# Crisis communication plan for Join For Water

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# 1. Situation of this plan and principles

For years, Join For Water has identified risks, graded them according to degree of possible impact, probability and frequency, taken targeted actions on this basis which it then monitors as a function of control and further grading of the risk. From our experience, we learn that certain risks occur as and crisis, calling for

- communicate quickly and transparently, and in doing so
- be clear, consistent and factual
- with a clear recognition of the problem to begin with
- and open communication about the steps we are taking to address the crisis, both internally and externally

Taking into account these risks and principles, we worked out communication policies around crisis situations.

# 2. Preparation

## 2.1.Risk analysis

1. We identify potential crisis scenarios specific to our water projects
2. We assess the likelihood and potential impact of each scenario on the communities where we operate, and on our organisation as such

The main crisis scenarios we identify are:

1. **Conflict and instability**
    - **Water infrastructure in armed conflict**. Infrastructure that Join For Water has invested in is destroyed by a warring party.
    - **Safety of staff, volunteers and visitors** is at risk due to terrorism (e.g. kidnapping), situation in conflict zones, health crises (cf. COVID-19) or natural disasters.
    - **Sudden political crisis, such** as a coup or a sudden power vacuum, **or sudden change of direction in government policy** that directly impacts our operation and funding.
2. **Problems at poject level**
    - **Effectiveness gap**. The results of a project are not achieved to a large extent, without there being a sufficient justification at first sight. A crisis at a partner organisation is usually the direct cause of this.
    - **Community resistance:** Local communities may resist the NGO's presence if they feel excluded or distrusted.
3. **Financial meltdown** that prevents the promised development results from being achieved, or threatens the existence of the NPO. 2 causes:
    - Poor financial planning
    - Substantial subsidy reduction
4. **Integrity issues** come to light and into the open,
    - **Financial and sexual**: among own employees towards own employees, among own employees towards members of partners or direct or indirect target groups (vulnerable people), or among partners towards target groups.
    - **Image / ethical doubts.** Our work is found unethical or inconsistent with our values due to questionable collaborations with corporations or undemocratic governments

- **Non-compliance with standards**: financial statements are not approved by the corporate commissioner or the GA; recognition for issuing tax returns is not approved; narrative or financial reporting of a project is not approved by the donor.

We assess the likelihood and potential impact on communities and the organisation, respectively, as follows:

| Domain | probability | consequences |
|---|---|---|
| **Conflict and instability** | high | high |
| Water infrastructure in conflict zone | limited | high |
| Employee safety | low | very high |
| Political crisis | high | limited |
| **Project level** | limited | limited |
| Effectiveness gap | limited | high |
| Community Resistance | low | limited |
| **Financial meltdown** | limited | very high |
| **Integrity issues** | limited | high |
| Financial | low | high |
| Sexual | limited | very high |
| Image problems | limited | high |
| Non-compliance with standards | limited | high |

### 2.2.Crisis communications team

1. We put together a crisis communication team for each crisis to follow up on the action plan (see point 3). The team consists of representatives from relevant departments
   - Programme Operation Service (country advisor or head of service), supplemented by a staff member from a local country team (unless crisis does not occur in a country)
   - Engagement service (external communications officer)
   - Administration and Finance Department (financial advisor ifv estimation of financial-administrative consequences)
   - Representative of a partner, if directly involved party
   - The director

2. We appoint a spokesperson who is familiar with both the technical aspects of water management and the local contexts in which we work.
   - As a rule, this is the director, and in his absence
   - the Head of Service Programmes or in his absence
   - the communications officer.

### 2.3.Training and Exercises

1. We organise media training for our spokespersons.
2. We simulate crisis situations, such as conflict or natural disaster, to prepare our team for real-world challenges.

## 3. Crisis identification

### 3.1.Monitoring and detection

We use monitoring tools to quickly detect potential crisis situations that could affect our water projects:

1. Each country coordinator and country advisor monitors daily news for his/her country(ies) through at least 1 national (online) newspaper and through 1 international or foreign (e-)newspaper or equivalent daily news sources
2. Project advisers maintain regular contact with partners and target groups through site visits
3. We are establishing a reporting protocol for team members in the field so that they can quickly report crisis situations to head office.

