

Morocco earthquake: immediate communication and engagement priorities

Key messages for responders

September 2023

A 6.8 magnitude earthquake hit Morocco's High Atlas mountain range on 8 September 2023, causing devastating loss of life and damage. As of 10 September, more than 2,000 people have been killed, with a further 2,421 people reported injured while search and rescue efforts continue. Government authorities are leading response efforts, with national response mechanisms and civil protection units deployed to provide critical assistance.¹

In the critical days after the earthquake, information will play a life-saving role in enabling people to stay safe and make decisions that impact their survival, coping, reunification and recovery. The worst affected areas are in hard-to-reach mountain terrain, as well as the major economic and tourist hub of Marrakesh² – meaning it is critical to understand the diversity within the communication and engagement landscape in order to mount an effective response. CDAC Network recommends the following areas of focus to prioritise effective communication, community engagement and accountability (CCEA) in the earthquake response.³

-
- 1 OCHA (2023) [Morocco earthquake – flash update #2, as of 10 September 2023](#).
 - 2 CNN (2023) [Moroccan government so far deploying its own response to the earthquake: UN coordinator, 10 September](#).
 - 3 This brief has been informed by CDAC Network's [Morocco media landscape guide](#), which was produced in cooperation with DW Akademie and supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and is available in Arabic and English.

1 People need actionable information to make well-informed decisions now

As the first to respond, affected people need focused, accurate information in their main language on how to stay safe and make critical decisions that impact their survival, coping, reunification and recovery. Early reports from Morocco indicate that people do not have enough information on how to access relief and shelter – with many resorting to sleeping in the streets.⁴ Research from other crises shows that people want actionable information from sources they trust. During a past crisis in Morocco, local NGOs, human rights organisations and local press correspondents were often cited as the main sources of trusted information.⁵

Recommendations

- Leverage and amplify timely government messaging and public information in relevant languages through multiple, accessible channels.
- Communicate clear, actionable information on critical topics to support people to manage their daily lives. This information should be accessible and shared using people's preferred formats, channels and languages, including local languages. This can be informed by existing analysis such as CDAC's [media landscape guide](#) and should be complimented by information gathered through response assessments.
- Work with diverse and trusted local actors – such as local NGOs, human rights organisations and trusted local press – to disseminate messages widely, including to hard-to-reach communities.

2 Ensure communication in the diverse dialects and languages of affected people

People in affected areas speak different dialects and languages. Morocco has two official languages: standard Arabic and Amazigh language. The large majority of Moroccans speak Darija (a dialect of Arabic known as Moroccan Arabic) in everyday life. Darija is an oral language and is not used in formal writing. Amazigh languages are comprised of a group of closely related spoken languages used by Imazighen peoples across North Africa. Within Morocco, there are three dialects of Amazigh languages used (see Table 1).

Literacy remains the most important barrier to accessing media. More than 70% of the population has no or very low education and consequently cannot access written content in Arabic. Public service television and radio stations, as well as printed and online media, mainly use standard Arabic, which is not understood by all Moroccans. Private radio stations and online media tend to relay content in a language somewhere between modern standard Arabic and Darija that is accessible to their listeners. As part of its public services mission, the national broadcasting company has dedicated a national TV and radio station to Amazigh (Berber) programmes.

4 BBC (2023) [Morocco earthquake: huge devastation found in remote regions](#), 10 September.

5 CDAC Network (2022) [Morocco media landscape guide](#), p.14.

Table 1 Languages written and spoken by the literate population aged 10 and over

Language	% female population	% male population
Arabic	99.2	99.3
Darija (Arabic dialect)	89.7	92.2
Amazigh	2.8	3.1
Tarifit (spoken north of Morocco, Rif mountains)	4.1	4.0
Tacherlhit (spoken in central areas)	14.1	14.2
Tamazight (spoken in Souss region in south of Atlas mountains)	4.1	4.0
French	68.4	66.2
English	20.2	17.6

Source: Moroccan 2014 population census

Recommendations

- ➔ Consider the different languages and Amazigh dialects of affected people in CCEA strategies. Pay special attention to differences in written and spoken language needs to ensure those with lower literacy have equal access to information.
- ➔ Include standard questions on language and communication preferences in needs assessments. Disaggregate other data by language to see where language marginalisation might be causing gaps in access to services.

