

PUBLIC INFORMATION BOARDS NOTES

Contents:

- ❖ What are Information Boards and when do you use them?
- ❖ Issues to think about when making an Information Board
- ❖ AUSTCARE and Bulletin Boards: Communication as Conflict Mitigation

What are Information Boards and when do you use them?

They are boards where information is posted to ensure that communities are at least informed about Oxfam GB's programme activities. These can be used in conjunction with other information sharing activities and are best implemented in situations of literate populations.

Issues to think about when making an Information Board

Pros

- Single location where all information placed together and people know about.
- Limited demand on resources with potentially large outreach.
- Written information can improve consistency of messages. Verbal messages, while often most appropriate in areas of low literacy, can often be misinterpreted and re-remembered differently.

Cons

- Information Boards are only ever going to be as good as the overall information strategy of which they are just one part. There is no point in having them if nobody knows who can use them, why they are there, and what kind of information they should contain, or who decides whether the suggestions are used or not.
- Information Boards can take a lot of time and energy to keep the information provided both timely and relevant.
- Information boards should not distract teams from focussing on effective face to face communication in an open, respectful and honest way.

- 1) Look at cultural practices in terms of using information boards – determine how communities can be effectively engaged in communication and feedback using information boards
- 2) Local ownership of the boards – ask the beneficiaries what they need to know and who will be responsible for the board; let the beneficiaries design and decorate their own board
- 3) Information to be provided on the board
 - Minimum information to be provided in the appropriate local language:
 - Name and contact details of key Oxfam contacts (SPM and local PM)
 - Name of all Oxfam staff working in that location, their position, area of responsibility and contact details
 - Members of community structures with whom Oxfam is working¹
 - Community contribution and Oxfam contribution to current projects in terms of equipment and labour²
 - When the next Oxfam/community meeting is to be held and on what topic
 - Plans for future projects

¹ Depending on security issues

² Depending on security issues

- Two clear statements: “Oxfam is here to listen to you: please tell us what you think” and “Oxfam staff are not allowed to ask you for or receive money or favours”
 - What to do and who to contact in case of a complaint (with a definition of a complaint)
 - Information boards could also include contact details for other agencies involved in that location but this would need to be agreed with them and should be part of a broader, agreed information strategy.
 - In situations with mobile populations (eg. IDPs regularly moving between original villages and different IDP camps) attention needs to be paid to ensuring that communities are aware of what is being planned in neighbouring locations.
 - A pictorial representation of overall aim / goal of the project can be helpful
 - Possibility of posting “before” and “after” photos of project progress, posting a time series of photos to track project progress
 - Could include a section on the board for community announcements
- 4) Physical design, layout of information on the board
- 5) Location of the Information Board
- should be decided in conjunction with communities
 - needs to be somewhere accessible to maximum number of people
 - not by piles of rubbish, or (necessarily) near main roads.

AUSTCARE and Bulletin Boards: Communication as Conflict Mitigation

Taken from: Public Information and Accountability in Aceh and Sri Lanka, Clinton Initiative paper (Oct06)

“In the past, AUSTCARE has faced angry participants when they have not understood what is going on with a project. Rumours of favouritism and a lack of a transparent process have fuelled these misunderstandings. Recently, however, AUSTCARE installed a bulletin board by the community coffee shop. When AUSTCARE used the board to post criteria required for participants in a project to reconstruct brick factories prior to requesting proposals from the community, the community became well aware of the restrictions of the selection process. All successful participants were posted on the board with a brief explanation of why they were selected, and why those who were unsuccessful were not so the process was transparent and everyone could see that we had been fair. In AUSTCARE’s opinion, the use of the boards has proved to be very effective in ensuring community jealousy and conflict has been kept to a minimum and messages previously “lost in translation” are made clear and accessed by all.” *AUSTCARE project manager, Aceh*

What Makes a Good Bulletin Board?

A number of board types have been used in IDP communities. Some key lessons have emerged on what types are the best.

Stand-alone boards versus those specially built

Many organisations have used specially constructed stand-alone boards with integrated roofs. A further variation is a whiteboard that needs to be attached to wall or a board with legs. These models have different strengths. Stand-alone boards cannot be moved once put in place, which means they will be neglected if they are not in the most opportune place. Organisations often put boards at the entrance to the community whereas communities generally prefer that they are close to areas of public use such as temples. At one location visited for this survey, communities had abandoned the purpose-built board in favour of using a wall in such an area.

Branding

This is a key issue. Most I/NGOs prominently brand their bulletin boards with their logo, which can have unintended negative consequences. First, other agencies often assume that the board is only for that particular organization instead of it being available to everyone. If the board is only for the agency in question, communities that work with several agencies may end up with several boards. Branded boards also cannot become a true community resource. If a branded board is used by other organisations, misunderstandings can arise as to the source of information displayed. A strong case for removing branding relates to the boards' potential as community empowerment and transparency tools. An unbranded board can be a community resource that can be used to hold organisations to account. In Aceh, an anti-corruption NGO distributed boards to local mosques, which the community then used to publicly display the mosque's financial records — a use for which branded boards would not have been appropriate.

Glass covers and keys

Several organisations have installed boards with glass covers that can be locked, with keys in the hands of both the community leader and the organisation. But this can deter other organisations and the community from posting information. One INGO in Aceh, however, said glass was necessary to protect beneficiary lists from being altered by those unhappy with the contents. They compensate by using a double-sided model with glass and an accessible white board.

White boards

This alternative to the traditional bulletin board has been explored in both Sri Lanka and Aceh. In Sri Lanka, ActionAid installs white transparency boards and trains communities and local partners to use them to post budget details. In Aceh, a UN pilot project distributed white boards to allow communities to create a written record of discussions with INGOs. A short monitoring exercise found that communities were using the boards to write up dates of promised aid distributions and draw diagrams of proposed projects such as housing or water system installations. It was also found that the boards were particularly popular in areas that lacked reliable electricity and could not use the local *menasa* announcing system to spread community information. The biggest drawback to whiteboards is the need for a pen. Even if supplied, they were often lost or dried up. Boards also have to be well covered since the writing can wash away in the rain. Of these various models, the best designed and most effective were those installed by CRS, which installed sturdy, well-covered permanent boards with glass on one side and a white board on the other.