

Special Report #1 ETC Services for Communities (S4C)

Information needs of Evacuated Barbuda Community living in Antigua

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BACKGROUND

Up to 265,000 people in the Caribbean have been affected by Hurricane Irma, which lashed the region in early September. One of the severely damaged islands is Barbuda. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda declared a mandatory evacuation of the islands for the entire population. Nearly 1500 families were evacuated within 24 hours after Hurricane. Families from Barbuda left their destroyed homes without much information on what to expect, and duration of the emergency. Evacuated population of Barbuda is now living in makeshift shelters provided by the Government in the capital of St Johns, Antigua. Services for Communities advisor (S4C) for Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) organized community consultation with evacuated Barbuda community to learn more

about their lives and concerns. Community consultations were organized with the goal of: having an understanding of means of information and communication employed, and to have better knowledge of gaps in telecommunication, information and communication services for communities.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE AND METHODOLOGY

The community consultations were organized with elderly men, women and young boys and girls. For all participants the size of their households varied between four and sixteen members. Most of the female participants were married, including an elderly disable woman with her 30 years old son with mental disabilities. Most of the men consulted were fishermen in Barbuda; whereas one of them was an art school teacher.

FINDINGS AND GAPS IN INFORMATION, TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

Almost all families from Barbuda have at least one mobile phone with them, mostly young men in the family keep the phone with them, majority have smartphones. All interviewed said to be using mobile network of Digicel for phone calls and Internet connectivity. Most of them said to spend almost 90 - 105 XCE (equivalent to around 33- 39 USD) for 30 days with unlimited WhatsApp communication and 3GB data. Most of them said to be using data for accessing news, listening to radio and Facebook. Many of the young participants said that back home they also used data to play music, but now they were not doing so, because they had to watch the data usage, and did not want to spend on it more. The women were not using smartphones and were primarily using connectivity for calls, to talk to other family members in other islands.

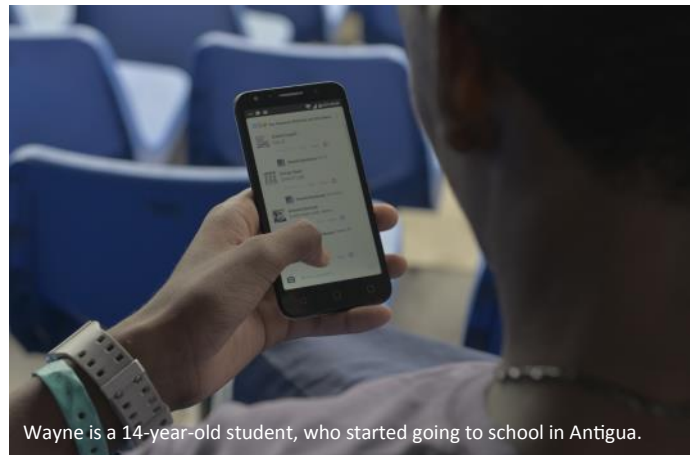
When asked who did they contact first after the hurricane, they all contacted their families



Randy is a school teacher from Barbuda.

and loved ones in other islands. *"When I was coming from Barbuda to Antigua, I kept on looking at my phone for signals, and the minute*

I saw those two signal bars appearing on my phone, I cried and called my mother and sister in Antigua", Elise, 32, said. "We had no idea how the situation was in Antigua, until I called them. And they were so relieved hearing my voice". She evacuated Barbuda with her husband and three kids, leaving her dogs, horse and all the belongings in the house. "Everything is gone, we need to start everything from scratch", she further added.



Wayne is a 14-year-old student, who started going to school in Antigua.

Randy, 41-year-old school teacher from Barbuda said, *" I have never experienced anything similar in my life before. The house was shaken by the wind/ The sound was nerve cracking. All of us in my family just snuggled in corners, trembling, crying, screaming and then... the roof started to crumble bit by bit! That's when the things started to get really scary. I just held my phone and kept looking at the clock. The weather forecast had predicted that it would be over by 5 o'clock. There was no Internet, no signals any more. We remained like that for hours, without roof above our heads. That was the most traumatizing experience of my life".*

All telecommunication equipment such as radio and TV has been destroyed in people's homes. *"Our phones remained with us, because that is the first thing you grab, when things go bad"*, said 63-years old William, a fisherman in Barbuda.

For more than 200 families residing in the cricket stadium, in the living quarters on the ground level, there is no phone signal. Hence to make phone calls and access the Internet the families come on the upper floor.

Faced with a situation of uncertainty, the frustration among evacuated families is growing every day. Their biggest need in terms of communication and information is to connect with the family and friends, receive information about rebuilding activities and keep track of their houses and properties in Barbuda.

"We don't know much what's going on in Barbuda. The source of information is only the ones who had an opportunity to have a look at the island", said Pelly, 42-year-old mother of two. As the time has passed the kids are resuming their education in Antigua, as no school or any infrastructure remains intact in Barbuda.

"My kids go to school and it seems that we are going to be in Antigua for sometime now. There is not much to do in here, but government has been hosting us very nicely. It is not like home, but it is what it is," said Maine, 47 who ran a small grocery shop in Barbuda.

Alongside, they have very little means to spend their days. Most of the people traumatized by the hurricane and faced with the tragedy of absolute destruction of their homes, farms and assets have no means of entertainment or morale uplifting among themselves. *"It might be*

nice to watch some TV, and to keep track of what is happening in the world", said William an elderly man from Barbuda. *"The time goes really slow these days"*, he added.

ETC S4C advisor as part of the mission is also connecting Antiguan community through social media with Barbuda community. S4C also has established links with local radio operators such as Antigua Observe and Sun FM to relay public service announcements free of cost for the Barbuda community. Further S4C, through its ETC partners GSMA and Digicel is keeping track on information needs of the all evacuated populations.



ETC S4C Adviser with the Barbuda community at the shelter.

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