The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in severe world-wide disruptions of economic and social activities. This paper aims to give an overview on the differences between disasters, crises, emergencies and risks, and the recommended types of communication response for each of these. It also proposes key communication considerations for SAIs to create or adapt disaster preparedness plans.

CRISIS, EMERGENCY & RISK COMMUNICATION

AFROSAI-E

1. Introduction

Each disaster serves as a learning opportunity for how to communicate better in the next disaster. There are a range of challenges, such as climate change, unplanned-urbanisation, under-development / poverty as well as the threat of pandemics, that will affect societies in the future. These aggravating factors will result in increased frequency, complexity, and severity of disasters.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the widespread disruption of normal social and economic activity. The level of global inter-connectedness also meant that news on the pandemic spread incredibly fast, along with false information and conspiracy theories. Situations like this, can quickly create fertile ground for misunderstanding, panic and confusion.

Disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic are difficult, if not impossible to predict in terms of their severity and impact on society. But there are many communications tasks that SAIs can undertake prior to a disaster to improve preparedness. Some of these tasks are common sense, while others may be more novel. Investing time and manpower now to improve a SAIs' communication capacity can save time in disseminating key messages to minimize chaos and manage stakeholder expectations once disaster strikes.

In times of crisis, how organisations communicate about it can create clarity and build resilience. Whatever the nature of the crisis, the fundamental tools of effective communication still work. Define and point to long-term goals, listen to, and understand your stakeholders, and create openings for dialogue. SAIs can draw on a wealth of research, precedent, and experience to build organisational resilience through an extended period of uncertainty, and even turn a crisis into a catalyst for positive change.

While there are many types of disasters, most planners try to take an all-hazards approach by creating general plans that are designed to be adapted to specific situations, rather than trying to plan separately for every possible type of disaster. While an all-hazards approach works in operational response, there will be important distinctions in the way the SAI executes communication by type of disaster and these differences require consideration during planning. In some situations, communications may be the only tool the SAI has available in the early phases of a crisis. An effective response plan requires communication. Even the best, well-informed, and creative decision will not work if the SAI does not effectively communicate it.

This paper aims to give an overview on the differences between disasters and emergencies, crises, and risks, and the recommended types of communication response for each of these. Further, it includes a modified version of the Crisis Emergency and Risk Communication (CERC) model, which is used by public health institutions to guide communication during an emergency response. Using the

CERC model, enables organisations to plan proactively for crisis (and disaster) situations, so that they can make the best possible decisions when a crisis occurs.

Pre-planning for a crisis while there is none on the horizon might seem to require more resources that SAIs cannot afford, not doing so can have an even higher cost. Resilience requires planning to prepare for the worst. Therefore, in addition to the good practice outlined in the CERC model, this paper includes key considerations for SAI's to improve their preparedness to communicate effectively with stakeholders during disaster, crises and emergency situations. It will specifically benefit leadership and management teams as well as the dedicated communication department or resources to develop, or address gaps in their crisis communication response plans.

The content of this paper will be further expanded on and incorporated into the AFROSAI-E Communication Handbook in 2021.

Contents

2. Disasters, Crises, and Reputational Risk

Even though there is a difference between what defines a disaster, crisis and emergency, they are closely interconnected, interdependent and overlap significantly. With a blurred line between the definitions of these terms, the mainstream literature uses the terms disaster, crisis and emergency interchangeably and in combination, such as 'disaster crisis management' and 'crisis and emergency management'

What do emergencies, disasters, and crises have in common? Simply that something bad has happened or is happening, that it is surprising on some level, and that an immediate response is needed. When something bad or unexpected happens, it may be called an emergency, a disaster, or a crisis depending on who is involved, the magnitude, and the current phase of the event.

2.1 Disasters and Emergencies

We can define a **disaster** as a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life. It is a serious disruption occurring over a short or long period of time that causes widespread human, material, economic or environmental loss which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

Natural Hazards
- **Geophysical** (earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic activity).
- **Hydrological** (avalanches and floods).
- **Climatological** (extreme temperatures, drought, and wildfires).
- Meteorological (cyclones and storms/wave surges).
- **Biological** (disease epidemics and insect/animal plagues).