3 Use the channels that people trust and use: television is a key source for Moroccans

Moroccans prefer to consume information via television, especially older people and those living in rural areas. Most of the Moroccan population, even in rural areas, has access to a television, and 84% of households are also equipped with satellite dishes to access international programmes.

There is an increasing reliance on social media for receiving breaking news, seen particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 36% of Moroccans indicating that they use social media as their primary source for breaking news. In 2021 the top social media sites by users in Morocco were: Facebook: 66%; YouTube: 25%; X (Twitter): 3%; and Instagram: 3%. More than 90% of internet users in Morocco used social media in 2019, with preference higher among younger people and those with higher levels of education. Internet penetration generally stands at 74%, with internet connectivity lower in rural and mountainous areas, such as the High Atlas mountains.

According to regulations, all information websites must be run exclusively by professional accredited journalists with an official press card. As a result, many Facebook pages, websites and blogs covering local news in small cities and citizen journalists have been either closed by their owners or shut down by the authorities, with some facing legal charges. According to figures from the Ministry of Culture and Communication, of the 4,000–5,000 information websites that existed in 2016, only 372 sites conformed to the revised code by 2019.

In rural areas, the weekly souks, or traditional markets, still occupy a prominent place in terms of trade, social gathering and the strengthening of social relations. They are an important occasion for mass communication.

Recommendations

- Prioritise television to disseminate accurate information to communities, ensuring consistent messaging across levels and languages, while also understanding and mapping the full spectrum of channels that people use – including face-to-face communication in community settings.
- Engage with messaging and social media channels by pushing key messaging and occupying the social media landscape, particularly in local languages. However, be aware that in the High Atlas region in particular, connectivity and smart-phone usage may be lower and social media should not be relied upon as the sole channel.

4 Counter mis- and disinformation with consistent, accurate information

In the first days and weeks after an earthquake when people are most fearful, rumours can quickly circulate about aftershocks, evacuations and relief efforts. Some media outlets have already reported a flurry of misinformation, fake images and videos about the earthquake and the response surfacing on social media.⁶ Rumours can create undue suffering, raise expectations and provoke unsafe behaviour. Getting clear, up-to-date and verified information to affected people in the languages they understand best is critical to stop harmful rumours in their tracks.

Recommendations

- Refer to analyses of communication channels and sources, and be prepared to monitor rumours in multiple languages.
- Ensure a cycle of listening and conversation to identify rumours; verifying and triangulating facts; and engaging with communities to share verified information. Building on existing and trusted relationships is key.
- Work with other agencies. A collective approach will save time and resources, while reducing information burden on communities.

Acknowledgements

This brief was written by Alyssa Thurston and Liz Hendry, CDAC Network.

6 Hespress (2023) [Debunking Morocco's earthquake misinformation: sorting fact from fake news](#), 10 September.



CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors – working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local.

© CDAC Network 2023

CDAC Network

Sayer Vincent–Invicta House
108–114 Golden Lane
London EC1V 8BR
United Kingdom

 cdacnetwork.org

 @CDACN

 @CDACN

 CDAC Network

 @CDACNetwork

Companies House Registration No: 10571501

Registered Charity Number: 1178168

Suggested citation: CDAC Network (2023) ‘Morocco earthquake: immediate communication and engagement priorities. Key messages for responders’ (www.cdacnetwork.org/policy-briefs/morocco-earthquake-immediate-communication-and-engagement-priorities).

This PDF has been prepared in accordance with good practice on accessibility.

Cover photo: Imlil in the High Atlas region of the Morocco which has now been affected by the earthquake.
Credit: Louis Hansel/Unsplash