

Unit 7 highlights the importance of selecting an appropriate channel mix for a communication response and describes **five categories of communication channels**: mass media, mid media, print media, social and digital media and interpersonal communication (IPC). For each of these channels, advantages and disadvantages have been listed, as well as situations in which different channels may be used.

Although this Unit has attempted to differentiate the channels and their uses for simplicity, there is recognition that channels frequently overlap and may be effective for achieving similar objectives. This is why the match between channel, audience and communication objective is important.

This unit provides some tools to help assess available and functioning channels during an emergency, as well as those that are more appropriate for reaching specific audience segments. Once you have completed this unit, you will have the following tools to support the development of your SBCC response:

- [Worksheet 7.1: Assessing Available Communication Channels](#)
- [Worksheet 7.2: Matching Communication Channels to Primary and Influencing Audiences](#)

### What Is a Communication Channel?

A communication channel is a medium or method used to deliver a message to the intended audience. A variety of communication channels exist, and examples include:

- **Mass media** such as television, radio (including community radio) and newspapers
- **Mid media** activities, also known as traditional or folk media such as participatory theater, public talks, announcements through megaphones and community-based surveillance
- **Print media**, such as posters, flyers and leaflets
- **Social and digital media** such as mobile phones, applications and social media
- **IPC**, such as door-to-door visits, phone lines and discussion groups

Different channels are appropriate for different audiences, and the choice of channel will depend on the audience being targeted, the messages being delivered and the context of the emergency. Using a variety of channels or a channel mix, is recommended so that messages can be reinforced through multiple sources.

Find more information on communication channels can be found at <http://www.thehealthcompass.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-channel-mix-plan>.

### Why are Communication Channels Important?

Communication channels are the means by which a program can reach its audiences with key messages during an emergency. They are therefore an essential component of SBCC programming; however, their effectiveness will depend on a careful selection process, based on the intended audiences' habits and preferences. Selecting a mix of appropriate and accessible channels will increase the likelihood of the audiences hearing and seeing the communication messages.

## Key Steps for Effectively Choosing Communication Channels

1. Assess Available Channels
2. Match Available Channels with Intended Audiences

### Assess Available Channels

The first step in selecting the channels for your communication response involves knowing what channels are available and accessible to the intended audience. A range of communication channels may exist, with some being more accessible than others depending on the context and situation. Broadly speaking, communication channels can be divided into the five main categories previously mentioned:

1. Mass Media
2. Mid Media (also known as “traditional” or “folk” media)
3. Print Media
4. Digital and Social Media
5. IPC

Each of these channel categories is described in detail later in this section, and a **Communication Channel Quick Reference** is included in the Appendix.

In addition, community mobilization (discussed in **Unit 3**) is an approach that can use several of the above communication channels, such as mid media and IPC, to engage all sectors of the community to prompt individual, family and community action. More information about the important role that community mobilization has in emergency communication, and about how it can be used, can be found in **Unit 3: Community Mobilization**.

### Telephone Help Lines

A special mention needs to be made with regards to telephone lines, which, in this I-Kit, are considered a separate channel category due to their versatility and the peculiarities of their uses. Phone lines can be hotlines or “warm lines,” meaning that they can be used for emergency purposes to supply essential information (hotlines) or for more in-depth answers to general questions and for support (warm lines).

They have the advantage of being easily accessible in countries with a good phone infrastructure, and can replace the use of health facilities for issues that are stigmatized, such as Ebola. Phone lines can also be helpful tools for monitoring and surveillance, providing a source of public health surveillance data that can help detect epidemics and monitor the evolution of the outbreak.

In the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 and early 2015, phone lines proved to be useful tools for disease surveillance and the dissemination of essential information.

**Table 11** on the next page provides information and key actions to consider in regards to phone lines and their different uses during the different phases of an emergency.