The reporting protocol is available on a Sharepoint site accessible to all employees. The protocol includes:

1. Crisis identification: what is considered a crisis. See table above.
2. Reporting channels: contact points in case of crisis.
   a. This is always the department head of the employee who detects the crisis. In case of his or her unavailability, this is either the head of the Programmes Department, or the director.
   b. In some cases, such as humanitarian or security crises, there is a continuously available hotline, accessible via the number on the reporting protocol.
3. Initial assessment of the situation
   a. Gathering basic information: The person reporting the crisis should collect as much core information as possible, such as:
      i. What happened?
      ii. Where and when did it happen?
      iii. Who is involved?
      iv. What are the possible consequences?
   b. Classification of severity: The reporter makes an assessment of the severity of the crisis, e.g. low, medium or high impact (see table above). This determines the nature and urgency of action to be taken by the crisis team.

### 3.2.Rapid Response

1. The contact point shall always and immediately inform a member of the executive committee with his or her additional assessment of the seriousness of the situation.
2. The executive committee member informs executive committee colleagues if the executive committee deems that the crisis team (and hence the crisis communication team) should be activated.
3. The director decides
   - Whether this team will be activated
   - Whether the crisis should be managed locally in terms of communication or whether organisation-wide communication is needed.

## 4. Action plan during the Crisis

### 4.1.Internal Communication

1. We inform all staff and volunteers quickly and accurately about the situation, with special attention to our teams in the field.
2. We provide clear guidelines on what is expected of them, including how to interact with local communities and media.

## 4.2. External Communications

1. We communicate quickly with stakeholders such as donors, volunteers, members, supporters, partners, and local communities through predefined channels, such as press releases, social media, and local radio stations.
2. We ensure that our communications contain the following key messages:
   - Recognition of the problem (e.g. destroyed infrastructure, kidnapped employee)
3. What we are doing to address the problem (e.g. evacuation, cooperation with local police).
4. Our commitment to transparency and accountability towards the affected community, family, local partner, ....
5. What we cannot do because we do not have the capacity for it, and which agencies we refer

## 4.3. Media management

1. We organise a press conference, if necessary, with the participation of local partners and community leaders if necessary.
2. We ensure that all spokespersons provide the same information and are consistent in their message. This information is prepared by the crisis communications team.

# 5. Aftercare

## 5.1. Evaluation

1. We hold a review meeting after the crisis to discuss what went well and what could be improved, with a special focus on the impact on the communities we serve.
2. We document all lessons learned and adjust our crisis communication plan based on this evaluation.

## 5.2. Reputation recovery

1. We plan activities and communication campaigns to restore the confidence of affected communities and (international) donors.
2. We work on rehabilitation projects and communicate their positive impact, such as restoring infrastructure, making water sources accessible again, psycho-social counselling or measures around ecosystem protection.

## 5.3. Psychosocial Support

We provide support to staff and volunteers who were directly involved in the crisis, and who may need emotional or mental support.
We also foresee additional opportunities for conversations provided with superiors and colleagues.

# 6. Documentation and update

## 6.1. Capture

We document all steps taken during the crisis, including decisions, communication and results. We also ensure that this documentation is available for future use and as learning material for new employees.

## 6.2. Updating the Plan

We ensure that our crisis communication plan is updated every three years, or sooner if necessary, based on new risks, experience from previous crises, and feedback from local communities.

# 7. Communication with Stakeholders

## 7.1. Regular updates

1. We regularly inform donors, partners and communities about the progress of our projects after a crisis.
2. We use transparent communication to restore trust and promote engagement.

## 7.2. Transparency

We are open about the actions taken and progress made, even if the situation is not yet fully resolved.

# 8. Follow-up Actions

## 8.1. Review of Policies

We assess whether changes in policy or operational procedures are needed to prevent a recurrence of the crisis, with input from both local partners and international experts.

## 8.2. Image enhancement

We work proactively to improve Join For Water's public image, for example by sharing success stories about the impact of our projects, and by implementing new, innovative water management solutions.