Technological & Man-mande Hazards
- Deaths and damages that result from human acts of omission and commission that occur in or close to human settlements.
- Examples include complex emergencies/conflicts, famine, displaced populations, industrial accidents, and transport accidents.

Public health emergencies
- The outbreak of diseases or the identification of specific risks from environmental or life-style factors.
- Examples of this include the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the Zika virus.

Figure 1: Types of disaster / emergency situations[1]

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[1] *Disaster Management.* https://www.physio-pedia.com/Disaster_Management

2.2 Crisis

A crisis is any event that is going (or is expected) to lead to an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, group, community, or whole society.

While the Covid-19 pandemic is a public health emergency, it also has crisis elements. The mid- to long-term impact of this pandemic has and will continue to affect social and economic aspects of society on a global scale.

There are five types of crises that can affect every organisation, regardless of industry:

Financial Crisis
Caused by either internal or external factors that result in there not being sufficient financial resources for the SAI to stay operational.

Personnel Crisis
Occurs when a SAI employee is involved with an illegal or unethical scandal that affects the SAI's reputation.

Organisational Crisis
When the institutional status is challenged as well as basic structures, principles and values are also threatened.

Technological Crisis
Occurs when an organisation's technology crashes - such as when a server breaks or an error appears in a software product.

Natural Crisis
When natural hazards such as severe weather interrupts normal business functions. Either temporary like a severe hailstorm or more permanent like a flooding evacuation or extended lockdowns because of a public health emergency.

Figure 2: Types of crises that affect organisations[2]

Crisis situations have common characteristics:
- It escalates in tension,
- it causes a high sense of insecurity and danger, and
- those involved can become overwhelmed by stress, affecting the usual operational efficiency of the organisation.

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[2] *Swetha Amaresan. 5 Examples of Crisis Communication and what You can Learn from them.*
https://blog.hubspot.com/service/crisis-communication-examples

Crises can also affect the "image" of institution itself, arousing the interest of the competent bodies and especially the media to get involved in the situation.

2.3   Reputational risk

Reputational risk is a threat or danger to the good name or standing of an organisation. Reputational risk can occur in the following ways:

- Directly, as the result of the actions of the organisation itself e.g. if the SAI fails to meet statutory audit deadlines.
- Indirectly, due to the actions of an employee, employees, or external influencers e.g. negative news reporting on the SAI, internal information leaks.

Reputational risk is the risk of failure to meet stakeholder expectations as a result of any event, behaviour, action or inaction, either by the SAI itself, its employees or those with whom they are associated, that may cause stakeholders to form a negative view of the SAI. This can include leaked information on an ongoing sensitive audit or complaints from disgruntled staff to journalists on internal SAI issues to issuing an incorrect audit report or opinion.

3.   Communication to manage crises, emergencies and risks

3.1   Crisis Communication

Crisis communication deals with things that <u>do</u> go wrong.

It is generally used in two ways:

- It describes the communication activities of an organisation facing a crisis. They need to communicate about that crisis to their staff and stakeholders.
- It is an unexpected and threatening event that requires an immediate response.

Typically, a crisis:

- Occurs unexpectedly
- May not be in the organisation's control
- Requires an immediate response
- May cause harm to the organisation's reputation, image, or viability

The content, form, and timing of the communication can either help reduce and contain the harm, or it can make the situation worse. Crisis communication is the verbal, visual, and or written interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders prior to, during and after a negative occurrence. For

crisis communication to be effective, there is need for skilled communicators to strategically defend and explain the organisation's position in the face of crisis-induced criticism, threat, and uncertainty.

During crises, public sector institutions typically face inquisitive, and potentially hostile press and stakeholders. These crisis communication processes aid organisations to reduce and contain harm during dangerous situations. They also enable the efficient supply of specific information to stakeholders to manage image and perceptions of blame and responsibility. Crisis communication looks to explain the specific event, identify likely consequences and outcomes, and provide specific harm-reducing information to affected stakeholders in an honest, candid, prompt, accurate, and complete manner.

