**Remote Field Crisis Management**

Session Title: 1.4 Working with the Media

Duration: 120 minutes (plus a break)

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| **Aim of the session** | | To provide learners with the theoretical tools to manage communications and media during a security incident. | |
| **Objectives:**  By the end of this session participants will be able to:   * List most important external and internal audiences * Explain what is part of and draft a basic crisis communications plan. * Determine how to manage media and social media during a security incident. | | | |
| **Key Learning points:**   * Managing communications, especially media and controlling information, is a crucial aspect of crisis incident management to ensure the safety of affected staff and to safeguard reputation. * Security incidents make news. * Local, regional and international media must be closely monitored, especially social media. * Media works globally, and it is very likely that social media will pick up your security incident first. * Preparation for managing communications during security incidents is key – but there is no blueprint as every situation differs. * Clear guidelines on spokespeople, protocols and a strategy on communications help you prepare and react. * We need to manage information and adapt communications for different audiences and scenarios. | | | |
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| **Timing** | **What to do and say *(methodology)*** | | **What you need *(resources)*** |
| 20’ | **Introduction: Communications during a crisis**  Ask: “Who do we need communicate with (and why) during a security incident, for example abduction of staff?” List on flipchart.  Debrief using **Slide 2**, highlighting that communications should all be FOR specific audiences: Journalists are looking for different information than the police. You communicate differently with staff than you would with the media.  Staff: need to know what had happened, what their roles are, what they should do in case media calls, need counseling as well if they were friends with affected staff, avoid rumors  Donors: need to know what happens to their project  Media: Need information to publish news. However, remember that media is an audience – but also a tool. It is never your goal to have media as an audience per se – you want to reach someone through the media. So consider who is your audience behind the media! Most often it’s the groups that hold your staff hostage.  Partners: Need to know what your strategy is in order to follow it. Might be helpful to solve crisis.  Embassies: Might have a very different (communications) strategy than you. Sometimes it is their goal to show their national media what they are doing, want to be seen as rescuers, while your strategy might be to keep a low media profile.  Beneficiaries: need to be informed if this security incidents affects changes in emergency response, might be helpful to solve crisis and/or act as interlocutor, might have relevant information  Police/Government: Could have their own agenda, might even be involved.  Family/friends: need counseling and support, could talk to media and get frustrated if they do not see us resolving crisis.  Show **Slide 3** and explain that if the drop in the water is your incident, the ripples are the media audiences.  Prioritizing audiences: View audiences as concentric circles, for example when dropping a drop of water. Those ripples closest to where the drop falls into the water are the most important audiences and must be managed accordingly.  Explain that we are going to prioritise journalists, donors (social media users), staff during this session and treat them as the most important audiences.  Work through **Slide 4**, explaining that a typical communications/media plan will identify the main audiences and how we will communicate with them. And, on a typical day at a typical NGO, these functions may be covered by staff in the HQ or country offices.  Ask the group: If there is a crisis, how might the answers to some of these questions change?  Answers:  Audience: You would have a local audience, for example Syrian journalists, which need to be handled locally. A media strategy for Syrian journalists might differ than an international one. For example, you could find it helpful to rally local media behind your cause, put up pressure to release abducted staff, for example, while you would prefer a more reactive strategy for international media.  Spokesperson: You would need a local Syrian spokesperson, as well as one in HQ.  Language/words: need to reflect and respect local context, traditions, culture  Social media: might be more effective to monitor locally  Media monitoring/interviews: spokesperson, either locally or at HQ need to inform media focal point about the interviews they did and maintain a spread sheet of all interviews  Remind them to include communications in crisis management teams and that comms needs to be considered from the beginning. Reiterate the importance of planning ahead and preparing for security incidents. | |  |
