

Appendix 3

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

These guidelines were drafted by the participants of the Brainstorming on 'Communicating Disasters: Building on the Tsunami Experience and Responding to Future Challenges': Bangkok, 21 – 22 December 2006 (see also Appendices 1 and 2). They are carried here without editing.

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.