One of the principal distinctions between crisis communication and risk communication concerns their origins. Crisis communication typically is associated with Public Relations and is grounded in efforts to strategically manage and frame public perceptions of an event so that harm is reduced for both the organisation and stakeholders. There are existing crisis communication models and frameworks that inform practice, and which can help limit and alleviate the damage to both the SAI and its stakeholders during a crisis.

3.2   Risk Communication

Risk communication deals with things that <u>might</u> go wrong.

Risk communication in the SAI context, can be associated with the identification of risks to the reputation of the organisation and risks of the consequences of not meeting stakeholder expectations. Typically, risk communication involves a discussion about adverse outcomes resulting from the occurrence of a risk event, including the probabilities of those outcomes occurring.

Through risk communication, the communicator supplies stakeholders with information about the expected type (good or bad) and magnitude (weak or strong) of an outcome from a behaviour or exposure.

Risk communication enables and prepares a SAI to respond quickly and effectively to situations that could affect the image and reputation of the organisation. A risk could include a public question that has generated some interest by stakeholders. For example, questions about procurement procedures for personal protective equipment during the Covid-19 epidemic, have generated concern among some groups. These worries have sparked a great deal of public debate. Risk communication influences how the SAI responds to the issue/risk and how it can potentially be resolved. In some cases, a risk can become an issue and potentially a crisis. In such cases, if effective risk communication strategies are in place, the SAI then has forewarning that a risk is developing into an issue or crisis and can take immediate mitigating actions. Risks that become issues may develop more slowly and

continue over extended periods. SAIs typically have more time to respond to issues than they would to a crisis.

Risk communication is focused on sensing threats and assessing their impact. In the context of SAIs, it includes reputational risk because of scandal, information leaks, political interference, and controversial audit outcomes. Basic principles of effective communication inform the practice of risk communication:

- Audiences tend to simplify messages.
- Credibility is important to the believability and effectiveness of messages.
- Risk messages should include some self-efficacy action that can be taken to reduce the risk.
- Messages are more effective when they are strategically matched to audience needs, values, background, culture, and experience.
- Risk messages should be clear and simple, appeal to reason and emotion, and offer solutions to problems.

3.3 Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC)

CERC combines the elements of crisis communication and risk communication used during an emergency response. Using the CERC model, enables organisations to plan proactively for crisis (and disaster) situations, so that they can make the best possible decisions when a crisis occurs.

CERC differs from pure risk communication in that a decision must be made within a narrow time constraint. The decision may be irreversible, the outcome of the decision may be uncertain, and the SAI may need to make decisions with imperfect or incomplete information. Part of effective communication is to help stakeholders accept the imperfect nature of choices during the crisis.

A situation like the Covid-19 pandemic requires crisis communication responses such as immediate steps for all staff to stay at home, information on staff safety and clarifying work-from-home procedures. But it also requires a risk communication strategies, since the pandemic resulted in higher expectations from stakeholders for example, to do real-time disaster audits and completing normal audits within statutory deadlines, and the resulting risk that SAIs may not be able to meet those expectations.

4. Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) for SAIs

A successful CERC will ensure that the SAI plans for clear messages to the right stakeholders at the right time when an emergency or crisis occurs. This includes information and key messages to inform and persuade their stakeholders in the hope that they will plan for and respond appropriately to risks

and threats. The adapted model below, shows how SAIs should follow CERC principles when responding to a crisis. A failure to use CERC, may result in the failure to effectively communicate key information.

It is however important to always consider the laws and regulations that prescribes the SAI mandate, as these will influence communication activities and the actions of the SAI in emergency situations.

4.1 The six principles of effective crisis and risk communication

While the nature and severity of emergencies may differ, the following six principles are applicable in any context:

1. **Be First:** Crises are time sensitive. Communicating information quickly is particularly important in relation to internal communication during a disaster or crisis. For members of staff, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source. In fast-moving situations, it is critical that the SAI keeps employees informed of the latest developments and how it affects them.