**Table 11: Information and Key Actions to Consider In Regards to Phone Lines**

Emergency Phase	Action	Phone Line Uses
<b>Pre-crisis</b>	<p>Conduct an assessment of telephone services and relevant infrastructure within the country. This will allow the quick activation of the phone line at the onset of the emergency. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone services</li> <li>• Infrastructure and equipment</li> <li>• Location and staffing</li> <li>• Partner engagement and roles</li> <li>• Guidelines on manning the phone lines</li> <li>• Monitoring of calls, data collection and questions received</li> <li>• For known and expected emergencies, develop a series of key messages with essential information (symptoms, treatment and prevention)</li> </ul>	<p>At this stage no operational phone line is likely to be needed.</p>
<b>Initial Phase</b>	<p>Activate the phone line immediately. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing together partners</li> <li>• Reviewing/developing essential key messages</li> <li>• Training and deploying identified staff</li> <li>• Putting in place supervision and quality assurance mechanisms</li> <li>• Collecting and monitoring data from the calls</li> <li>• Communicating to the general public the existence and uses of the phone line</li> </ul>	<p>Hotlines provide essential, lifesaving information to callers either through trained callers or recorded messages. Monitoring the calls received is a surveillance tool that gives insights into the evolution of the emergency.</p> <p>Health service providers and community mobilizers can use the hotline to alert regional and national health services about emergency cases.</p>
<b>Maintenance</b>	<p>Continue manning the existing phone lines and review information provided by personnel to ensure it continues to respond to the needs of callers. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing messages if necessary</li> <li>• Assessing whether a support/counseling service is necessary</li> <li>• Conducting further training of staff</li> <li>• Reviewing surveillance data collected from calls</li> </ul>	<p>A hotline may still be necessary as there may be pockets in the country that are still severely affected by the emergency. However, there may also be a need to start introducing a warm line to provide more in-depth information to callers, as well as support and counseling, if required.</p>
<b>Resolution</b>	<p>Review the uses of the phone line and assess whether to turn it exclusively into a warm line or reduce the size of the team and phone lines. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing data from calls</li> <li>• Assessing staffing needs</li> <li>• Conduct training for staff on counseling</li> <li>• Providing support and supervision to staff</li> </ul>	<p>At this point, it is likely that, although the emergency is under control, individuals are still emotionally affected by what they have experienced. In this phase, a warm line providing support and counseling will be needed.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p>Review all areas of the phone line mechanism to assess its effectiveness and areas of improvement. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speed at which it was activated</li> <li>• Staffing capacity and skills training</li> <li>• Trends in number of call and types of calls</li> <li>• Need for maintaining a smaller warm line to continue providing support to those who survived the emergency</li> </ul>	<p>A warm line to provide ongoing support to survivors of the emergency and to act as a surveillance tool to detect potential new outbreaks.</p>

## Advance Preparation

Knowing what channels exist and are currently functioning is essential in determining the channel mix of any SBCC campaign. During an emergency response, however, time constraints may limit the ability to assess what communication opportunities exist and how audiences wish to receive information. It is therefore recommended that such scoping work be carried out in advance.

Moreover, some approaches that are known to be effective in emergency settings, such as channels that garner trust and promote two-way communication between the community and service providers, require time to set up. Having knowledge of mobilizer networks in advance would greatly help the development of an effective and rapid communication response.

If an assessment of channels is done in advance, the programmer will then only need to focus on how the audience's media landscape and habits may have changed as a result of the emergency.



### Tips for Assessing the Media Landscape

When conducting an initial assessment of the media landscape and available communication channels for the emergency response:

- Refer to the information you gathered through the rapid needs assessment and audience analysis (**Units 2, 4 and 5**) to **review the audiences' preferences and habits**.
- **Keep your intended audience(s) in mind** and obtain information about the channels that have been used to successfully reach them in the past. This should be based on past impact, audience needs and preferences, as well as channel availability.
- **Obtain information from national and international partners** working on emergency response as well as organizations and agencies working in media and communication. The worksheets in **Unit 1: Coordination and Mapping** should help you identify partners in the media and communication sector. Examples of sources of information on media and communication include local television, radio stations (both national and community radio), press offices, advertising agencies and published media analysis studies. Gather this information at government-run meetings so the information you gather is representative of the national context.
- Consider approaching local and international organizations working in the field to **obtain data about IPC channels**. Examples include program reports, clinic-based data and government statistics.
- **Verify that identified channels are functioning**. For example, radio may be an effective channel with a large listenership, but programming may only happen if and when fuel is available for the generator.
- **Consider channels both at the national and local level**. In some countries, regional differences in culture and lifestyles may warrant the use of different communication channels.
- **Consider that the emergency may have altered the availability of some communication channels** and obtain the most up-to-date information about each.
- **Conduct an assessment of telephone services, their coverage and uses**. This information will help determine whether mobile technology (for example for sending text messages with key messages), or phone lines are a viable communication channel. Use the preparation phase also to buy-in support from phone companies and set up working agreements on how to operate in the case of an emergency.

In summary, every communication channel has its advantages and disadvantages, and different channels are appropriate for different communication objectives. **Table 12** on the next page provides a general summary of which channels are more suitable to which situation. It is important to note however, that this table is provided for general guidance only and that there is always a degree of flexibility in how communication channels are used. They can therefore be versatile depending on the messages, context and approaches. Importantly, although some channels may be more appropriate for certain settings and information requirements, a mix of channels is necessary to achieve maximum impact, as discussed later in this Unit.

**Table 12: Which Channel to Use in an Emergency Context**

CHANNEL	IN AN EMERGENCY CONTEXT, THIS CHANNEL IS MOST APPROPRIATE FOR...
<b>Mass Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness across audiences (informing and educating)</li> <li>• Modeling behaviors</li> <li>• Reducing stigma and taboos</li> <li>• Communicating with low literacy audiences</li> <li>• Obtaining wide regional and national reach</li> </ul>
<b>Mid Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging communities</li> <li>• Promoting discussion and reflection among communities about the issues being addressed by mid-media activities</li> <li>• Modeling behaviors</li> </ul>
<b>Print Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting other communication channels</li> <li>• Providing more detailed information on a particular topic that individuals can look through at home</li> <li>• Providing information about personal and confidential issues</li> <li>• Engaging with policy and decision makers</li> </ul>
<b>Social &amp; Digital Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating with young people</li> <li>• Obtaining a large reach (if Internet is widely available and accessible)</li> <li>• Promoting discussions through chat rooms or email exchanges</li> <li>• Providing information about personal and confidential issues</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a two-way communication process with the audience</li> <li>• Engaging community members and creating community action plans</li> <li>• Promoting discussion, reflection and challenging dominant norms</li> <li>• Informing and educating (increase knowledge)</li> <li>• Imparting skills</li> <li>• Discussing sensitive topics</li> </ul>

**Exercise: Assessing Available Communication Channels**

**Worksheet 7.1** provides a template that can be used to carry out an initial assessment of available communication channels in the context of an emergency. It allows for the recording of key information that will help with the selection of appropriate channels for reaching the intended audiences.



