

Case study: CDAC Haiti and cholera research

Shortly after the outbreak of cholera in October 2010, Communications with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Haiti initiated a multi-agency process to survey levels of knowledge of cholera, and of its prevention and treatment. Organisations felt that they needed indicators on information needs around the disease.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Internews all participated in the development of a questionnaire and a focus group model. Staff from all organisations carried out the fieldwork in five locations across the Port au Prince metropolitan area, surveying 1,678 participants.

The survey was basic and the area covered limited to the capital, but crucially the data was analysed and released fast, with findings available to organisations within two months of the start of the outbreak. Organisations working on outreach were therefore able to act on the results quickly. When survey data revealed that 63 percent of respondents did not know where their nearest cholera treatment centre was, for example, UNOPS began making sure that all community mobilisers were provided with details, including phone numbers, of the centres nearest to their area of operation, and actively promoted this information.

In the months that followed many cholera treatment centres closed, changed location or new ones opened. In addition, Oral Rehydration Posts were set up. The location of these different emergency health facilities was considered to be life-saving information, and CDAC Haiti continued relaying updated details to all network partners so that they would have the correct information to give to the population.

Several organisations such as Médecins du Monde, Concern and HelpAge used the survey's questionnaire to monitor and evaluate their own projects. The results helped the Ministry of Public Health and the Health Cluster and Hygiene Promotion Sub Cluster to readapt messaging to fill the knowledge gaps identified.

The survey was also used to inform strategic planning on how best to reach Haitians with cholera messages. For instance, coupled with other sources of information¹, the survey's findings were used to develop a training programme for radio journalists on cholera so that they could have informed discussions with callers.

¹ Such as OCHA regional assessments and feedback from hygiene promotion actors.