2. **Be Right:** Accuracy proves credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what the SAI is has done to fill in the gaps. Communication to staff and stakeholders should be based on reliable facts from credible sources and, if those are not readily available, the SAI should be upfront about that. This is especially true in this time of hyper-connectivity where false information and rumours have the potential to spread incredibly fast and with potential harmful or disruptive consequences.

3. **Be Credible:** Even in times of great uncertainty, the SAI should not compromise its honesty and truthfulness during crises. While it may be difficult to give clear answers during a crisis on for example when audit work can resume or when staff should return to the office, being honest and open about the challenges of the situation is critical for the SAI to remain a credible voice in the eyes of stakeholders.

4. **Express Empathy:** Crises create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in words. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport. This is especially true when engaging with staff during a crisis. The impact of a public health emergency such as Covid-19, necessitating staff to working from home while juggling family responsibilities, compounded by the potential physical and mental strain of for example a public health emergency, should be acknowledged with empathy.

5. **Promote Action:** Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes a restored sense of control. In engaging with staff this could mean supplying

guidance and support to enable them to work more effectively from home. For external stakeholders that could include issuing a public notice on the use of public funds during an emergency.

6. **Show Respect:** Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport, especially when the emergency leads to social and economic disruption.
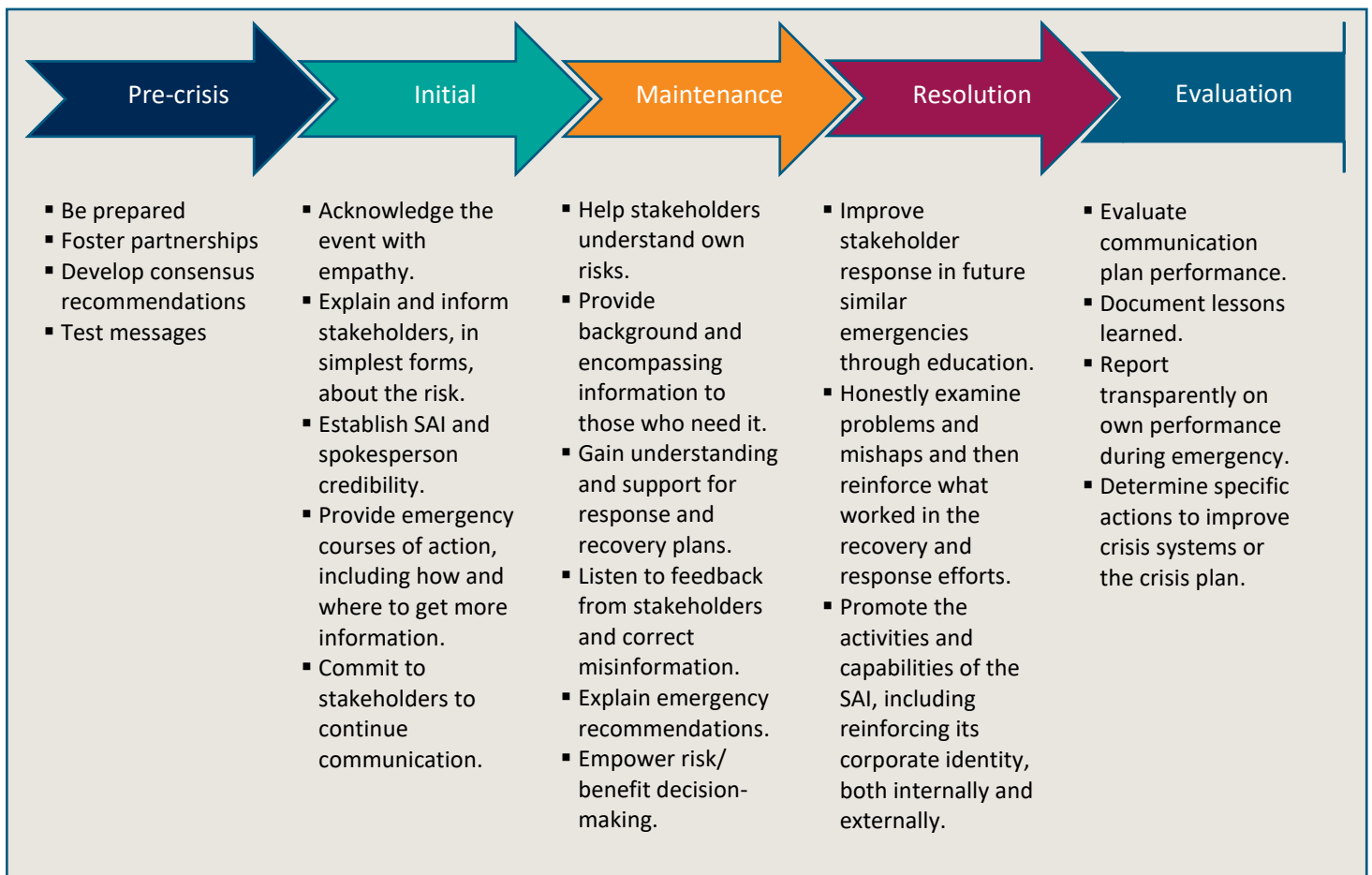
4.2   Communication lifecycle

