



Communicating Disasters

Building on the Tsunami Experience and Responding to Future Challenges

A Regional Brainstorming Meet
Bangkok, Thailand: 21 - 22 December 2006

Organised by TVE Asia Pacific (TVEAP)
and
United Nations Development Programme - Regional Centre in Bangkok
(UNDP-RCB)



Report of meeting highlights

Prepared by TVE Asia Pacific

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Co-organisers:

United Nations Development Programme - Regional Centre in Bangkok



The UNDP has established Regional Centres in Bangkok, and Colombo, as well as a multi-disciplinary Pacific Centre in Suva with focus on the Pacific Islands. A main priority of the Regional Centres is to provide UNDP Country Offices in the Asia and the Pacific with easy access to knowledge through high quality advisory services based on global applied research and UNDP lessons learnt. The second priority is to build partnerships and promote regional capacity building initiatives, which allow UNDP, governments and other development partners to identify, create and share knowledge relevant to solving urgent development challenges. The Regional Centre in Bangkok mainly focuses on support to Democratic Governance, Energy & Environment and Crisis Prevention and Recovery. The Centre also provides support to UNDP country offices in a number of cross-cutting areas, including capacity development, ICT for development, public-private partnerships and mine action. The Regional Centre in Colombo's primary focus areas are Poverty Reduction with an overarching effort on achieving the Millenium Development Goals and HIV/AIDS.

<http://regionalcentrebangkok.undp.or.th/>

Television for Education - Asia Pacific, trading as TVE Asia Pacific



(TVEAP), is a regional not-for-profit organisation that uses audio -visual and new media to communicate sustainable development and social justice issues in the Asia Pacific - the world's largest and most diverse region. Established in 1996 and governed by an International Board, TVEAP operates as an editorially independent, journalistic organisation that produces and distributes media content; trains media professionals in development sensitive coverage ; consults on communications strategies; and networks with governments, civil society and educational institutions.

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"How can timely communication save lives, and mitigate impacts in disasters? How can the media balance the public's right to know and the affected people's right to dignity and privacy?"

"Is too much expected of the media, when other social institutions are non-existent, collapsing, or corrupted...or would the media have even more responsibility precisely because of other failures in society?"

"The relationship of people with ecology and natural resources is one of the most neglected aspects of disaster management. When we're discussing disasters, we need to look at the social ecology of disasters as well. "

"There's a real danger that journalists become so professional that they want to have a value-free mind when they do their stories. We should have enough courage to say something is wrong when we encounter injustice and unfairness."

"Covering long-term disasters becomes tiring both emotionally and financially."

"Countries like mine are internationally 'branded' for disasters. There's strong stereotyping. We find it very difficult to get out of that mould. We seem to attract international attention all the time for disaster, famine, suffering or death."

"In a disaster, everyone is a victim in one way or another; no one is spared. We as media are not there to merely and dispassionately report. We invariably become a vital link the scene of the disaster has with the rest of the country and world."

"We've for too long had an artificial division of journalists vs. non-journalists. We need to move above and beyond that. "

"The under-reporting and non-reporting of many human interest and human development stories is a scandal. There are many silent emergencies that never attract sufficient media coverage or public attention..."



“Early warning is a pure public good. It can't be left to the market alone to decide and manage early warning information. This is where government, civil society, academics and commercialised media all have to join hands.”

“Some developmental agencies try to get favourable coverage - basically, their propaganda - by paying for media air time or print space. This distorts the news values and makes it more difficult for other agencies to get the media coverage they deserve. This is corruption - I call it 'checkbook development'.”

“Reporting about poverty or disasters (in the media) is as much an industry as working on poverty reduction or disaster management (in the development sector). But can we find ways to do well and do good at the same time?”

“The only problem was with the international relief agencies, who are extremely hierarchy conscious. They were not easily available to the news media, and often they spoke only to influential Western news agencies such as Reuters and BBC.”

“The priority of development organisations arriving at disaster scenes "is not primarily to communicate, but to respond to the emergency situation on the ground. This frustrates many journalists. It is therefore necessary for development organisations to see information as a 'commodity' ...”

““Some Asian governments don't trust their citizens enough to disclose too much about impending disasters...and citizens have grown to distrust anything their governments say.”

“As journalists, we've been trained to do quick, sharp and precise stories that will have the most impact with our viewers. In doing so, we lose many nuances in a story like the Tsunami.”

“If they want to engage the media, development professionals must first understand the complexity, nuances and diversity in what is collectively labeled as 'media'. In fact, the very term 'media' is a plural!”

Executive Summary

"Where there is no camera, there is no humanitarian intervention," said Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Medecins Sans Frontieres - and many of today's disaster managers and relief agencies would agree. Yet, the relationship between media practitioners and those managing disasters can often be stressful, difficult and fraught with misunderstandings. Communicating about disasters sometimes ends up as communications disasters.

How can these mishaps be minimised, so that the power of established and new forms of mass media can play a more meaningful role in managing both hazards and disasters?

This was the broad question addressed during a regional brainstorming meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, held on the eve of the Indian Ocean Tsunami's second anniversary, i.e. 21 - 22 December 2006. Organised by TVE Asia Pacific and UNDP, the meeting brought together over 30 leading media professionals, disaster managers and communication specialists from South and Southeast Asia.

Early on, it became apparent that both the media practitioners and disaster/development professionals had very different attitudes and approaches to managing information before, during and after disasters. Some of the differences arose from a failure to appreciate the different needs and priorities of these two

groups. But this division became less sharp as the two groups agreed on the essential functions of information and communication, and the need to serve the public interest over individual, corporate or agency interests.



The meeting recognised that the media must evolve its own ethics, guidelines and strategies for covering hazards and disasters, and these cannot be imposed from outside. At the same time, all participants agreed on the value of greater understanding and cooperation between media practitioners, development professionals and disaster managers.

Participants of the meeting formed a Yahoo group to support future networking and to sustain information sharing among themselves. An Asia Pacific Resource Book planned for 2007 will combine the meeting's highlights with contributions from leading media and disaster professionals in Asia.

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Background and context

December 2006 marked the second anniversary of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which devastated coastal areas in South and Southeast Asia, and to a lesser extent in eastern Africa. The event of Boxing Day 2004 ranks among the top ten disasters of all time, with the affected countries and families still recovering from its mighty blow.

It was astonishing that a disaster of this magnitude could arrive in so many places in Asia without any public warning. The region has witnessed a rapid proliferation of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in recent years. Yet with thunderous impact, the tsunami drove home the point that the timely and efficient management of information mattered more than mere delivery technologies.

In response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, the United Nations and aid donor countries initiated an inter-governmental process to build a high-tech tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean. By June 2006, UNESCO - whose Inter-governmental Oceanographic Commission coordinated the effort - reported that the system was 'up and running'. Some 25 new seismographic stations would detect underwater earthquake tremors, while three deep-seabed sensors were in place to detect tsunami waves through tiny changes in water pressure. More equipment, including satellite sensors and additional seabed sensors, are to be added to the system in 2007 and 2008. A network of 26 national information centres will enable Indian Ocean countries to receive and distribute warnings of potential tsunamis, UNESCO added.¹

¹ <http://www.scidev.net/News/index.cfm?fuseaction=readNews&itemid=2945&language=1>

Even the most sophisticated early warning system will be rendered ineffective without adequate mechanisms to disseminate warnings in a timely, credible manner. Setting up a state-of-the-art, high-tech and high-cost system is not a solution by itself. Because the most advanced early warning system in the world can *only do half the job*: alert governments and other centres of power (e.g. military) of an impending disaster. The far bigger challenge is to *disseminate* that warning to large numbers of people spread across vast areas in the shortest possible time,² and ensure that people understand the warning and take appropriate evacuation measures.

The crucial question remains: *how can credible disaster warnings travel that all important 'last mile'?*

Bridging the 'last mile' requires a combination of national and local level capacity building, community-based disaster preparedness and strategic alliances with those who already have swift, inexpensive outreach to communities. Strategic partnerships with the mass media (radio, television, online and print media) would be key to success in these efforts.

During the past 15 years, Asia's airwaves have become crowded with a cacophony of FM radio and television channels that reach out to most households day and night. These media outlets can play a major role both in disseminating disaster warnings, and also in:

- coordinating relief and rehabilitation;
- preparing communities for disaster risks; and
- raising public awareness about actions taken or should be taken by different organizations and individuals to minimize future risks before disasters strike.