| 15’ | **Who are the Media?**  Ask: Why do security incidents make news?” Take a few responses.  Use **Slide 5** to explain that, nowadays, it is not a question of IF security incidents make news, but WHEN they’ll make the news.  Ask: “Why might this be a problem?”  Write answers on flip charts. Make sure they the following are listed and explain the reasons:   * safety of staff (captors’ perception of hostage and his/her ‘value), * reputational risk, * donor perception of crisis (example: people gave enormously for Philippines storms but very little for Syria. Why? Perceptions about money not reaching the needy in Syria).   Use **Slide 6** to explain basic rules how media work and who they are.   * The single objective of the media is not necessarily the vehicle to inform the public- they are here to sell papers or get ratings * It’s a crowded space, while often news will breed news, all media outlets are looking for something different, exclusive, breaking. Especially in the age of 24-hour news. Deadlines are minutes or hours. Deadlines make for angry, stressed people!! Don’t be put off; journos aren’t trying to be rude, but they are often on deadline and need the information NOW. * They are experts in researching, always looking for new angles, i.e. they use Facebook, Twitter etc to get their information. Or they call our partners to get quotes – so we need to inform everyone working with us and keep them updated on our media strategy. * TV and radio are still the main choice of news, and in most countries, newspaper readership is in decline. Social media and online media move more quickly than we’re used to, so we need to be fast. For example, within minutes of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, people were posting updates on Twitter. * Newsrooms are cutting jobs. Reporters now have multiple “beats”, so you are not dealing with a reporter who focuses on development or emergencies; they cover everything. There are fewer international correspondents. Many media use freelancers, who will not fully understand our business or the need for us to hold off information if the safety of our staff is at stake.   There are differences on how media works in each country, there are also differences between national, regional, international news. Use **Slide 7** to explain the basic characteristics of most media stories, regardless to country or levelExplain that a good media story has at least one of those five elements. A crisis often touches several points: it could be very ‘emotional’ and compelling (i.e. abduction of staff) and it is certainly ‘relevant’ (the Syria conflict makes headlines around the world).  Ask participants to discuss in buzz groups about some of the particularities of the media in their organizational environments. Give them about five minutes and ask for responses. In the pilot course in Syria, there are several particularities of the media there:   * no independent international media as too dangerous * local media is distorted * social media major vehicle to spread news, which makes it very difficult for international media to verify facts about Syria crisis – and easy to get rumors spread. * Citizen journalism vs. traditional journalism   Tell recent story from Pakistan (**Slide 8**), where the Taliban murdered three journalists and negotiated a deal with the newspaper for whom they were working for to get major coverage.  “Not long after, while the bodies of the slain still lay under white sheets, TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan called in to the channel to take responsibility for the shooting: "*Express* TV, like a lot of other Pakistani media outlets, is acting as propagandists against the Pakistani Taliban," he said in an attempt to justify the attack on live TV. What happened next was even more astonishing: *Express* anchor Javed Chaudhry began to negotiate a sort of informal peace settlement with the TTP, offering coverage on demand in exchange for security. “  <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/06/taliban_express_pakistan_journalism_murder> | |  |
| 20’ | **Communications during a crisis**  **Slide 9:** In a crisis incident, the first goal is to protect the safety of staff (i.e. during a kidnapping) or to protect your organization’s reputation (i.e. discovering aid diversion).  The media/communications strategy should always supplement the overall security/program strategy, i.e. if it is the strategy to rally local support for the release of an abducted staff, you target relevant local media with specific messages.  In general, a low profile is advised, therefore the objective of your communications strategy will likely be:   * Keep media profile low and media coverage limited * Control information flow   Explain that as part of your strategy you need to decide whether you are reactive (see above) or pro-active for certain scenarios. Discuss what the differences might be:  Reactive = reacting to events in media (i.e. media breaks the news of security incident) or when approached by media  Proactive = actively publishing news, i.e. pushing for the release of aid worker after kidnapping, demonstrating your neutrality to involved armed groups, communicating with involved groups  Divide the group in half. Ask each side of the room to work in small buzz groups and discuss:   1. One half: In a crisis, why might we choose a reactive media strategy? 2. Other half: In a crisis, why might we choose a proactive media strategy?   Give the buzz groups a few minutes to discuss. Debrief with each of the groups and use **Slide 10** to clarify.  In general, you want to be reactive (i.e. only sending out statements as reaction to something), but this can change depending on what happens.  Remember, it is your goal to ensure the safety of staff or protect your organization’s reputation, therefore your approach must reflect that!  It is generally recommended to send out a short statement as soon as the security incident hits the media, so you switch from a passive to a reactive approach. As long as the media/ social media has not published the fact of a security incident, stay silent. Don’t be the one breaking the news to the media. However, be prepared when it hits. Nowadays, it is not the question IF the incident will make news, but rather WHEN. As soon as the media reports, react with publishing a statement. But be strategic about it, for example if it is only published in local news, publish your statement in local news. If it goes global, target all relevant major media outlets. Try to control information flow, publicise news yourself rather than others doing it – and avoid spreading rumors. 