Pre-crisis	Initial	Maintenance	Resolution	Evaluation
▪ Be prepared ▪ Foster partnerships ▪ Develop consensus recommendations ▪ Test messages	▪ Acknowledge the event with empathy. ▪ Explain and inform stakeholders, in simplest forms, about the risk. ▪ Establish SAI and spokesperson credibility. ▪ Provide emergency courses of action, including how and where to get more information. ▪ Commit to stakeholders to continue communication.	▪ Help stakeholders understand own risks. ▪ Provide background and encompassing information to those who need it. ▪ Gain understanding and support for response and recovery plans. ▪ Listen to feedback from stakeholders and correct misinformation. ▪ Explain emergency recommendations. ▪ Empower risk/ benefit decision-making.	▪ Improve stakeholder response in future similar emergencies through education. ▪ Honestly examine problems and mishaps and then reinforce what worked in the recovery and response efforts. ▪ Promote the activities and capabilities of the SAI, including reinforcing its corporate identity, both internally and externally.	▪ Evaluate communication plan performance. ▪ Document lessons learned. ▪ Report transparently on own performance during emergency. ▪ Determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan.

Figure 3: Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Lifecycle[3]

4.2.1 Pre-crisis

This is the most comprehensive and decisive preparation phase. It takes place when everything is still routine, and the possibility of the crisis may seem remote. The **first challenges** in this phase is to mobilise resources to identify the likely scenarios and study them. The **second** is getting to know the SAI stakeholders and the most effective ways for communicating with them during a crisis to increase

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[3] US Department of Health and Human Services. Crisis, Emergency, Risk Communication, 2014:1-20.

awareness and coordinate their expectations about the ways in which the SAI plans to respond. The **third** challenge is to develop a comprehensive plan for a communication strategy which will include the organisational and inter-organisational infrastructure and the human and technological resources required. The **fourth** is to engage in activities that will enhance the preparedness of staff, including periodic training and drills, educational campaigns, and the ongoing testing of messages and their effectiveness.

The pre-crisis phase is where the SAI should do planning and preparation work. During this phase, the SAI should:

- Predict and define the types of disaster the SAI is most likely to face
- Anticipate and develop preliminary answers to stakeholder questions.
- Draft initial key messages to address the disaster. Specific details will come later.
- Identify spokespersons, resources, and resource mechanisms well ahead of time.
- Practice following the response plan, using the messages you have already created, followed by refining the plan and messages as needed.
- Foster partnerships to ensure that key role-players are speaking in a coordinated manner (using one voice).
- Develop and test communication systems and networks.

