

Case study: JPHRO and large scale camp communications

Since the earliest days of the response, the Jenkins/Penn Haiti Relief Organisation (JPHRO) managed the spontaneous camp on the golf course of the Petionville Club in Port au Prince, home to an estimated 50,000 internally displaced people. The camp was one of the largest in Haiti. It was also one of the first to pioneer a systematic approach to camp-based communication during the relocation of 7,000 at-risk residents to the new camp in Corail ahead of the 2010 rainy season. From the start, JPHRO implemented a philosophy of dialogue, of offering camp residents a choice of options, and of framing communication work as an opportunity for camp residents to ask questions and discuss their circumstances.

This approach initially centred on a system of 14 staffed 'information kiosks', combined with community mobilisers and megaphone announcements in areas of the camp implicated in the Corail move. Staff in the kiosks were provided with guidelines on answering questions and instructed to take notes of any questions they couldn't answer along with mobile numbers. These were discussed at daily debriefs with JPHRO leadership, which also ensured that issues raised by residents were fed straight back into the organisation's decision making.

While the full kiosk system was too labour intensive to maintain outside of this specific move, and also not necessary, JPHRO retained and refined the kiosk principle. They scaled back to five, but would upscale again if necessary. They also found that a static approach was insufficient, so while they now have 24 dedicated information staff, they combine presence at kiosks with tent-to-tent outreach and informal discussions with residents. The community mobilisers help to identify vulnerable people and connect them to the protection team. They also identify residents whose shelters are damaged or who need other assistance, as well as check if repairs have been carried out. Information staff complete a form when they receive complaints or find issues, and debrief senior management regularly. JPHRO also uses information boards and written information to combat persistent rumours.¹

JPHRO found that expectation management and staying ahead of rumours were key challenges. "Perceptions are much more important than reality," said one staff member. "It is vital we make sure perceptions are rooted in reality. If you have an area where 500 people decide that something we are doing is holding them back – in their minds it is, and then we have a problem." When it became evident that camp residents were increasingly looking to JPHRO to provide goods and services, the organisation realised that expectation management had to be addressed more aggressively. In addition the volume of information was such that the system needed strengthening. Another major challenge was related to sharing information about the return process, something addressed by inviting camp residents to discuss their circumstances with dedicated staff.

JPHRO is now implementing approaches that include assigning staff to specific sections of the camp, and introducing a newsletter to strengthen information dissemination. An additional need is to

¹ For example, displaying a letter throughout the camp stating that there would be no food distributions when rumours began that more were planned.

extend communication to the community in Delmas 32, where most Petionville Club residents lived before the earthquake and to which they will be returning. JPHRO has also worked closely with other NGOs operating in the camp, such as Médecins Sans Frontières, who have their own outreach staff. Given the size and complexity of the camp, staff found that maintaining a comprehensive system for information sharing and feedback was essential to maintaining the relationship with residents. JPHRO allocated around 10 percent of its camp coordination budget to communication. “The amount of time that is invested in communication and conversation, especially when it comes to relocation is quite substantial,” said one senior staff member. “This investment is crucial,” said another. “It is time consuming but essential to our entire operation.”