

Communicating Disasters

An Asia Pacific Resource Book

Edited by

Nalaka Gunawardene and Frederick Noronha

Foreword by

Sir Arthur C Clarke



UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok



TVE Asia Pacific

December 2007

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Published jointly by:

UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok and TVE Asia Pacific

December 2007

UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok

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Designed by

BT Options

Printed by

Melios

Cover

Caption: A mother hands over her baby to one of her relative to take him to a safe place. Migration never happens during flood, it happens when river erosion starts. But in Sirajganj, a northern district of the country river erosion and flood come together. Most of the northern district is under threat of flood. People have to move their homes with their belongings and take shelter on the highland. Continuous increase in water level causes inundation of river beds and marooning thousands of people. Sirajganj, Bangladesh. July 30, 2007.

Photo credit: Tanvir Ahmed / DrikNEWS / Majority World

Contents

Acknowledgements	V
Co-publishers	VI
Preface, by Elizabeth Fong, Regional Manager, UNDP RCB	VII
Foreword, by Sir Arthur C Clarke	VIII
Introduction <i>Nalaka Gunawardene and Frederick Noronha</i>	1
Section I: Communicating Tsunami	5
<i>The Indian Ocean Tsunami arrived without public warning. The first few days and weeks after the disaster were extraordinary for journalists and broadcasters: it challenged them professionally, personally, ethically and technically. Some of the region's leading communicators look back at their post-tsunami experiences, drawing insights and lessons.</i>	
The 2004 Tsunami: Unfinished Story <i>Johanna Son</i>	7
A Candle in My Window <i>Peter Griffin</i>	13
Nobody told us to run . . . <i>Chanuka Wattegama</i>	21
Children of Tsunami: Documenting Asia's Longest Year <i>Nalaka Gunawardene and Manori Wijesekera</i>	27
Beyond the Disaster-News Template <i>Joanne Teoh Kheng Yau</i>	37
Surviving the Tsunami: A Journalist's Story <i>Frederick Noronha</i>	41
Section II: Communicating under duress	43
<i>Whenever a hazard turns into a disaster of any kind, journalists and relief workers are among the first to arrive on the scene. But they have very different agendas. Journalists have to access and verify real time information, conform to communication ethics and get their story ahead of the competition. In the information age, disaster managers have to balance their own humanitarian priorities with the need to manage information flows and maintain good relations with the media. Five authors offer their perspective on how this might be attempted.</i>	
Capturing Nature's Fury <i>Shahidul Alam</i>	45
Stop All the Clocks! Beyond Text, Looking at the Pics <i>Max Martin</i>	49
Seeing Disasters Differently: How to Unearth Real Disaster Stories <i>Amjad Bhatti</i>	55
Communicating to Save Lives <i>Patrick Fuller</i>	59
Extra Hands in Times of Crisis <i>Veronica Balderas Iglesias</i>	65

Section III: Seeking common ground

69

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) give us unprecedented power to reach more people faster on hazards and disasters. Technology alone cannot deliver this potential – it requires a mix of sociological, cultural and institutional responses by governments, corporate sector and civil society. This also calls for building or reinforcing ‘bridges’ between media practitioners and disaster managers who have traditionally been on two sides of a divide. In this section, our contributors offer personal perspectives on harnessing the power of information and communication to save lives, heal broken hearts and help disaster survivors rebuild their lives.

Engaging the Media: A Rough Guide	<i>A S Panneerselvan</i>	71
Building Bridges: Managers and the Media	<i>Sanny Jegillos, Rajesh Sharma and Pablo Torrealba</i>	77
Who’s Afraid of Citizen Journalists?	<i>Sanjana Hattotuwa</i>	81
Bridging the Long ‘Last Mile’	<i>Nalaka Gunawardene</i>	87
Gender and Disasters: Tracing the Link	<i>Ammu Joseph</i>	93
Healing Broken Hearts, Calming Anguished Minds	<i>Chin Saik Yoon</i>	101
‘Critical mass’ for Community Disaster Resilience	<i>Buddhi Weerasinghe</i>	111
Digging Under the Rubble	<i>Kalpana Sharma</i>	115

Appendices

119

Appendix 1		120
<i>Official Report of Regional Brainstorming meet on ‘Communicating Disasters: Building on the Tsunami Experience and Responding to Future Challenges’: Bangkok, 21 – 22 December 2006</i>		
Appendix 2		137
<i>List of participants of Bangkok Brainstorming, December 2006</i>		
Appendix 3		139
<i>Suggested guidelines for more effective engagement of mass media and new media before, during and after disasters</i>		
Appendix 4		141
<i>Contributing Authors</i>		
Appendix 5		144
<i>Reuters AlertNet for Journalists</i>		
Appendix 6		147
<i>UN/ISDR Media Network on Disaster Risk Reduction</i>		
Appendix 7		149
<i>ReliefWeb Project</i>		

Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of a year-long process, which started with the TVE Asia Pacific and UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok coming together in late 2006 to explore the nexus between communication and disasters in the Asia Pacific region.

