

Case study: CDAC Haiti and the *Koute Ayiti* caravan

The *Koute Ayiti* caravan project (*Kreyol* for ‘Listen to Haiti’) was developed by Communications with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Haiti to address several systemic gaps in communication. The first was the lack of opportunities for earthquake survivors to hear in person from responders, and to debate and discuss key issues. The second was the lack of opportunities for survivors to make their voices heard, and the third was the extent to which communication work at the time¹ was focussed in the capital, Port au Prince, marginalising those elsewhere.

The concept was a travelling event, which included debates, Q&A sessions with aid workers and local authorities in the afternoon, followed by music, street theatre, dance and comedy in the evenings. From the start the project was a collective effort, led by CDAC Haiti and the Ministry of Culture and Communication², with 17 local and international organisations participating. Event management was outsourced to a local company, and Haitian performers were also hired for the evening section. As well as promoting information exchange about earthquake, the caravan was also used as a platform to provide access to information and services about more general issues, such as gender-based violence, sanitation and HIV. Confidential HIV testing and counselling services were provided on site each night by a local organisation, with around 200 people on average undergoing testing. The caravan travelled to eight locations, including St Marc in Artibonite, an area unaffected by the earthquake but home to a large percentage of those displaced and later the epicentre of the cholera outbreak. In-country media coverage was encouraged. The project was also covered extensively on *Enformasyon Nou Dwe Konnen* – ENDK (*Kreyol* for ‘News You Can Use’) – a daily humanitarian news and information programme produced by media development organisation, Internews, which took questions from the audiences every night and ran special editions of their mailbox section.

Funding for the project came from CDAC Haiti, which also coordinated the participation of the organisations and Haitian authorities involved. Management of the caravan and logistics were outsourced to *Konesans Fanmi se Lepwa Timoun* (Family Knowledge is Children’s Hope), who had a long track record of organising roadshows and included doctors and social workers to manage on-site HIV testing.

Feedback and monitoring and evaluation interviews conducted by the Internews team at two events suggest the caravan was welcomed with considerable enthusiasm by audiences, who especially welcomed the chance to ask questions. According to the report from the event in Champs de Mars in Port au Prince, “Participants in the debate showed much interest in the topics discussed. Whenever a person requests the floor they pose two or three questions, all deemed relevant by the panelists. The moderator had to take the floor to say that we can accept only one issue to enable a

¹ July 2010

² The Ministry of Public Health and DPC were also involved.

larger number of participants to intervene. Interviewed one by one, nearly two dozen participants said the discussion was very interesting.”

Others, however, commented that for some it wasn't as relevant to their situation living in a camp as they had wanted. “It isn't that the debate isn't interesting at all, but you know, when you have other more pressing concerns it's really hard to concentrate on other things,” said one. “I came in the hope that there was some information about our situation here in the camp.”

On the entertainment side, many interviewees in Champs de Mars said they hoped there would be more such events. Most could recall at least one piece of information shared during the event. In Leogane, where the afternoon debate focussed on medical issues, questions were asked about HIV transmission and malaria, and particularly about childhood diarrhoea. Several participants also said they wanted to talk about conditions in the camps and to complain. Researchers who talked to audience members afterwards noted that all those they interviewed after the debate seemed satisfied. One commented, “It is a very interesting programme, in this kind of debate we can learn valuable information and save our lives.” Feedback in Leogane also recorded 100 percent approval of the debate. The evening event attracted many people, with the comedy performances (which also focussed on health) particularly popular.

The feedback from attendees clearly illustrated the demand for information from earthquake survivors and their appreciation of such projects. It also revealed their frustration at the unavailability of hard information, particularly about plans for the camps and highly localised information relevant to the living conditions of those in individual camps.

From an organisational perspective, the value of providing a common platform and an opportunity to reach people outside Port au Prince was clear from the number of agencies that participated. Without the leadership and small amount of funding³ from CDAC Haiti, however, it is unlikely that the *Koute Ayiti* caravan would have happened. Many other organisations expressed interest in replicating the model, particularly after the cholera outbreak, but at the time of writing had yet to do so.

³ The project cost US\$25,000.