A well-coordinated, collaborative plan would enable tapping the mass media's unparalleled outreach in times of impending or unfolding disasters, as well as in post-disaster coordination.



² <http://www.scidev.net/content/opinions/eng/a-long-last-mile-the-lesson-of-the-asian-tsunami.cfm>

Meeting goals and objectives

On the eve of the disaster's second anniversary, TVE Asia Pacific and UNDP organised a regional brainstorming that brought together over 30 leading media professionals, disaster researchers and managers and development communication specialists from across South and Southeast Asia. The meeting's goal was to discern the key communication lessons of the Tsunami (and other disasters), both in terms of the mass media and new media.

Its objectives were:

- To explore the role of media professionals and their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) before, during and after a disaster;
- To share lessons learned among media professionals and key players in disaster risk reduction based on the experience of the Tsunami disaster; and
- To come up with a few suggestive guidelines for engaging the mass media and new media for more effective communication before, during and after disasters.

Workshop content

The agenda of this two-day meeting was designed to encourage maximum interaction among all the participants. It avoided formal presentations or speeches, and instead included series of panel discussions, debates, interactive sessions, group work and film-screenings. A large part of the workshop content was generated by the participants themselves.

The final version of the agenda is given as Annex 1.

Workshop participation

A total of 33 participants took part in this meeting. Among them were:

- media communicators interested in better covering disasters;
- disaster managers, interested in better links with the media; and
- development professionals keen on improving links between the two.

There was representation from both South Asia and Southeast Asia. There was also a good mix of journalists, broadcasters, media managers, researchers and development professionals. The list of participants is given as Annex 2.

The overall meeting facilitators were:

- **Chin Saik Yoon**, Communications specialist and Publisher, Southbound Press, Penang, Malaysia
- **Nalaka Gunawardene**, Director and CEO, TVE Asia Pacific

Workshop proceedings

We have captured below the essence of the many ideas, opinions, arguments and suggestions presented during two days of intense discussion and debate.

Day One: 21 December 2006

Introductory remarks



Marcia V J Kran, Deputy Regional Manager and Head of Policy and Programme, UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, stressed the importance of information management, learning and training, and early warning systems. She suggested creating historical disaster databases to understand disaster trends, and to better understand early warning stakeholders.

She added: "UNDP recognises and supports the very critical role played by the media. In terms of access to information, raising awareness, shaping democratic governance structures, and promoting safer communities."

Nalaka Gunawardene, Director and CEO of TVE Asia Pacific, said that it "took a



mega-disaster like the Indian Ocean Tsunami to open our eyes... To make us realise how vulnerable we were (and perhaps still are)." He felt the media and other information and communications technologies (ICTs) had not done a good job in alerting the Asian public about the oncoming Tsunami. He quoted the words of Sir Arthur C Clarke to this effect (see boxed quote below).

He went on to say that after the Tsunami had struck, the media's role was paramount. This was living proof of what Bernard Kouchner, the co-founder of Medecins sans Frontieres, had said: "Where there is no camera, there is no humanitarian intervention." If not for the wide coverage in the media, the world would not have pledged US\$13 billion for relief and recovery efforts.

He urged the meeting to remain focused on the following:

"The Asian tsunami's death toll could have been drastically reduced if the warning - already known to scientists -- was disseminated quickly and effectively to millions of coastal dwellers on the Indian Ocean rim. It is appalling that our sophisticated global communications systems simply failed us that fateful day."

- **Sir Arthur C Clarke**, novelist and long time resident in Sri Lanka, quoted during the opening remarks

- Public communication of disasters using mass media and new media
- Look at all phases of a disaster: before, during and after
- Consider many different types of disasters
- Study the nexus between media-based communications and disasters with a view to finding ways to improve this relationship on all fronts.

Chin Saik Yoon, publisher and communications specialist, saw disasters as the more visible 'peaks' in processes that unfold over time affecting lives of large numbers of people. Media, as mirrors of society and analysts of social trends, should be interested in these processes as much as they cover the 'peaks'.



During the self-introductory session, each participant was asked to share a "quick personal insight related to any disaster". These helped illustrate the diversity of nationalities, experiences and perspectives in the room. Some are captured in Box 1.



Box 1

Recalling disasters

These are among the impressions and experiences cited by participants at the outset of the meeting.

- **Chin Saik Yoon, Southbound Press:** Shortly after the Tsunami, I wrote about the experience of the Nallavadu village, Pondicherry, on the eastern coast of India, whose people were alerted about the oncoming Tsunami via phone from Singapore.¹ This call, given by one villager who was working in Singapore, saved everyone's lives. But later I found out that he had become the most hated person in his community! Because while lives were saved, the village suffered significant property losses. But the news had spread far and wide that this village had been "saved" by that call, which prevented relief or recovery support from reaching the people. Everyone thought this village was doing just fine.
- **Lynette Lee Corporal, Inter Press Service-Asia Pacific:** Philippines is known as the country of typhoons, super-typhoons, mudslides and landslides, so I am not a stranger to disasters. I've covered serious disasters, and have also done volunteer work after disasters, having glimpses of how it is to be on the "other side" of the situation. The perspective as a volunteer is very different, something which most media practitioners lack.
- **Chanuka Wattegama, UNDP-APDIP:** Before the Tsunami there were only a handful of blogs written by persons based in Sri Lanka, and these too didn't have much following. Within days of the disaster, many new blogs emerged. These not only tracked and reported what was happening on the ground, but continued to cover other matters of public interest afterwards. Now there are at least 100 - 200 regular bloggers, many expressing themselves on a daily basis.
- **Shahidul Alam, Drik Picture Library:** As a media person, I need to find a balance. What's very important is sending out the messages, the real stories of what's happening during a disaster. On the other hand, countries like mine are internationally 'branded' for disasters. There's strong stereotyping. We find it very difficult to get out of that mould. We seem to attract international attention and coverage all the time for disaster, famine, suffering or death.
- **Amjad Bhatti, Duryog Nivaran - South Asian Network for Disaster Risk Reduction:** A farmer who had experience of 30 years of flood once told me: "We used to pray to have floods." He explained that floods used to bring fertile deposits to their lands. These are nuances that are often overlooked by 'experts'.

Session 1:
Distilling media experiences and learnings of the Asian Tsunami

Panel 1: Covering the Indian Ocean Tsunami: the hard news edge

Moderated by Chin Saik Yoon, members of this panel were journalists and news editors who recalled how they covered one of the biggest news stories in recent years - the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

Milind Khandekar, Deputy Managing Editor, Star News, India:



- For a media practitioner, the biggest challenge in a disaster is logically managing information about the unfolding event. You have to get the pictures. This was the challenge when covering the Tsunami. We have heard and seen so many disasters in India, yet never heard of Tsunami. Honestly, we were not ready for it.
- In India, the first reports of the Tsunami came in from the eastern metropolis of Chennai around 9 am. These talked about flooding at Marina Beach. Water was said to be coming into the city. There were no reports yet from other parts of the state of Tamil Nadu. Our first reaction was: is it a flood? It took us time to understand this was a Tsunami.

Even while the story was still unfolding, we found out that it was hitting our neighbours worse: Sri Lanka, Thailand -- and things were getting worse by the hour.

- In a disaster, everyone is a victim in one way or another; no one is spared. We as media are not there to merely and dispassionately report. We invariably become a vital link the scene of the disaster has with the rest of the country and world. During the Gujarat Earthquake, I allowed dozens of affected people to use my microphone -- live on air - to speak out and tell their family and friends elsewhere that they had survived.

Asoka Dias, Sirasa TV/Mararaja TV, Sri Lanka

- When the Tsunami story was breaking, one big challenge was to find a word or a phrase to explain the Tsunami in our local languages (Sinhala and Tamil). Historically Sri Lanka has had some tsunamis, but none in living memory. We



- struggled to describe what was happening.
- The tsunami hit many provincial correspondents based in coastal areas. According to one assessment, two correspondents went missing and 23 were injured. Additionally, nearly 1,000 members of 121 journalists' families were displaced, with housing and equipment damages totaling US \$300,000. Among the damages listed are 48 houses, 80 still cameras and nine television cameras. This, and telecommunications disruption in the affected areas, placed

- practical difficulties in obtaining coverage in the initial days.³
- Sri Lankan government requested the media not to carry photos of dead bodies. Later, we realised affected people were using pictures in the media to identify their missing loved ones. This prompted some individuals to record the TV reportage of the tsunami and sell them on CDs for approx US\$ 1.50 per copy.