A regional brainstorming meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, held on the eve of the Indian Ocean Tsunami's second anniversary on 21 – 22 December 2006, brought together over 30 leading media professionals, disaster managers and communication specialists from South and Southeast Asia. The discussions and recommendations of this meeting form a key part of this book, which has been compiled in the months that followed, pooling the knowledge, expertise and diverse perspectives of some meeting participants as well as other acknowledged practitioners in media and development spheres.

We would like to thank all participants of the Bangkok brainstorming, especially Chin Saik Yoon who co-moderated the meeting with Nalaka Gunawardene.

As editors, we relied heavily on all our contributing authors who not only wrote their individual chapters but also responded to our many editorial queries and suggestions.

A special word of thanks to those who have provided the diverse array of photographs used to illustrate this book: Drik Picture Library of Bangladesh; Mangala Karunaratne; Pamudi Withanaarachchi; Photoshare service of the Information & Knowledge for Optimal Health (INFO) Project, USA; Reuters AlertNet; and UN Volunteers. Photographs of the Bangkok brainstorming were by Thananuch Sanguansak and Janaka Sri Jayalath. We have given individual photo credit where relevant; others have been drawn from TVE Asia Pacific (TVEAP) inhouse image archive.

The project has been ably supported at the UNDP by Shahid Akhtar, Programme Co-ordinator of the UNDP Asia Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) and his team comprising Christine Apikul, James George Chacko and Chanuka Wattedgama. Additional support and inputs were received from Pablo Torrealba, Risk Reduction Specialist, UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok.

At TVEAP, the project has received programmatic, administrative and coordination support from several colleagues, notably, Wipula Dahanayake, Janaka Sri Jayalath, Geeta Saravanan, Indika Wanniarachchi and Manori Wijesekera.

We also wish to thank Mathi Parthipan and his team at BT Options in Colombo for design, layout and production of this book.

We acknowledge with gratitude the financial support provided by UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok for both the brainstorming meeting and this book.

Nalaka Gunawardene and Frederick Noronha
Editors

Co-publishers



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 development initiatives, which allow UNDP, governments and other 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 and 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 Millennium Development Goals and HIV/AIDS.

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Television for Education – Asia Pacific, trading as TVE Asia Pacific (abbreviated TVEAP), is a regionally operating non-profit organisation engaged in information, education and communication (IEC) activities on a broad range of sustainable development and social justice issues.

Set up in 1996, the organisation has over a decade's experience in using audio-visual media (television, video and film) and new media (Internet and Web) for development communication. It works closely with television broadcasters, civil society groups and educational organisations across the Asia Pacific to tell authentic and engaging stories of how individuals, communities and countries pursue better lives and a better planet. Its main strategy is to use 'moving images to move people'.

TVEAP produces and distributes editorially independent, journalistically packaged TV, video and online content on a broad range of topics and issues. TVEAP's media products are used by broadcast, educational and civil society organisations across the Asia Pacific region for education, awareness, advocacy, training or activist purposes. TVE Asia Pacific is registered as a guarantee company in Sri Lanka, where its office is located. It is governed by an international Board of Directors.

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Preface

Information is a powerful tool, especially in a disaster. Media can be an invaluable conduit to alert communities of impending disasters, to update the situation during a disaster, and to profile real-life stories when the rebuilding begins. Media can bring us up close and personal to the site of the disaster, and show us images as they unfold in real time. Journalists have the power to both inspire positive action as well as ignite fear, depending on the nature and content of the stories they shape.

On the second anniversary of the tsunami in December 2006, the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok and TVE Asia Pacific organised a meeting on *Communicating Disasters: Building on the Tsunami Experience and Responding to Future Challenges*. It provided an opportunity for over 30 media professionals, disaster researchers and managers, and development communication specialists from tsunami-affected countries in Asia to take stock of media coverage, personal experiences, issues and lessons learned from the tsunami.

The meeting specifically explored the role of media professionals and their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). They shared incisive lessons and reflected on their role during the tsunami and its aftermath. Their experiences helped to shape guidelines for engaging the mass media and ICTs for more effective communication before, during and after disasters.

This joint publication of UNDP Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme and TVE Asia Pacific seeks to capture the essence of the discussions and provide a forward-looking insight into the role of the media in disasters. Their personal observations, and in many cases, dramatic participation in covering the tsunami, offer a new perspective on the many facets of journalists' work.

There are certainly great benefits to be reaped if strengthened understanding and common ground can be forged between different media outlets, government departments and development agencies when disasters strike. This publication is one contribution toward leveraging the reach of the media and ICTs to better inform citizens and save lives.

Elizabeth Fong
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UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok