

Why Connectivity Matters:

*Enhancing Programme
Effectiveness Through Strong
Communication Systems*

Effective communication is fundamental to the success, safety, and accountability of NGO and humanitarian operations. In fast-changing environments, reliable communication channels support a range of tasks, including:

- Distributing operational updates
- Checking in with staff in remote locations
- Reporting incidents
- Co-ordinating programme activities

Without efficient communication systems, programming becomes harder and more complex - it is less transparent, less responsive, and more dangerous.

What are the risks?

- If communication tools fail during field activities, teams may be unable to report incidents, warn others of danger, verify needs, or mobilise rapid responses.
- In extreme cases, a communications failure can hinder evacuation procedures or limit coordination with local authorities.
- Communication gaps can undermine the programme's objectives, reduce trust between NGOs and communities, and delay life-saving assistance.

What are the risks? (cont.)

- The sector increasingly relies on e-SIMs and virtual numbers to maintain flexibility across borders, yet even these solutions depend on local regulations and network stability.
- Poor data protection practices, such as sharing sensitive information over unsecure channels, can expose communities to harm, compromise beneficiary privacy, or jeopardise staff safety.

The quality and reliability of communications have a direct impact on **programme outcomes** and **staff wellbeing**.

Assess the context

Many humanitarian settings, especially those affected by conflict or natural disaster, face significant connectivity challenges:

- Blind spots in mobile networks, due to damaged infrastructure or remote terrain.
- Satellite phones, two-way radios, or encrypted messaging platforms may be regulated or banned by state actors.
- Distrusted social communication platforms.

A clear understanding of the communications landscape helps organisations choose **appropriate tools** while **avoiding legal and operational pitfalls**.

Communications plan

To mitigate these risks, organisations should develop a comprehensive communications plan, including details of:

- Available communication channels
- Roles and responsibilities
- **Data security management** protocols
- Procedures for **routine and emergency contact** (including check-in schedules and escalation processes).
- Map of **no coverage** and comms interference areas.
- **Back-up communication options:** satellite phones, radio networks, alternative SIM cards, or pre-designated meeting points

Inclusion through training

Finally, effective communication depends on introducing the organisation's communication plan to staff with adequate training.

Key topics to consider:

- **Technical use:** Not all staff are familiar with radios, satellite devices, or secure messaging apps
- **Communication etiquette:** Radio channel discipline and basic communication etiquette in high-stress environments.
- **Cross cultural communication:** when working across multiple languages and cultures, guidance is needed on using translators, avoiding ambiguity, and ensuring messages remain accessible to diverse audiences.

At **ILS**, we support our clients by reviewing and developing **communications plans and standard operating procedures, training staff on crisis communications, and communicating effectively in high-risk environments** - strengthening team coordination, reducing misunderstandings, and ultimately improving the impact and security of humanitarian operations.

👉 **Let's talk.** If you or your organisation are looking to strengthen or review your communications framework we'd love to hear from you.