Ahmed Shakeeb, Television Maldives

- You can barely imagine impact of that magnitude for Maldivian people living on the sea. The Tsunami struck Maldives at 9.20 am in the morning. It became more shocking because of the nature of our livelihood. As the Tsunami hit, the whole communication system failed. The telephone and radio systems failed. The only thing that still worked were the TV signals.
- Because of the Maldives' small land mass and population, the world did not realize how badly it was affected. Some 13 islands had to be tally evacuated. Out of these, four islands were later abandoned. Nearly two years later, a couple of thousands people are living in temporary shelters.
- Almost 95% of the Maldives is the sea. The sea is everything for us Maldivians: playground for our children, and source of livelihood for many of us. In a split of a second, their friend (the sea) became an enemy. After the Tsunami, everyone is afraid of the sea. Not just the sight of it, but even the thought of it. But we have to overcome this: we cannot live in the Maldives fearing the sea - it is never more than a few metres away!



Box 2

Indian News Channels: United by Tsunami

The first hours and days after the Tsunami saw the highly competitive Indian news media organizations sharing each other's information, visual and contacts in the true spirit of cooperation. Panos South Asia Executive Director (and former News Director of India's Sun TV network) A S Panneerselvan told the meeting:

"Generally, the Indian news market is highly competitive with 18 TV news channels. They're not willing to share visuals or co-operate. But something extraordinary happened soon after the Tsunami news broke. For the first time, none of the channels was insisting on exclusivity. They were simply downloading each other's images, without even bothering about the rights or other issues.

"This was indeed rare. We know how many contracts have to be signed even for broadcasting 10 seconds of a cricket match. The kind of cross-flow of information after the Tsunami was amazing. All channel rivalries were momentarily forgotten.

"The only problem was with the international relief agencies, who are extremely hierarchy conscious. They were not easily available to the news media, and often they spoke only to influential Western news agencies such as Reuters and BBC."

Panel 2: Covering the Asian Tsunami: beyond news headlines

Moderated by Manori Wijesekera, Regional Programme Manager of TVE Asia Pacific, this panel discussed the Tsunami's coverage in formats other than news and current affairs, and how such coverage extended beyond the hard news values. TVE Asia Pacific's *Children of Tsunami* was one key experience discussed during a panel. Three of the four panelists had been associated with this multi-country, multi-media initiative (see Box 3).

Box 3

Children of Tsunami: Journalism with empathy



Children of Tsunami was TVE Asia Pacific's main response to the Tsunami. It tracked -- on television, video and web -- how affected people were rebuilding their lives, livelihoods and homes after the disaster. From February to November 2005, TVEAP-commissioned local film-makers made monthly visits to two chosen families in each country. Based on location filming and field investigations, they produced television, video and web stories for a global audience.

The main focus was on eight surviving children, who served as 'story guides' - but the stories also covered their extended families, neighbours and communities. Using their specific experiences, *Children of Tsunami* showed how tsunami recovery was progressing - or, in some places, stagnating - across affected Asia.

TVEAP's Regional Programme Manager Manori Wijesekera described it as 'an open-ended experiment that took us beyond the comfort zone of conventional television journalism'. She added:

"Positioned between hard-edge news and current affairs TV journalism and the development community, TVEAP was well equipped to engage in this exercise. As a regionally operating media organisation, we were extremely keen to tell the story of tsunami recovery using the audio-visual medium. But instead of producing documentaries laden with information and statistics, we opted to personalise the stories.

"This was done by tracking the recovery efforts of eight Tsunami affected families in the four countries most affected - India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. It's called a longitudinal study in the television industry."

For more information, visit: www.childrenoftsunami.info



Pipope Panitchpakdi, Director - Documentary, Nation Broadcasting Corporation, Thailand

- As journalists, we've been trained to do quick, sharp and precise stories that will have the most impact with our viewers. In doing so, we lose many nuances in a story like the Tsunami.



- Most editors are disinterested in "slow moving" stories. Once the news value faded away, it was a challenge to keep the Tsunami stories on the air. When TVEAP approached me with this idea, I welcomed it as that would allow me to track two affected Thai families for a year. Nation TV agreed to let me work half time during that period, but with full pay.

- Much of the Tsunami coverage in the Thai media (as well as international media reports filed from Thailand) centred around how foreign tourists were killed or injured. No one had looked at how the disaster affected the Moken ('sea gypsies') – nomadic, indigenous people living in coastal areas and some islands. One of the two Thai families tracked for *Children of Tsunami* was a Moken one.
- *Children of Tsunami* enabled me to raise other issues that were not adequately covered in the mainstream Thai media. For example, how some Western relief offers came with attempts in Christian proselitization, or the difficulties faced by Tsunami widows -- under Thai law, their husbands were not considered dead till bodies were found.

Joanne Teoh Kheng Yau, Executive Producer, Channel News Asia

- In the days following the tsunami, Channel News Asia received satellite news feeds showing the extent of devastation, as well as what experts, charity workers and politicians were doing to provide relief. But we felt the need to move beyond headlines. We wanted to examine the various facets of the tsunami's impact - social, cultural, political and even scientific aspects," she recalled.
- Shortly after the disaster, I visited my native town of Penang, Malaysia, where my grandmother was among the affected. The randomness of this event caught many journalists by surprise. Many of us were groping for words to describe the impact.



- It was in the second half of 2005 that I became involved in *Children of Tsunami*, when TVEAP negotiated a co-production arrangement with Channel News Asia. I was designated as executive producer for CNA's documentary based on the material filmed by the four country teams: *Children of Tsunami: No More Tears*.
- I have seen many types of TV and video productions related to disasters, but never come across a sustained effort like *Children of Tsunami*. It covered the struggles of some very ordinary people with extraordinary courage in the tsunami's aftermath. It captured many nuances and subtext. These details tell us more than the screaming news-headlines. My challenge was to distil so much that was gathered over the year into 26 minutes.
- Even now, many media organisations still work according to a 'disaster template', which needs to evolve.

Dendy Montgomery, Freelance TV professional, Aceh

- Aceh was the worst hit by the Tsunami. The good news is that children in Aceh are no longer afraid of the sea. They go to the beach every Sunday.
- There has been progress, but not for everyone. President Clinton was in Aceh recently, but when I asked affected people, some said: 'We don't care who comes visiting. When do we receive our permanent houses?'
- The Tsunami disaster in Aceh is not sexy (as a news-story) anymore. For several months after the disaster, all eyes were on Aceh. When the first year's commemoration came up, reporting took a spurt. Then it slowed down again. You should follow your heart. Journalists from elsewhere come to Aceh to do what their news directors want, and not really to report on what's happening on the ground.



Frederick Noronha, Freelance journalist & new media activist, India



- There seems to be a 'hierarchy of reporting' in disaster related media coverage. For example, some disasters are covered much more widely than others. The international news media takes an interest in some countries only when a major disaster strikes. Even within countries, some areas receive media attention only when a disaster strikes.
- We need to critique the media for not telling the stories that break over a long period. The tsunami story is not yet over. It may no longer be 'sexy', but there is much unfinished business in the post-tsunami recovery process.
- The under-reporting and non-reporting of many human interest and human development stories is a scandal. There are many silent emergencies that never attract sufficient media coverage or public attention. Today we have the tools and technologies to spread information quickly and inexpensively. We need to find alternative communications strategies.

Session 2 : Beyond the Tsunami: zooming out to the wider issues



Debate 1: Communicating Disasters or Communications Disasters?

The first activity under this session was a debate on 'Communicating Disasters or Communications Disasters?'. Moderated by Nalaka Gunawardene, it involved four participants representing diverse backgrounds such as print and broadcast media, development agencies and research/advocacy groups.

In starting off the debate, **Nalaka Gunawardene** raised several questions:

- Is information itself an essential 'relief item' during and after disasters, as recognised in the *World Disaster Report 2005*?
- Where does the media's role begin and end in disasters: should the media merely report and analyse- or get involved in rescue, relief, recovery and rehabilitation as well?
- How do we balance the public's right to know with the right to privacy of disaster affected persons
- How do new media alter the traditional media coverage of disasters? Can citizen journalists help improve communication of disasters?

