

## Case study: SAKS, BHN and the Community Address System

The Haitian group, *Sosyete Animasyon ak Kominikasyon Sosyal* (SAKS) and Japanese NGO, Basic Human Needs (BHN) began the Community Address System (CAS) as a disaster risk reduction early warning system across 13 camps in Leogane<sup>1</sup>, west of the Haitian capital, Port au Prince. The original concept was to install loudspeakers and sirens in the camps to ensure that warnings about hurricanes or other hazards could be quickly and easily shared with the whole community.

The model consisted of a series of speakers mounted on solar power streetlights, controlled by a central unit containing a control box, an AM receiver and a microphone. The solar panels provided energy for the lights, the speaker and the whole system so that it was not dependent on any other power source. In addition to hurricane alerts, the project also included on-site facilitators drawn from the local community who helped community leaders to use the system and ensure that important information was broadcast.

Since the first CAS had been established in August 2010, however, communities had found many innovative and interesting ways to use the system. They used it to broadcast radio<sup>2</sup> and community announcements such as births, engagements, marriages, deaths, and to alert residents to the start of meetings and other community events. Community mobilisers used it to share information about cholera and other illnesses. Organisations announced vaccination services or other forms of assistance through the system.

“The system was originally established about 500 metres away, where the old camp was. It has been here since August and everyone loves it. When the camp was dismantled and we received t-shelters here, the community liked the system so much they dismantled it and rebuilt it here,” says community leader Willy Petit-Homme. “People like the music too – life in the camps is boring. That’s the other reason we play the radio. We sound the siren before we use the microphone to make an announcement so everyone knows to listen. This one unit can reach about 550 people. If it breaks we will find a way to fix it.”

In a different camp visited by infoasaid, residents explained they used the microphone during meetings so the whole camp could listen. “We use it sometimes during important meetings – people take it in turns to speak with the microphone and that way the meeting is shared with everyone even if they don’t come. If new people come to the camp, especially foreigners, if they have something to say or a new project to propose, we give them the microphone,” explained one committee member. “It makes us feel more secure knowing that the system is there – we know that when there is another hurricane we will be able to use it to spread information.”

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<sup>1</sup> Leogane was close to the epicentre of the January 12<sup>th</sup> earthquake.

<sup>2</sup> One camp visited specified Signal FM for news and the Canadian Red Cross show on Radio Belval because it was about Leogane.



Another camp resident also said she appreciated the system. “I have a radio but sometimes I don’t have a battery so I come to the camp to listen to the shows because it’s a nice distraction. Other people from villages around also come to listen to the radio here. It’s good because people can listen wherever they are – they can stay home, or stay doing their work, and still get the information.”

Both camps also appreciated the streetlamps, saying that the light was really important as it got very dark in the camp at night, and that children sat underneath them to do their homework.

Both camps described the CAS as the single most important piece of assistance they had received since the earthquake on January 12<sup>th</sup>.

