

Media and Communications Advisor

of the Shelter Coordination Team (SCT)

The SCT is a flexible team, deployed by the IFRC to coordinate the Shelter Cluster in response to natural disasters during the emergency phase.

Its composition varies upon the size and needs of a disaster, ranging from a 2 to 20 person team. The key roles of the SCT include the following:

- Cluster coordinator
- Information manager
- Technical coordinator
- Recovery advisor

Additional roles can be deployed as required.

Background

The shelter coordination team (SCT) has a number of key roles that are deployed each time a Shelter Cluster is activated in response to a disaster. There are a number of additional positions, such as the media and communications advisor, which can be deployed depending on the size and needs of the disaster. The following case study aims to explain the main role of the media and communications advisor, key activities related to this role, and its impact for the Shelter Cluster.



The media and communications advisor, Mark South, is interviewed by a correspondent from Al-Jazeera in Haiti, 2010.

The role of the media and communications advisor

Media and communications are powerful tools for education, empowerment and engagement. The role of the media and communications advisor is to maximize these opportunities for the Shelter Cluster, by providing a number of communications resources for beneficiaries, shelter agencies, external partners and donors.

Within the SCT, the media and communications advisor works with team members – particularly the information management staff for facts and figures – and liaises between shelter agencies in order to consolidate messaging and information on the shelter response. The advisor then uses the information to provide key communications

tools for beneficiaries, the media, donors and other partners external to the Shelter Cluster, in order to advocate and give visibility to the work of shelter agencies. The advisor also serves as a media spokesperson for the Shelter Cluster, interviewing with local and international journalists, and linking them directly with shelter agencies.

Main activities

Depending on the context and type of response, the media and communications advisor provides various communications tools as follows:

Internal communications

- **Contact lists** outlining communications focal points in each shelter agency are tailored for local and international journalists. They provide a direct and efficient method for the media to reach first-hand information in the field. The contact lists serve as a critical resource for journalists, and help shelter agencies gain greater visibility.
- **The Question and Answer/ Key messages** document is a useful tool for shelter agencies. The document is updated on a regular basis, with the objective of streamlining information for interviews with international and national media, in order to provide a consistent and consolidated overview of the Shelter Cluster's response.

Media relations

- **Media monitoring** of international and local news serves allows the advisor to be aware of the issues journalists are addressing, which enables him/her to develop appropriate messaging. It is also an indicator of interest in shelter issues, and the level of visibility shelter agencies are receiving. At a local level, media monitoring helps identify gaps in beneficiary communications, while at an international level it allows the advisor to identify which news agencies are present in-country. Media monitoring is also a vital information tool that can be useful if there is handover for another media and communications advisor.
- A **'media section' of the Shelter Cluster website** managed by the media and communications advisor provides a forum to host films and news articles about shelter and the work of shelter agencies, in addition to relevant contact information for the SCT. This communications tool is geared towards national and international journalists, shelter agencies and the general public.
- **Press releases** disseminated at strategic moments can clarify the position of the Shelter Cluster, or make an important, specific announcement to the media.

Information and advocacy

- **Information updates** provide an opportunity to share up-to-date facts and figures and key messages on the overall shelter response, increasing the visibility of shelter agencies and their achievements to external and internal agencies as well as donors.
- **Advocacy messages** developed in partnership with the SCT provide a consolidated outline on the needs and direction of the shelter response. The messages target donors, but also serve external agencies and partners.

188,383 DESTROYED OR SERIOUSLY DAMAGED HOUSES IN HAITI

SHELTER IN HAITI

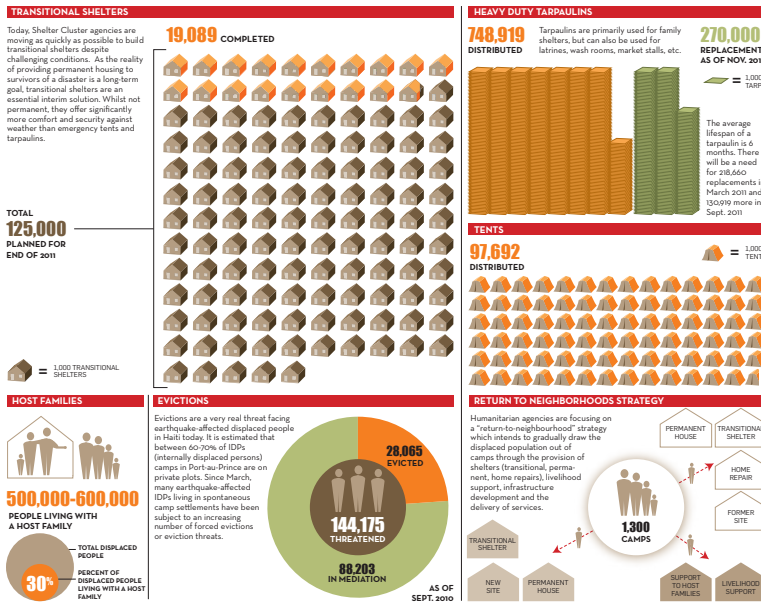
1,500,000 PEOPLE NEED SHELTER ASSISTANCE