The following are highlights of initial and later remarks made by each participant of the debate.

Lynette Lee Corporal, Project Editor, Inter Press Service - Asia Pacific, raised the issue of the mass media "losing interest" in disasters after a while.

- The Tsunami (like other disasters) came in "different waves" -- the need for information, the need for analysis and commentary, the spurt in citizen journalism.
- Citizen journalism has changed the way journalism is practised today. Unlike the detached 'objectivity' of the professional journalist, we have some honest, real accounts of what happened at the ground from citizen journalists (mainly bloggers). That in some ways has enhanced the reporting of professional journalists. The two groups have become complementary.



- The reporter needs to know what is happening... and not just go 'blind' to the scene of a disaster or any other event. Understanding and reflection are important attributes of a good communicator.

Amjad Bhatti, Regional Coordinator, Duryog Nivaran - South Asian Network for Disaster Risk Reduction, called for defining 'disasters' and going beyond the



"obsession with macro disasters".

- Since the Indian Ocean Tsunami, there has been a trend of "Tsunamisation of disasters" which had led to a desensitisation of responses in other disasters large and small.
- Disasters that set in slowly are being overlooked. For example, if 500 people die in a single train disaster, it's a big story for the media. But if that many - or far more - people die over a period of time by drinking pesticides, that's not as big a story.
- So many people have to die in one place at the same time for it to qualify as 'news' in today's media world. Mega-narrative of disaster is attractive to the media. For them, the motto seems to be: "If it bleeds, it leads".
- We must question how the media perceives 'news'. For instance, in 2005, 98.22% of the total number of people affected by all disasters in South Asia were those affected by floods. But the story of flood disasters was buried under issues like Kashmir earthquake and the Tsunami.
- There are 'missing' disasters (which don't get reflected in the media). Among them are climate-induced, technological or biological disasters. Talking openly about HIV/AIDS is still a taboo in many parts of South Asia. Sea level rise in Bangladesh is not seen as a potential disaster. Famine becomes a story, drought doesn't - because the latter kills slowly.
- The disaster-management discourse has to be linked with the media perspective, and *vice versa*.

A S Panneerselvan, Executive Director, Panos South Asia, argued that development professionals and disaster managers should not view the 'media' as a monolithic entity.

- If they want to engage the media, development professionals must first understand the complexity, nuances and diversity in what is collectively labeled as 'media'. In fact, the very term 'media' is a plural!
- Yet, development professionals regard and engage the media on simplistic presumptions. To many deep-immersed in text, media are only or largely broadsheet newspapers. A few romanticise community media as if that's the panacea for everything.
- In reality, there is a multiplicity of narratives that go on in the mainstream media all the time. Contending and contesting viewpoints co-exist, negotiate



their space and offer a wider view of the world as it is, rather than the world as we want it to be. Important as it is, development is only one of many areas of human endeavour that the media cover.

- Within media, it's always a constant struggle to get important stories out, and seasoned journalists have developed various tactics, e.g. subtle subversion, creative trespassing, passing a story to a rival media organisation if it can't be covered in one's own media outlet, etc.

Shahidul Alam, Director, Drik Picture Library, argued that it is always assumed that one primary concern of the media is to inform (and sometimes educate) the



people...and one primary concern of developmental agencies is to remove poverty. Are these premises correct in all situations?

- These romanticised notions ignore the political economy of both the media and development sectors. If we are to make both media and development more effective, we have to wake up and recognise the driving forces and realities.
- Let's face it: the commercialised media's job is to make money for its owners or shareholders, while the development agencies are constantly trying to secure more funding to sustain themselves. Self interest, rather than the public interest or the greater good, seems to dominate.
- Reporting about poverty or disasters (in the media) is as much an industry as working on poverty reduction or disaster management (in the development sector). But can we find ways to do well and do good at the same time? This needs more attention and discussion. We need to move beyond the platitudes and rhetoric. We need to take the reality head on and find creative ways to push our own public interest agendas within existing inequalities.
- Some of us don't like to confront this reality, and opt for terms and strategies like 'alternative media'. Well meant as these are, we often tend to marginalise ourselves in doing so. The so-called mainstream media can, in fact, be used as a vehicle for all kinds of reformist, progressive agendas- we just need to be smart and tactical about it.
- The biggest challenge is to make what is currently perceived as 'alternative' viewpoints into mainstream viewpoints.



Interactive session: "My wish...."

During this interactive session, each participant had the opportunity to express a personal wish on one of the following aspects:

- How hazards, disasters and post-disaster situations can be better communicated in the media;
- How to improve linkages and partnerships between media practitioners and disaster managers; and
- In what ways can the more established and newer ICTs support this process?



Here are the wishes expressed by participants, reproduced in their original wording (excepting improvements on grammar for clarity), as sorted into several categories by the meeting co-moderators:

AVOIDING CONFLICT:

- Developmental agencies and NGOs often feel that they 'possess' or 'own' the community that they provide assistance to. This creates tension/conflict between journalists and developmental agencies.
- To avoid confrontation, there is a need to focus on the public interest.
- Disaster officials should avoid using jargon. They need to be responsive to the journalists' questions.
- If a question is a complex one, journalists need to take the time to listen to the complex answer. Don't ask for the simplistic response.
- Both journalists and disaster managers should indulge in more self-reflection.

PRACTICES:

- Give utmost importance to "commons" (and common interest) rather than "exclusive", "logo and brand" exercises.
- See and consider the media as a partner.
- Disaster communicators to think like a CEO of an enterprise and see journalists/media as consumers of information.

INTERGRATING:

- What are the best models and examples for media and disaster managers cooperating well?
 - Involving the media as a stakeholder.
 - Involve media in joint assessments (not just after the project is over). After that, sponsor media professionals to visit projects and discuss issues.
 - "Embed" journalists in your work.
 - Co-creation of content.

COMMUNITY-CENTRED:

- Idea: Set up community-based communication channels in disaster prone areas (e.g. community radios, community newspapers, theatres, etc.)
- How best to magnify the voice of disaster-affected people:
 - Magnify access to tech-help-know-how
 - Sensitize managers about the difficult circumstances of minorities
 - Drama can be used to simulate a situation that requires a quick response (knee-jerk reaction). So dramatize a disaster in training.
- Provide a venue (or numerous venues) for affected people to air their grievances, needs, etc., and act on these ASAP.
- Effective disaster management is difficult without local capacity to organise



and direct volunteer action when disaster hits, and without building the capacity for disaster preparedness within the communities. Volunteerism has a proven value. Use it!

- Develop and encourage New Media (blogs, picture blogs, video blogs or video collections like YouTube.com) to give a voice to the poor and rural communities who do not get their fair share of voice in the mainstream media.
- Media should give as much space to the affected people through live group sessions on the ground, phone-in or SMS. This helps in the affected people getting to voice their pain and needs. It works better than the traditional way of doing a "human interest" story.

BUILDING UNDERSTANDING/TRUST:

- Having standard practices or standard operating procedures (SOP) in place for disaster response, relief and recovery. There is no time to think or plan during the stress. So follow SOP only or act automatically.
- Help media to understand the issue, while not promoting the organisation.
- Develop (cultivate and nurture) an ongoing relationship with the media.
- Establish a network for media and 'disaster relief providers' for better and efficient communications. (A possible outcome of this meeting.)
- Understanding the limitations of each other.
- Journalists, disaster managers and development workers should be provided a milieu to share their concerns and success on a common platform.
- Best practices/models: Mutual understanding on expectations has helped.

- An effective co-ordinating mechanism (for example, TNTRC, a neutral forum) is already working on balancing interests of government, local I/NGOs.
- Just try to understand the *priorities* of the "other" side. * To build trust and respect: exchange opportunities -- let journalists work with organisations, and officials into the newsroom, for a day.
- Development workers put on media glasses. Journalists put on development glasses. Both need to talk in the people's language.
- Find common interests and work together.
- Let the disaster-affected people speak, communication. Be fair with them (there 'no competition'). Respect and (try to) understand each other's constraints and roles.



Day Two: 22 December 2006

The second day started with the moderators presenting a summary of the interactive session which ended the first day.