🡪 Importance of media monitoring!  Sometimes it is necessary to call media to ask them to stop reporting or to hold off the message for a while.  Focus your key message on the humanitarian aspect (but be aware of sensitivities, i.e. women’s empowerment in certain extreme Islamist environments)! Always show sympathy. But don’t give away any other relevant information that the media might not have yet. Never give details of how you are trying to resolve the crisis. Never give details of staff identity without permission from family. Don’t make any promises, i.e. ‘Our staff will be free soon’.  Use media as ‘partner’, often the do understand why you keep certain information. Be proactive ‘behind the doors’, ask them for information they might have gotten during their research. But be aware of the risks!  Consider nationality of press and how a crisis affecting certain staff could be relevant (i.e British national 🡪 British media)  Use **Slide 11** to emphasise that, whatever strategy(ies) you choose, make sure that your partners know and understand your approach! | | Flipchart and markers |
| 10’ | **Dos and Don’t when handling media requests**  Show **Slide 12,** distribute Handout 1 and discuss | |  |
| 15’ | **Further tips: spokespersons, language and social media**  Spokespersons, **Slide 13**  Ask if anyone ever acted as spokesperson. Was it as a Spokesperson as part of a crisis response?  Who is spokesperson in Syria vs. team in Turkey? Discuss the importance of having a spokesperson in-country in the FCMT, one person to handle all interviews with the local Syrian media. Can be the same person as the media/communications officer/ focal point but does not need to be. But be clear about the fact that most media *statements* will originate from the country office or the HQ, based on information they get from you in-country. Under most circumstances, the FCMT should not make any media statements that have not been approved by the CMT.    Mention the importance of media training! If they have not identified a media spokesperson for their organization in-country, do so and make sure they get trained.  Language  Words matter. Work through **Slide 14.**  Consider which words to use – in English, Arabic and Turkish 🡪 especially if you speak or draft statements in a language that is not your native one.  Social and digita media **Slide 15**   * Social media serves different audiences and it’s very likely that the information regarding security incidents will spread on Twitter first. Explain that journalists use social media, i.e. Twitter to gather information. Explain when and how to react. Explain importance on monitoring social media channels around the clock and need for quick reaction. This is where rumours are spread! * In case of abduction, remember to check your staff social media profiles – this is where media can get private information. Make sure your staff are aware of this and have their agreement and passwords to close their sites in extreme cases. Check with your HR teams how to best handle this. * Chase down Twitter or Facebook account holders to convince people to stop tweeting about the incident – time intensive! * Removing social media posts can also look as if you have something to hide, plus it is not easy to do. * Social media policies help setting a basis for how the organisation, but also staff, uses social media. There is a thin line between using social media privately and professionally – as a person working for an NGO you always represent that NGO. * Try to use social media for your organisation’s benefit, i.e. highlighting the good humanitarian work you do. * A while ago, a staffer of an INGO was abducted in Somalia by Al-Shabaab. The then killed the person and tweeted live about this to all their followers. The organization got this news through following the Al Shabaab Twitter account. So social media monitoring is crucial. * Remember also to look at your website, social media channels and take down any sensitive/contradictory information | |  |
| 30’ | **Groupwork**  Break group into either three or six groups, depending on size. Distribute the three **1.5 Scenarios for participants** across the groups (if six groups, you’ll have three groups that share the same scenario).  Explain that there are always different scenarios of how a security incident can unfold. There are three scenarios of critical incidents. Give them 15 minutes to discuss (**Slide 16**):   * How would you handle the media request? * Would you be pro-active or reactive? * What support would you need from the country office or the CMT? * How would you handle social media?   Debrief. | | 1.5 Scenarios (facilitators notes)  1.5 Scenarios (for participants) |
| 10’ | **Close**  Close with **Slides 17 & 18**  Other people may have their own connections to media (such as the family!).  In this example, a family has created their own Twitter site about their abducted family member. Remember that families might want to talk to media and that they should be advised of consequences, receive media support and should know what to say about your organisation. There is potential for frustration and they might raise this with media. Ensure that family does hear news from you first, not from the media. We will discuss family a bit more in the following session.  Staff and partners need to know that they should refrain from mentioning security incidents on social media and who to contact in case of media requests. However, make sure staff are kept in the loop (some of them are certainly close friends or even family of affected staff) and receive adequate information – internal communication is crucial.  And finally, remember that even after a security incident is over, the media coverage may continue! | |  |

**Supporting information for facilitators:**