Scenario planning

SCENARIO PLANNING

This is a strategic planning method that SAIs can use to make flexible long-term crisis and risk communication plans. Scenario-based thinking is a good method to aid the SAI in anticipating the impact of a crisis on employees and stakeholders, and the appropriate messaging that can help them as the crisis unfolds.

TYPES OF SCENARIOS THAT TRIGGER THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT A CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN:

- Financial or resource issues and constraints
- Crime, violence or threats
- Cyberbreach / hack / information leaks to press
- Natural Disaster
- Harassment
- Departure or death of key executive
- Lawsuits
- Protest / Walk-out by staff
- Rumours

EIGHT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN DRAFTING SCENARIOS FOR A CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN:

1. What are the issues?
2. How might it play out?
3. What do you need to get across (if … then)?
4. What is your position (if … then)?
5. What are the legal issues and considerations?
6. What can you say?
7. What can't you say?
8. How could others manipulate these messages?

SIX QUESTIONS TO ASK IN YOUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANNING:

1. **Crisis Scenarios:** What situations can cause a crisis?
2. **Target Audience:** Who are the target audiences you need to influence during a crisis?
3. **Key Messages:** What key messages do you want to communicate to your target audiences?
4. **Tactics:** Which tactics will help you to reach your target audience with your key messages?
5. **Timing:** How quickly must you respond?
6. **Monitoring:** How long and how will the SAI monitor the situation?

Figure 4: Scenario Planning[4]

4.2.2 The Initial Phase

The period from the moment an approaching threat is identified until that threat materialises and becomes a crisis, differs with each situation. At times this could be an extended period with the threat gradually dying out and disappearing. In other situations, this phase will not appear at all and the crisis will erupt without warning. Therefore, if the warning phase does appear, the first challenge is to use fully this precious and sometimes brief period. This is the time to carefully review, update and prepare all the steps that are required during the next phase, the emergency, particularly all those which concern the alerts regarding its eruption and the required responses.

Communication goals during this phase include rapid communication to staff and affected stakeholders. These communication efforts aim to do the following:
- Convey empathy and reassurance. Reduce emotional turmoil.

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[4] *Gina Rubel. Planning for a Crisis: The Scenarios*

- Designate crisis or SAI spokespersons, and identify formal channels and methods of communication.
- Establish general and broad-based understanding of the crisis circumstances, consequences, and expected outcomes based on available information.
- Reduce crisis-related uncertainty as much as possible.
- Help the stakeholders understand the responsibilities of the SAI in the response.
- Promote self-efficacy (explain to people that they can help themselves) through personal response activities and share how and where they can get more information.

When communicating in the initial phases of an emergency, it is important to present information that is simple, credible, accurate, consistent, and delivered on time. In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, the initial spread of the virus was centred in regions outside of Africa. This provided a short but valuable buffer period for countries in Africa to take precautionary steps and put plans in place.

In South Africa, the SAI moved swiftly to put a disaster management plan in place and set up a crisis management committee to ensure the SAI's continued relevance and value-add, also during these abnormal circumstances. This included several key steps to engage staff on health and safety, as well as contacting Government, at the appropriate time, to assert the relevance and value of SAIs in times of crisis. This resulted in the recognition of the SAI as providing an "essential" service, while the country was still in lockdown, enabling them to proceed with critical audit work and a real-time audit on the government's management of Covid-19 funding. This further enabled the SAI to demonstrate its value and relevance to citizens and stakeholders. [5]

Confusion and intense media interest are usually characteristics of the initial phase of a crisis. Information is usually incomplete, and the facts are sparse. An information deficit exists, and it is important to know that information from the media and even within response organisations may not be completely correct. It is therefore important to learn as much about what happened as possible, to determine the SAIs' communication responses, and to confirm the magnitude of the event as quickly as possible.