This was followed by the screening of audio -visual material.

- ***Children of Tsunami: No More Tears*** (24 mins) was a regional documentary co-produced in late 2005 by Channel News Asia of Singapore and TVE Asia Pacific, based on year-long filming carried out in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand (see Box 3). It was broadcast Asia-wide on the first anniversary of the Asian Tsunami, in December 2005, and has since been repeated several times on Asia's leading English news channel.
- Participant Asoka Dias screened extracts from his media network's news and current affairs coverage of the two Tsunami related Sri Lankan stories where the media had played a key role:
 - The case of two men who were caught on a freelance journalist's video camera on Tsunami day as they robbed the necklace of an affected woman and threw her back into the waters immediately after the first wave had struck Galle. Based mainly on this evidence, a judge sentenced both men to death in December 2006.⁴
 - The case of baby Abilash, who was separated from parents and washed away by Tsunami waves but miraculously survived. Dubbed 'Baby 81' by the media, he received worldwide coverage when the media claimed nine couples claimed him as their own - which turned out to be a fabrication. (See Box 4 for more information.)
- Asoka saw the first example as one where the timely action by a professionally trained videographer - himself caught in the unfolding disaster - helped solve a crime. The second was where the media went overboard, and 'created news needlessly' when so many other, more legitimate stories were unfolding all around them.
- Nalaka Gunawardene, originator of *Children of Tsunami*, described how challenging it was to get regional and global broadcast media organisations to take note of the thousands of individual recovery stories behind the mega-story of the disaster's death and destruction. "When they were not following the blood, they were following the (aid) money. For sure, both were important, but was that all the Tsunami story was?" Nalaka referred to the insensitive conduct of some western media outlets - claiming to be global media - when they assigned a disproportionately high level of coverage for affected nationals from that media's country of origin /location. Jeremy Seabrook called this 'imperialism in death'.⁵

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6178779.stm

⁵ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/site/story/0,14173,1381297,00.html>

Sri Lanka's Baby 81: Controversy manufactured by media?

A Sri Lankan baby who grabbed world media attention as a "celebrated" Tsunami orphan was later united with his biological family -- but not before it had created headlines.

The four-month-old boy, Abhilash Jeyarajah, was picked up by a neighbor who found the infant under a pile of garbage immediately after giant waves lashed Kalmunai on 26 December 2004. The man handed over the child to the Kalmunai hospital. The parents, who also survived the waves, later found their child.

Police denied nine couples claimed him as their own and hospital authorities confirmed that only one couple had come forward to claim the baby. The man who handed over the child to hospital has told police that he had known the child was that of his neighbors and that there was no dispute about the parentage.

"Because it had a miraculous escape, a lot of people showed interest in the child, but they never said they were the parents," chief inspector W. C. Wijetilleka was quoted as saying. "Only one couple claimed the child. No one else has come forward to make a legal claim."

But newspapers and news agencies said squabbling had broken out over "Baby 81" -- as he was dubbed by hospital authorities in Kalmunai, going by the admission number. Apparently, nine couples who lost infants in the tsunami had all said he was theirs. *The New York Times* referred to him as a "celebrated orphan".

"As far as the police and the courts are concerned, only one couple is claiming the child," inspector Wijetilleka said. "We have reported the facts to court and the judge ordered the hospital to release the child to the parents."

The story was fuelled by the hospital's initial reluctance to release the boy until he was well enough. The couple then petitioned the court, which ordered on 12 January 2005 that the baby be given to them. DNA tests, presented to court on 14 February 2005 confirmed their claim as biological parents.

"The young couple was at the centre of endless media coverage for several weeks," says Asoka Dias, Station Director of MTV/MBC Network, Sri Lanka. "This created public impression that they also received a great deal of money and other help, which was not the case. They have had to relocate to a new neighbourhood, and are struggling to lead normal lives."

Sources: Lanka Business Online, www.lbo.lk

IHT: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/02/14/asia/web.01214baby81.php>

Session 3:
Enhancing the media's role in communicating disaster

Panel 3: Communicating before disaster strikes



This panel was moderated by **Roopa Rakshit, Communications and Information Manager of the Asian Disaster preparedness Centre (ADPC), Bangkok**. She stressed on the need for "timely, accurate communication" which could be a cost effective way of saving lives and reducing property damage.



Some of the suggested bullet-points for discussion were:

- What meaningful role can the mass media play in disaster awareness and preparedness at the community or national level?
- How can the media cover different types of disasters -- some evolving slowly (e.g. drought) and others more rapidly or without prior warning?
- How best can the mass media amplify credible hazard warnings, broadcast them to the largest numbers in the shortest possible time?
- What role do the new media play in disseminating early warnings?
- How can we improve the nexus between disaster managers, early warning systems and the media?

Cherdsak Virapat, National Disaster Warning Centre, Thailand, said his country was preparing a national office to coordinate an early-warning system for impending disasters.



- We want to see the media play a key role in disseminating these early warnings to the public in a fast, efficient and reliable manner.
- But we are finding it difficult to engage the media. Some sections of the Thai media say they don't trust us. We feel they don't know very much, and they don't want to learn. When we invite them for media training, they say: 'No, we don't have much time. We want just the news.'

Lakshaman Bandaranayake, Managing Director, Vanguard Management (ETV Channel), Sri Lanka, argued that the broadcast media offered wide reach and quick access in his country.



- We can reach 80% of our population through TV, and 90% through radio. It also has a value in terms of immediacy. But the media cannot be the only channel, and every available means of communications -- even the traditional village drummer -- needs to be looked at and creatively integrated into delivering disaster preparedness and disaster warning information to every section of society. It can't be left to the market alone to decide and manage early warning information. This is where government, civil society, academics and commercialised media all have to join hands.

- The traditional school of journalism may not readily acknowledge the possibilities thrown up by the new media. But the fact is that the new media are here to stay. We can't just dismiss the new media saying 'they don't have enough accountability, or don't follow the same code of ethics as the more established media do'.
- There are exciting opportunities that emerge with the new media, such as user-generated content, social networking and video blogging. It's up to all public spirited people to explore how these can be put to serve the public interest. The new media offer strong ways of binding communities together. We can create user-groups that are attracted by disaster concerns, and encourage them to share best practices.



Pablo Torrealba, Regional Risk Reduction Specialist of the UNDP's Crisis Prevention and Recovery (CPR) Team, contested the view that disasters were "natural".

- Disasters are triggered by a natural event which shocks society. We cannot change the event, but we can change society's response so that it doesn't become a disaster.
- Most disasters build up over time, some aggravated human action or apathy. It's a question of: how do

we create a disaster (over a period of time).

- People who are most impacted by disasters are those who are always left out of the development process.

Joe Carlos, Programme Manager, Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development, called for "good journalism" that would help turn a story into an "interesting, moving piece of story-telling".

- We need better protection to ensure the safety of journalists covering disaster and conflict situations. It is important to have guidelines for the media's own safety in times of disaster.



- We also need ethical guidelines on aspects such as interviewing those traumatised by disasters, handling privacy issues of disaster affected people , and in breaking bad news to the next-of-kin.
- Investigative journalism is needed to understand the factors and processes that turn hazards into disasters.

Box 5

Be better prepared !

Journalists across Asia can benefit from training on how to cover hazards and disasters in greater depth and with more sensitivity, the meeting was told. Joe Carlos, who works for AIBD, a regional organisation that builds the skills and knowledge of broadcast media personnel, had several specific suggestions:

- Regular dialogue between the media and different stakeholders;
- Media awards for the most appropriate coverage of any kind of disaster;
- Using local Asian languages more widely and effectively for such coverage;
- Training journalists in how to cope with trauma themselves, and those traumatised by a disaster;
- Training of community broadcasting staff as this media could play a bigger role in taking the knowledge to the grassroots.

Working group activity

Participants divided themselves into three smaller groups and worked in parallel sessions to come up with some guidelines for more effective engagement of mass media and new media before, during and after disasters.

These were then presented at plenary level and discussed. The resulting draft guidelines are given in Annex 3.



Session 4: Strengthening links between media and disaster managers

This concluding session of the meeting was joined by a few representatives from Bangkok-based UN agencies, disaster management organisations and mass media organisations.

Workshop moderators welcomed them, provided a summary of meeting activities thus far, and invited them to introduce themselves.