--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

## Match Available Channels with Intended Audiences

Once the media landscape has been assessed and available, functioning communication channels have been identified, it is important to match those that are most appropriate to the intended audiences.

Although different channel categories may be more appropriate for different situations and communication objectives, the choice of channels will depend on a range of factors. The list below highlights some important considerations that will determine the selection of the channel mix:

- **The preferences and habits of the intended audiences.**
- **Literacy levels of the intended audience.** Where levels of literacy are low, communication IPC, radio, television and highly visual print materials.
- **The type of information that needs to be conveyed.** Complex information, for example, will require longer and more interactive formats than simple messages.
- **The communication objective.** If the objective of the communication is to raise awareness and increase knowledge, appropriate communication channels could include public service announcements, posters and advertisements promoting the same key messages. In cases where the objective is to improve skills and self-efficacy, however, interactive and participatory communication channels such as small group activities may be more appropriate. It is important to note, however, that effective risk communication should use a mix of channels that can both increase knowledge as well as skills and self-efficacy to deal with the emergency. As people become aware of the risks, it is essential to provide them the information, tools and skills to protect themselves from that risk.
- **Budget availability.** Some communication channels, such as television, will be more expensive than others. Budget and funding may therefore limit the choice of channels.
- **Timeline.** Some formats of communication within each channel category can take longer to develop. A serial drama, for example, requires a certain amount of time to be developed, recorded and pretested and may therefore not be a feasible option at the start of an emergency when information needs to be disseminated quickly. Recorded debates or question and answer (Q&A) sessions can be produced relatively quickly and may be an appropriate alternative when there are time constraints.

Importantly, the channels selected for a communication response must resonate with and be accessible to the intended audience. They need to be the channels that the primary and influencing audiences will use, choose and trust for obtaining information relating to the emergency. The worksheet that follows, **Worksheet 7.2**, offers a series of questions to help reflect about the factors that influence the choice of communication channels and identify the most appropriate ones for each audience segment.



## WORKSHEET 7.2: MATCHING CHANNELS TO THE PRIMARY AND INFLUENCING AUDIENCES

**Purpose:** This worksheet includes a list of questions to support the selection of an appropriate channel mix to communicate with the intended audiences about the emergency issue being addressed.

**Directions:** State who the intended audience is for this exercise and whether they are a primary or influencing audience. Complete one sheet for each audience segment you have identified. Worksheet 4.1 in *Unit 4: Audience Segmentation* can help you identify audiences if you have not done so yet.

Answer the questions asked about the audience. Use evidence-based data from sources such as media consumption studies, project reports, surveys, qualitative studies and government statistics.

Finally, summarize the key points as this will help you identify the most appropriate communication channels for each audience.

***Please note that this worksheet is followed by a completed example that you can use as reference if necessary.***

---

**Audience:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Priority**

**Influencing**

1. What channels does the audience use regularly for different communication needs? For example, radios and TV for receiving or accessing news or health information, mobile phones for communicating with others, etc.
2. What communication channels does the audience generally prefer?
3. Which channels does the audience consider credible and for what kinds of information? Consider both modern and traditional communication channels such as community leaders and influential members or society.
4. What is the audience's literacy level? If possible, specify whether there is a different between rural and urban populations.
5. What differences exist, if any, in access to communication channels between genders?
6. Which channels does the audience prefer for getting information about emergencies?
7. Whom does the audience trust and turn to for advice about health or about other topics similar to that causing the emergency? If known, highlight differences between rural and urban areas and between genders.
8. During the emergency, how does the audience spend a typical day? Where do they go and what communication opportunities exist throughout the day? Consider that during an emergency standard routines may be disrupted.

**WORKSHEET 7.2: MATCHING CHANNELS TO THE PRIMARY AND INFLUENCING AUDIENCES (Continued)**

<b>Time of Day During the Emergency</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Location for Each Activity</b>	<b>Potential Communication Channels</b>
Early morning			
Midmorning			
Midday			
Early afternoon			
Mid afternoon			
Early evening			
Dinner			
Late evening			
Special Occasions/ Festivities			

Summarize the information obtained from this worksheet in the table below. This will highlight the principal channels for communicating with each audience segment.

<b>Audience:</b>	
<b>1. Communication Channel Preferences</b>	
<b>2. Trusted Information Sources</b>	
<b>3. Literacy Level</b>	
<b>4. Possible Communication Channels</b>	