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI generated a disaster in a country already deep in a humanitarian crisis. According to UNDP's Human Development Index 2009, Haiti was listed 140 out of 182 nations, making it the poorest country in the western hemisphere. In 2009, approximately 58% of the population lacked access to clean water, 40% of households did not have access to adequate food, and more than half the informal settlements in Port-au-Prince were located in ravines and gullies and were susceptible to inundation.

ACHIEVEMENTS

AS OF NOVEMBER 2010
MEMBERS OF THE SHELTER AND NON-FOOD-ITEMS CLUSTER have delivered vital aid to the estimated 1.5 million people who were directly affected by the earthquake. Despite a destroyed port, a severely damaged airport and a lack of infrastructure, cluster members reached an average of 100,000 people per week in the first four months of the response operation. Each family received two tarpaulins or one tent. In the following months, with over 19,000 transitional shelters constructed, shelter agencies have reached over 2.6 million individuals.



THE CHALLENGES



THE WAY FORWARD



The infographic was created to provide an overview on the Shelter Cluster response in Haiti, 2010.

■ The Shelter Cluster 'infographic' is a visual, comprehensive document created for the media, the Shelter Cluster and donors. It provides an overview of the achievements, challenges and long-term goals of the Shelter Cluster. It illustrates the complexities of the response in an attractive manner that is easy to understand.

■ Twitter is a resource for sharing information and interacting with internal and external partners, local and international journalists, and the general public. The SCT uses Twitter to share updates, and highlight shelter-related news in the media.

Beneficiary communications

Together with the support of the SCT, shelter agencies and local journalists, the media and communications advisor takes the lead in developing various beneficiary communications tools and platforms:

■ Shelter messaging for beneficiaries can address key shelter issues such as, "how do I obtain a shelter?" or, "is my house safe to live in?" They are disseminated by radio and print, among other means. The messaging ensures beneficiaries are incorporated

into the response and have a clear understanding on the processes of shelter agencies.

- **Round-table discussions** between local representatives of shelter agencies and local journalists provide a forum to openly discuss shelter programmes and goals. It not only makes shelter agencies more accessible to the local community, but it also improves understanding on their work to the affected community.
- **Field tours** for local journalists to visit shelter agencies provides first-hand information; it allows journalists to have an inside perspective on the work of shelter agencies, along with an opportunity to directly ask questions and interview beneficiaries.
- **Surveys in camps** led by local journalists (guided by the media and communications advisor) provide an opportunity for beneficiaries to express their needs, concerns and opinions on the shelter response. The findings of the survey can be used to improve the work of shelter agencies and other cluster partners.

Complaint mechanisms

When communicating with beneficiaries, it is important to consider using complaint mechanisms for the affected population to provide feedback. However, shelter agencies must be prepared to receive and respond to inquiries and demands.

Examples of complaint mechanisms include a 'hotline' for beneficiaries to call and receive direct answers to questions, or an 'information centre' including a mailbox for written inquiries, and a board for information and responses.

For additional information and a list of available resources related to beneficiary communications, please consult the SCT's Beneficiary Communications Guide.

Impact

- Communicating in disasters can be as vital as aid itself for an affected population. Providing resources for beneficiary communications serves both beneficiaries and local communities by allowing them to be involved in the response process. It enables shelter agencies to understand their needs, improves beneficiaries' understanding on the work of humanitarian agencies, and complements efforts of agencies as they provide aid.
- The role of the advisor as a media spokesperson increases the visibility of the Shelter Cluster. Journalists are aware of the advisor's presence as a reliable resource for concise and consolidated information. The advisor also alleviates pressure on the SCT to spend time interviewing with journalists, thereby allowing the team to remain focused on their specific roles and responsibilities.
- Shelter agencies have valued the support provided by the media and communications advisor in previous deployments. Whether it is streamlining messaging for the media or initiating a round-table discussion with local journalists, the coordination at a macro-level strengthens their efforts in the overall shelter response.



For further information,
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www.ifrc.org
Saving lives, changing minds.



For more on the Humanitarian Reform, the role of the IFRC as convener of the Shelter Cluster and the SCT, please visit www.sheltercluster.org