Debate 2: Communication under duress: Do disaster managers make good communication managers?

This debate was moderated by Chin Saik Yoon, and involved four participants.

Suggested discussion points were:

- When disaster strikes, how to balance the media's insatiable thirst for new information with ground realities and survival needs of the affected?
- How can disaster managers cope with media scrutiny and criticism? Do journalists get in the way of relief and rescue efforts?
- Who looks after public accountability and transparency?
- What media can disaster managers take into confidence?
- Which media outlets are the most important -- local, national or global?
- How can we optimise the strengths of print, broadcast and the online media?
- Can anything be done about 'checkbox journalism' that some media organisations indulge in at disaster scenes (paying or rewarding affected people to talk to them exclusively)?
- What non-media communications methods are available to disaster managers?

Heru Hendratmoko, Radio 68H community radio network, Indonesia described the challenges his network faced in covering the Tsunami's aftermath.

- We first heard of the Tsunami through an SMS, which simply said: "Earthquake in Aceh. Seawater rising." We sent in our first reporter to Aceh with a satellite phone, and he was given a ride on the plane carrying the Indonesian vice-president.
- Several international TV networks were beaming pictures from Sri Lanka and Thailand showing the damage. But the devastation in Aceh turned out to be much bigger than initially thought. This became known only after a few days, and then the world responded generously.
- But the post-disaster management could have been better handled by the Indonesian government. Relief materials were piling up at airport and harbours. People's needs and expectations were not being met. Frustrations were setting in, and morale was very low.



- We decided to use the airwaves to uplift the morale of the Achenese. We felt this would help them to start rebuilding their lives. Of course, it was not easy.
- We also started rebuilding the local radio station damaged by the waves, and sought international assistance. Before the disaster, we had 14 radio stations in Aceh and we now have 25.

Lisa Hiller, Communications Manager, UNDP Nepal, held the view that the priority of development organisations arriving at disaster scenes "is not primarily to communicate, but to respond to the emergency situation on the ground".

- This frustrates many journalists. It is therefore necessary for development organisations to see information as a 'commodity' -- in the same way they see emergency shelters or water supply as a commodity.
- As relief workers, we don't just arrive, bringing the tents, and then say 'Oh, here it is - you guys pick it up'. We would find distribution networks, and make sure the tents reach the right people. We have to manage information in the same way.
- It's a bit surprising that in Asia - where a majority of countries are still developing - that development is not considered a top news story.



Surein J S Peiris, Deputy Director General, Sri Lanka Red Cross said the Tsunami



was a major challenge to his relief organisation. The Red Cross did have decades of experience in dealing with various types of disasters, but the Tsunami was of an unprecedented scale and magnitude.

- The strength of the Red Cross is in its volunteerism. We had the capacity and readiness to mobilise thousands of volunteers for rescue and relief within hours.
- Under the overall banner of Red Cross, over two dozen organisations operated in Sri Lanka in the months following the Tsunami. This included the ICRC, IFRC, a number of Red Cross societies from other countries, and of course the Sri Lanka Red Cross. Most sections of the media did not grasp nor appreciate this complexity. To them, it was all one and the same Red Cross. Some misreporting and confusion arose as a result.
- As the Red Cross operates on a neutral basis, its preferred mode of operation is collaboration and partnership building. Sometimes the Red Cross cannot make statements as expected by the media, criticizing aid agencies or governments.
- In my view, the media needs to raise and sustain the coverage of the issue of internally displaced people (IDPs) both in times of disaster and conflict.

Prof Nalini Rajan, Dean, Asian College of Journalism (India) stressed the value of self reflection by both media practitioners and development/disaster professionals.



- While journalists dislike it when they are criticised, they seldom exercise the adversarial role they are expected to play.
- The media is good at reporting an event in terms of the 5 Ws in journalism -- who, what, where, when and why -- they but not so good at explaining processes that lead to an event, or the 'how' part of it.
- Criticism is needed on both sides: development workers need to focus the spotlight of criticism on themselves because there is a good deal of self-congratulation going on while there is much unfinished business.

Box 6

Governments, disasters and communications

Indian environmentalist Anil Agarwal wrote a scathing comment after the Bhuj earthquake of 2001: "Disasters come and go but, our government has become a permanent disaster". While we are vulnerable to natural disasters, he said, these temporary and preventable disasters turn into massive calamities because of the "perpetual disaster that this country's governance system has come to represent".

The uneasy relationship between Asian governments and the governed came into focus several times during the meeting. Whether it was the failure of governments to adequately prepare or warn people of impending disasters, or the inadequacies in post-disaster relief, recovery and rehabilitation, participants felt that governments did too little, too late.

Lack of good communications was part of the problem. "Governments don't trust their citizens," was one observation that many agreed with. In some countries, this could be traced to their colonial or dictatorial past. Similarly, many citizens feel they cannot count on their governments: the authorities often just want to avoid causing panic and alarm -- and hence play down or even deliberately suppress early warnings.

The sheer lack of reliable information and the many bottlenecks prevents its flow were also identified as problems. For instance, in the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster, it took a long time before the leaking deadly gas could be identified and its seriousness assessed.

The meeting agreed that for media to fulfill its role as public educator and early warning disseminator, governments need to get their act together and create an enabling environment. One participant - a media manager - shared his bitter experience of having to face legal action for a *bona fide* error in a public interest website his company had put up after the Tsunami.

Clearly, a good deal of 'bridge building' and confidence building is needed.

In the ensuing discussion, participants cited both best and worst practices in disaster communications. One aspect that drew several comments was the obsession of many relief and development agencies for 'branding': the phenomenon of using disaster relief items, as well as disaster relief communications, as 'logo delivery mechanisms'.

Nalaka Gunawardene drew attention to another unhealthy trend: some developmental agencies seeking favourable media coverage - basically, their propaganda - by paying for air time or print space. "This distorts the news values and makes it more difficult for other agencies to get the media coverage they deserve. This is corruption - I call it 'checkbook development'," he said.

Development agencies present acknowledged they are under much pressure to document and account for resources they receive. While coping with these institutional imperatives, the meeting agreed, issue-based public communication of development and disasters should not be sidelined or abandoned.



Concluding Remarks

The meeting concluded with a few remarks by the co-organisers and co-moderators.

- Nalaka Gunawardene described plans for compiling a regional resource book on Communicating Disasters, which would include: the full report of this meeting; invited contributions from several participants; and contributions from a number of other media or development professionals in the region.
- Participants agreed on the value of an internet-based mailing-list focusing on communications and disaster. The idea is to keep it open to others who are not present, but interested in the intersection-point of these two topics.⁶
- Building online (or print) directories of journalists interested in developmental communications was also mentioned. Shahidul Alam said he would be keen to build up a listing of photographers in various parts of Asia. Others pointed to the existence of some such lists.
- Amjad Bhatti mentioned attempts to create a global network of journalists working on disaster issues. He said special editions were also brought out, with six being released so far, related to disaster themes. "In South Asia, we are sharing mountains, river basins and deserts. The question is how to also share more information?"



In her concluding remarks, **Cherie Hart, UNDP's Regional Communications Advisor**, said looking at the issue in terms of "media vs. development practitioners or disaster practitioners" was a false divide. She added: "I don't think they're two different sides. We need to see each other through the same lens. We have more in common in goals that we have, than we might first realise."

She also said it was another "false divide" to see things in terms of the mainstream media vs. alternative media. "I find that divide is really fuzzy. More and more, we're seeing bloggers breaking the stories. We're seeing alternative media coming to the fore. We've already seen how cell phones are taking the lead."

Manori Wijesekera, TVE Asia Pacific's Regional Programme Manager, concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for having participated with such energy and enthusiasm. "We had worked hard to bring together a good mix and balance of participants, and that resulted in a dynamic meeting of minds where discussion was forthright and honest. Our challenge is to carry these ideas forward in our own spheres of work."