In the initial phase of a crisis, you must be accurate while recognising that you might not have all the facts available early. One of the best ways to limit staff anxiety in a crisis is to supply useful information about the event and tell them what they can do. Even when there is little information to offer, it is still possible to communicate how the SAI is handling the event and when more information will be available. *SAI Uganda responded to the escalating Covid-19 situation by displaying, in both digital and*

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[5] *Auditor General of South Africa. [SAI South Africa's response to government efforts to fight the Covid-19 pandemic](#).*

print media, posters and notices to staff with good practice guidance on personal health and safety precautions to take during the pandemic.

SAIs should consider, that during the initial stages and at the peak of a crisis, government need space to deal with the situation. While continuously monitoring governments' response to the crisis, the SAI can engage with government stakeholders when the time is right, to discuss the relevance of the SAI during the crisis.

At the very least, messages should show that the SAI is engaged and addressing the issues directly. This means that approaches are reasonable and timely, and all available information is being provided, within the legal framework applicable to the SAI. At the same time, the pressure on SAIs from stakeholders to release information prematurely can be intense. If procedures to table special audit reports during a crisis are too slow or cumbersome, the planning phase is a good opportunity to engage stakeholders on improving the speed and effectiveness of current processes.

An example of swift action during the initial phase comes from SAI Sierra Leone during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of its public education and information drive, the Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL) issued public notice to inform the general public about the procedures in the use of public funds under a national emergency situation including the manner in which imprest funds should be accessed and retired. The SAI issued the notice send a strong message that users of public funds are required to be mindful of public financial management and procurement rules and regulations when carrying out activities using public funds during emergencies.[6]

4.2.3 The Maintenance Phase

This phase is the ultimate test of the SAIs ability to understand the crisis and its significance appropriately, and to manage it skilfully. The SAI must combine its readiness and preparedness with resourcefulness, creativity, sensitivity and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Communication goals during the crisis maintenance phase include talking with staff and other key stakeholders:

- Ensure that the staff knows what is going on, understands ongoing risks, and knows how to mitigate these risks.
- Supply background and supportive information to those who need it.
- Update stakeholders, such as auditees, on the impact of the crisis on current and planned audits.
- Engage the legislature on how the crisis will affect the SAIs ability to meet statutory audit deadlines.
- Encourage broad-based support and cooperation with response and recovery efforts.
- Gather feedback from the affected stakeholders—listen, learn, and assess.

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[6] https://www.auditservice.gov.sl/assl-public-notice-on-use-of-public-funds-an-emergency-situation/

- Correct misunderstandings, rumours, or unclear facts.
- Continue to help staff believe they can take steps to protect themselves, their families, and their community. Continue to explain those steps.
- Support informed decision-making by stakeholders based on their understanding of risks and benefits.

As the crisis evolves, the SAI should expect media interest and scrutiny. Unexpected developments, rumours, or misinformation may place further media demands on SAI communicators. Stakeholders expectations of the SAI may increase based governments' management of and response to the crisis. Should the SAI undertake real-time audits during this phase, a comprehensive communication plan will aid the SAI to keep stakeholders informed of the process and demonstrate the value and benefit of the SAI during the crisis.

Staying on top of the information flow and maintaining close coordination with government stakeholders is essential. During the maintenance, or peak of the crisis, it is important that the SAI continuously assess the needs of its stakeholders, the situation and the allocation of its resources. During this phase, regular and continuous communication to staff and external stakeholders is critical to avoid confusion, assumptions and unrealistic expectations.

SAIs also need to demonstrate empathy by giving back to the citizens in times of crisis. Therefore, during this phase, Corporate Social Responsibility activities can be highly impactful. In addition to activities such as real-time audits, it is also valuable for the SAI to show its immediate and direct contribution to a crisis. This could include donation drives within the office to raise funds for citizens affected by the crisis, taking part in land rehabilitation projects, sponsoring personal protective equipment etc.

SAI Kenya rallied staff to contribute to the national Covid-19 Fund through online posters and contribution drives. The Fund is aimed at mitigating the effects of the pandemic by economically cushioning the most vulnerable members of the society, providing Personal Protective Equipment to health workers and the poor. The handing over of the contributions was publicised in the mainstream media and internally to staff.

