creates better opportunities to address them seriously. Dramas can also provide some needed entertainment during the rebuilding period in people’s lives. Writing and producing effective dramas is *not easy*! Work with local theatre groups to help create dramas that sensitively and effectively address the specific challenges in your community. For example, several radio stations in Malawi broadcast five- minute dramas which focused on a family that was facing drought and hunger. The drama presented recommended practices such as winter cropping, food diversification, food budgeting, planting backyard gardens and discouraging practices such as selling maize. Stations also used entertaining and educational 5-minute episodes with popular comedians.
* **Panel discussions**: Panels should also be aired during the post-emergency stage. They provide a good opportunity for farmers and experts to discuss social, political, and economic issues connected with the emergency. They also allow community members to discuss which strategies should be adopted and how they should be implemented (for example, you can hear a panel discussion on strategies for managing Ebola after the most recent outbreak <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03b196q>) Panel discussions also enable community members to hold organizations accountable for the emergency services they are mandated to provide. Broadcasters can follow up on key issues identified by panelists.

***Where else can I learn about producing effective emergency communication and disaster relief radio programming for farmers?***

BBC Media Action, undated. *Lifeline Production Manual*. <https://www.bbcmediaactionilearn.com/mod/page/view.php?id=796>

BBC Media Action, undated. What your audience needs to know in an emergency: Life-saving information. Topic-by-topic guides. <https://www.bbcmediaactionilearn.com/mod/page/view.php?id=797>

***Definitions***

*Adaptation*: Adapting means making adjustments in response to actual or expected emergencies—for example, planting early-maturing or drought-resistant crops such as sweet potato and cassava when farmers are facing a changing climate. These adjustments reduce harm or take advantage of beneficial opportunities.

*Resilience*: The capacity of systems, communities, households, or individuals to prevent, mitigate, adapt, or cope with risk, and to recover from shocks.

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