⁶ This has since been launched, and can be accessed at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/communicating-disaster/>

Communicating Disasters

Building on the Tsunami Experience and Responding to Future Challenges

**A Regional Brainstorming Meet
Bangkok, Thailand: 21 - 22 December 2006**

Organised by TVE Asia Pacific (TVEAP)
and
United Nations Development Programme Regional Centre in Bangkok
(UNDP-RCB)

Venue: **Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel and Tower**
2 Charoen Krung Soi 30(Captain Bush Lane), New Road, Siphya, Bangkok
10500

Agenda

Meeting Formats:

Panels:

- Typically 3 - 4 panelists
- Moderator introduces topic in 3 - 5 mins
- Each panelist gets 5 mins for initial remarks (prepared statements or PowerPoint presentations not expected - you may speak from notes).
- Q&A engagement with the full group for at least 30 mins

Debates

- Typically 4 participants in 'fish bowl' style seating arrangement
- Moderator introduces topic, and elicits brief initial responses from participants
- Cross-talk between participants is allowed and encouraged
- Moderator moves around, asking pointed questions of both participants and the live audience - aim is to provoke and stimulate
- With moderator's permission, the audience gets to pose questions to participants, or make very short and relevant comments

Interactive sessions

- These will happen involving the full group, or in smaller working groups.
- Exact nature, scope and tasks are to be announced during the meeting.

Film screenings

- Large screen projection of relevant documentaries, preceded or followed by brief discussion on issues raised by them.

Overall meeting facilitators:

- **Chin Saik Yoon**, Communications specialist and Publisher, Southbound Press, Penang, Malaysia <http://www.digital-review.org/bau32.htm>
- **Nalaka Gunawardene**, Director and CEO, TVE Asia Pacific <http://www.childrenoftsunami.info/crews/exec.php#4>

Workshop Sessions Overview

Day	Time	Session/activity
Day 1 Thursday 21 Dec	AM	Opening remarks and self introductions
		Session 1: Distilling media experiences & learning of Asian Tsunami
	PM	Session 2: Beyond Tsunami: zooming out to the wider issues
		Evening dinner and river cruise
Day 2: Friday 22 Dec	AM	Session 3: Enhancing media's role in communicating disasters
	PM	Session 4 (with more local participants joining): Strengthening links between media and disaster managers
		Closing remarks

Day 1: Thursday, 21 December 2006

Note: Bullet points given under each topic are only suggestive, and not in anyway meant to confine or influence the discussion in a particular direction. Moderators will use these and other points to provoke wide-ranging discussion.

08:30 - 09:00	Registration of participants and distribution of materials
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome and opening remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nalaka Gunawardene, Director and CEO, TVE Asia Pacific • Marcia V.J. Kran, Deputy Regional Manager and Head of Policy and Programme, UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok
09:15 - 09:45	Getting to know each other: one minute spotlight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell us who you are, what you do and where you come from • Share a quick personal experience related to any disaster
09:45 - 10:00	Meeting agenda and formats explained
Session 1	Distilling media experiences and learnings of the Asian Tsunami
10:00 - 11:00	Panel 1: Covering the Asian Tsunami: the hard news edge Journalists and news editors recall how they covered one of the biggest news stories in recent years <u>Moderator:</u> Chin Saik Yoon <u>Proposed panel:</u>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milind Khandekar, Deputy Managing Editor - Star News • Asoka Dias, Sirasa TV/Mararaja TV, Sri Lanka • Ahmed Shakeeb, Television Maldives
11:00 - 11:30	Tea/coffee break
11:30 - 12:30	<p>Panel 2: Covering the Asian Tsunami: beyond news headlines Moderator: Manori Wijesekera, TVE Asia Pacific Proposed panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pipope Panitchpakdi, Director - Documentary, Nation Broadcasting Corporation, Thailand • Joanne Teoh Kheng Yau, Executive Producer, Channel News Asia • Dendy Montgomery, Freelance TV professional, Aceh • Frederick Noronha, Freelance journalist & new media activist, India
12:30 - 13:00	<p>Film screening: <i>Children of Tsunami: No More Tears</i> Co-produced by TVE Asia Pacific and Channel News Asia, December 2005</p>
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch break
Session 2	Beyond Tsunami: zooming out to the wider issues
14:00 - 15:15	<p>Debate 1: Communicating Disasters or Communications Disasters?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is information an essential 'relief item' during and after disasters? • Where does the media's role begin and end in disasters? • Should media merely report and analyse - or get involved in rescue, relief, recovery and rehabilitation as well? • How do we balance the public's right to know with the right to privacy of disaster affected persons • How do new media alter the traditional media coverage of disasters? • Can citizen journalists help improve communication of disasters? <p>Moderator: Nalaka Gunawardene In the 'fishbowl' (proposed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lynette Lee Corporal, Project Editor, Inter Press Service - Asia Pacific • Amjad Bhatti, Regional Coordinator, Duryog Nivaran - South Asian Network for Disaster Risk Reduction • Shahidul Alam, Director, Drik Picture Library, Bangladesh • A S Panneerselvan, Executive Director, Panos South Asia
15:15 - 15:45	Tea/coffee break
15:45 - 17:00	<p>Interactive session: "I wish..." Each participant gets to express one wish on how hazards, disasters and post-disaster situations can be better communicated in the media:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Format: express in 1 min or less (alternative: write on flash card) • Feel free to add to someone else's wish • Facilitators will cluster and collate all wishes to produce a synthesis for Day 2
17:00	End of sessions
19:00	Dinner reception and river cruise
22:00	Estimated time of return to the hotel

Day 2: Friday, 22 December 2006

09:00 - 09:15	The combined 'wish list': A synthesis of participants' wishes expressed on Day 1 Summed up by Chin Saik Yoon & Nalaka Gunawardene
09:15 - 09:30	Film screening 2 Video clips sourced by meeting participants
Session 3	Enhancing media's role in communicating disasters
09:30 - 10:30	<p>Panel 3: Communicating before disaster strikes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What meaningful role can the mass media play in disaster awareness and preparedness at community/national levels? • How can media cover different types of disasters- some evolving slowly (e.g. droughts) and others more rapidly or without prior warning? • How best can mass media amplify credible hazard warnings, broadcasting them to the largest numbers in shortest possible time? • What role do the new media play in disseminating early warnings? • How can we improve the nexus between disaster managers, early warning systems and the media? <p><u>Moderator:</u> Roopa Rakshit, Communication & Information Manager, Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), Bangkok</p> <p><u>Proposed panel:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cherdsak Virapat, National Disaster Warning Centre, Thailand • Pablo Torrealba, Regional Risk Reduction Specialist, Crisis Prevention and Recovery (CPR) Team, UNDP • Lakshman Bandaranayake, Managing Director, Vanguard Management (ETV channel), Sri Lanka • Joe Carlos, Programme Manager, Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD)
10:30 - 11:00	Tea/coffee break
11:00 - 12:15	<p>Working group activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants divide themselves into three smaller groups and work in parallel sessions to come up with some guidelines for more effective engagement of mass media and new media before, during and after disasters. • Working groups will be provided a brief and the meeting convenors will roam among the groups to provide inputs if needed.
12:15 - 13:00	<p>Group work presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups come back together to present each group's recommended guidelines • Followed by discussion.
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch break
Session 4	Strengthening links between media and disaster managers (involving several more participants from Bangkok)
14:00 - 14:10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming newly joining participants from Bangkok-based UN agencies, disaster management organisations and mass media • Summing up what has happened so far <p>By Chin Saik Yoon and Nalaka Gunawardene</p>

14:30 - 15:15	<p>Debate: Communicating under duress - Part 1 Do disaster managers make good communication managers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When disaster strikes, how to balance media's insatiable thirst for new information with ground realities and survival needs of affected • How can disaster managers cope with media scrutiny and criticism? • Do journalists get in the way of relief and rescue efforts? • Who looks after public accountability and transparency? • What media can disaster managers to take into confidence? • Which media outlets are most important - local, national or global? • How can we optimise the strengths of print, broadcast and online media? • Can anything be done about 'chequebook journalism' that some media organisations indulge in at disaster scenes (paying/rewarding affected people to talk to them exclusively)? • What non-media communications methods are available to disaster managers? <p>Moderator: Chin Saik Yoon <u>In the 'fishbowl'</u> (proposed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Nalini Rajan, Dean, Asian College of Journalism, India • Heru Hendratmoko, Radio 68H, Indonesia • Lisa Hiller, Communications Manager, UNDP Nepal • Surein J S Peiris, Deputy Director General, Sri Lanka Red Cross
15:15 - 15:45	Tea/coffee break
15:45 - 16:30	<p>Debate: Communicating under duress - Part 2 How to build better 'bridges' between media and disaster managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the best models and examples for media and disaster managers cooperating well? • How best to accommodate and amplify the voices of disaster affected people? • How to avoid confrontations between journalists and disaster managers when it comes to communicating disasters? • Balancing the interests of governments, local NGOs and international NGOs - all engaged in disaster relief and management • What happens when charities and relief agencies compete for media attention and coverage, each vying for their '15 minutes of fame'? • Do disaster relief items become 'logo delivery mechanisms' for high profile relief agencies? <p>Moderator: Chin Saik Yoon/Nalaka Gunawardene <u>In the 'fishbowl'</u> (proposed): Same debate participants continue</p>
16:00 - 17:00	Further engagement with the enhanced audience
17:00	<p>Concluding remarks by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-facilitators: Chin Saik Yoon and Nalaka Gunawardene • Co-organiser: Manori Wijesekera, Regional Programme Manager, TVE Asia Pacific • Co-organiser: Cherie Hart, Regional Communications Advisor, UNDP Regional Centre Bangkok