4.2.4 The Resolution Phase

The crisis has ended or is rapidly decreasing in term of severity and impact. Some people may have lost their lives, while others may have suffered physical, mental or financial damage. Governments have used public resources to deal with the crisis that they must accounted for. During this phase, the SAI should do the following:

- Explain to stakeholders how the SAI plans proceed with statutory and special audits.
- Motivate stakeholders to act if needed.

- Facilitate broad-based, honest, and open discussion about causes, blame, responsibility, resolutions, and adequacy of the response.
- Improve individual understanding of new risks.
- Promote behaviours that avoid risks.

As the crisis resolves, there may be a return to the status quo, with a better understanding about what took place. While this phase may include less public and media interest on the crisis, management of the crisis could become an area of high interest. Once the crisis is resolved, SAIs may therefore need to respond to intense media scrutiny of how the response was handled and the SAIs role.

Organisations should also be prepared that a crisis could alter the environment significantly with a lasting impact on how the SAI operates. Communication during the crisis should therefore also reflect on how the SAI is responding, changing and adapting to new ways of working. By closely monitoring the evolution of the crisis, the SAI can support internal stakeholders to adapt to their changing work environment through change management programmes.

An opportunity may exist to reinforce messages of anti-corruption and transparent accountability while the issue is still current.

The challenge during this period is to improve preparedness for similar future events, while using the freshness of participants' experiences and memories, as well as accessibility to information, people and evidence, for comprehensive data collection that will allow for honest, thorough and courageous organisational lesson learning.

4.2.5 Evaluation Phase

Objectives during the evaluation phase include communication directed toward the response community. Responders will evaluate and assess the effectiveness of responses, including the following:
- Discuss, document, and share lessons learned.
- Determine specific actions to improve crisis communication and crisis response capability.
- Evaluate the performance of the communication plan.
- Implement links to pre-crisis activities.

Typically, the SAI would develop an after-action / lessons learned report by taking stock of the actions taken and consulting with key stakeholders. No response is ever perfect, and there is always something to learn. This information should also feed into the SAIs' annual performance report to give an honest reflection of what it was able to do, and not do, during the crisis. This may mean reflecting transparently on the SAIs' inability to meet statutory audit deadlines due to the crisis.

The main challenge during this phase is to use the lessons learned, to decisively implement plans and activities to prepare for future crises

5. Crisis Communication as part of SAI resilience planning

One of the issues noted in the AFROSAI-E Research Paper: *SAI Resilience in addressing the auditor expectation gap during disaster periods: The case of sub-Saharan SAIs during the COVID-19 pandemic,* was that SAIs have generally not been resilient during the Covid-19 disaster situation. The biggest area of concern relates to their visibility to stakeholders.

This paper outlines some of the good practices on planning for and implementing crisis and emergency risk communication plans. But the key challenge for SAIs and especially their communication managers/specialists, is to adapt these principles to their specific environment and then put it into practice. While many countries are still contending with the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, we know that inevitably the next disaster could happen at any moment. For SAIs to be resilient in the face of these ongoing challenges, pre-planning and scenario planning is especially critical.

Resilience requires planning to prepare for the worst. Therefore, in addition to the good practice outlined in the CERC model, key considerations for SAI's to improve their preparedness to communicate effectively with stakeholders during disaster, crises and emergency situations are[7]:

- Have a crisis management plan and update it at least annually.
- Have a designate crisis management team, ideally including public relations/communications, legal, operations, finance, ICT and human resources staff.
- Conduct exercise at least annually to test the crisis management plan and team. E.g. if using mass communication channels such as WhatsApp for all staff, is part of the planned actions, this should be tested to ensure its effectiveness.
- Pre-draft select crisis management messages including content for press releases and templates for crisis statements. Have the legal department review and pre-approve these messages

By planning in advance for crises, risks and emergencies, the SAI can be better prepared to act swiftly and decisively when disaster strikes.

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[7] *Crisis Management and Communications. Posted on October 30, 2007 by Institute for PR. https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/*

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