Annex 2

List of Meeting Participants, Facilitators and Organisers

New media and mass media organisations

- Dr. Shahdiul Alam, Managing Director, Drik Picture Library Ltd, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Mr. Lakshaman Bandaranayake, Chairman/Managing Director, Vanguard Management Services (Pvt) Limited, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Ms. Lynette Lee Corporal, Project Editor, Inter Press Service Asia Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand
- Mr. Asoka Dias, Director Station, Sirasa TV, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Mr. Heru Hendratmoko, Production Director, Radio News Agency KBR 68H, Jakarta, Indonesia
- Mr. Milind K Khandekar, Deputy Managing Editor, Star News, Mumbai, India
- Mr. Dendy F. Montgomery, Freelance Cameraman, Aceh, Indonesia
- Mr. Pipope Panitchpakdi, Director of Special Report and Documentary, Nation Broadcasting Corporation, Bangkok, Thailand
- Mr. Ahmed Shakeeb, Announcer, Television Maldives, Male, Maldives.
- Ms. Joanne Teoh Kheng Yau, Senior Producer, Channel News Asia, Singapore

Research and academic organisations

- Mr. Amjad Bhatti, Regional Coordinator, Duryog Nivaran, South Asian Network for Disaster Risk Reduction, Islamabad, Pakistan.
- Mr. Joe Carlos, Programme Manager, Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Mr. A S Panneerselvan, Executive Director, Panos South Asia, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Dr. Nalini Rajan, Dean of Studies & Associate Professor, Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, India.
- Ms. Roopa Rakshit, Communication & Information Manager, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Bangkok, Thailand.

Governmental and non governmental organisations

- Ms. Nalini Keshavaraj, Manager, Tamil Nadu Tsunami Resource Centre, Chennai, India.
- Mr. Surein J.S. Peiris, Deputy Director General, Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- Mrs. Yupayong Thetapupa, Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Ministry of Interior, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Mr. Cherdsak Virapat, Chief, International Coordination National Disaster Warning Center, Thailand (NDWC), Bangkok, Thailand.

Meeting facilitation and documentation

- Mr. Chin, Saik Yoon, Publisher, Southbound, Penang, Malaysia.
- Mr. Frederick Noronha, Independent Journalist, Goa, India.

Co-organisers - TVE Asia Pacific

- Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene, Director and CEO, TVE Asia Pacific
- Mr. Janaka Sri Jayalath, Audio Visual Officer, TVE Asia Pacific
- Ms. Geeta Saravanan, Administrative Officer, TVE Asia Pacific
- Ms. Manori Wijesekera, Regional Programme Manager, TVE Asia Pacific

Co-organisers - UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok (RCB)

- Ms. Christine Apikul, Programme Specialist - Content Development and Knowledge Management, UNDP-APDIP, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Ms. Cherie Hart, Regional Communications Advisor, UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok
- Ms. Lisa Hiller, Communications Manager, UNDP Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Mr. Pablo Torrealba, Risk Reduction Specialist, UNDP, Regional Centre Bangkok, Thailand
- Mr. Chanuka Wattegama, Programme Specialist ICT4D, UNDP-APDIP, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

UN Participants for the special half day session on Day 2

- Ms. Vero Balderas Iglesias, Communication Specialist, United Nations Volunteers, Aceh, Indonesia.
- Mr. Osama M. Rajkhan, Social Affairs Officer and Human Rights Focal Point, Emerging Social Issues Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), Bangkok, Thailand.
- Ms. Anuje Pina Sirkit, Public Information Officer, UNESCO Bangkok, Thailand



Annex 3

Suggested guidelines for more effective engagement of mass media and new media before, during and after disasters

These guidelines were drafted by the meeting participants, working in three parallel groups during the morning of Day Two.

Before a disaster strikes (hazard phase)

Guidelines for media organisations, and also government/developmental organisations:

- Investigative reports are needed; on issues like institutional readiness.
- Pre-disaster work needs to start years before disaster, not minutes before.
- Need for credible government agencies tackling such issues.
- Institutional, developmental and academic institutions need to provide media with easy-to-digest information.
- Non-media institutions need to assist media in covering slow-moving stories, and to provide the 'human face' to what could otherwise be just dry stories.
- Fill in the 'resource gap'. Recognise logistical limitations of the media, with support from institutions for exposure visits and the like.
- Developmental organisations and institutions should make efforts to understand the diversity of the media. This means, diverse sections of the media need to be dealt with in differing ways.
- State of preparedness needed to be created among media organisations.
- Reach out to a greater variety of the media, and also the traditional media
- Institutions could make available B-roll footage available to the media, exploit existing networks such as the UNiFeed, <http://www.un.org/unifeed/>. Online photo libraries could also help to build awareness in the media. Institutions (working on disaster issues) should consider starting blogs.
- Local languages need to be deployed in media campaigns.
- Editors should be encouraged to have a 'disaster beat'
- Preparedness is a cultural value. It needs to be built upon.

During an unfolding disaster and immediately afterwards (first two weeks)

- It's not possible nor realistic to compile a rigid list of do's and don'ts.
- This phase of the disaster, in most cases, involves a window of two weeks from the time a disaster breaks.
- Focus on the 'immediate' media -- newspapers, TV, radio, web, cell phone. (Theatre, music, etc., may not be relevant at this point of time.)
- Work actively to bridge the mismatch between victims' needs and relief agencies' interest/focus.
- Let media have access to all information and sites, without restriction. Don't prevent journalists from reaching the disaster and other relevant sites.

- Encourage active participation of affected parties in the information and communication processes.
- Rather than preparing any more manuals or guidelines for media, what is needed is training, reorientation and sensitising for developmental agencies.
- Media needs to be considered and build (based on spot-reporting), a central desk, expert panel and other suitable forms to better cover an unfolding disaster situation.
- The goal is to spread information effectively, and provide expression to the people affected.
- Media should be treated as (those generating information for) part of the public domain, and a space for complementing ideas.
- Guidelines: Encourage and support all forms of narratives, and visuals.
- Guidelines: Be sensitive. There can be a difference between showing bodies and gore.
- Guidelines: Don't be offensive.
- Guidelines: Be effective.
- Guidelines: Training needed for the authorities, donors, agencies to understand journalism and how media organisations work.
- Bridge the mismatch between information available and needed.
- Assessment should start from the ground up.
- Let media have access to real information.
- New media (including TV) requirement: good 'sound bytes'.
- Media needs to adopt an antagonistic position, based on its logic of operations. Idea is to make those in power more accountable, less cosy.

After a disaster: long-term recovery

- Taking care of physical needs without overlooking mental disorders, stress, psychosomatic issues that are not often raised.
- Factors that exacerbate the problem need to be focused on: ethnic tensions, regional divisions, etc.
- Issues of gender need to be considered: especially concerns such as redefining women's role in the family after a disaster.
- Make available "cultural" emergency relief, as well as recovery support
- Disaster beat is recommended, the media should work to keep post-disaster issues in the news.
- Media should focus on both immediate aftermath and long-term effects.
- Be aware about possible mismatch between aid available, and the community needs.
- Media coverage needs to extend beyond the status quo in society (e.g. male control of households and assets).
- New media can play a special role in bypassing the hierarchy.
- Media has a role in 're-energising' the community during recovery phase.
- Media also has a role to play in sharing relevant stories with the community.