

# In the Tsunami's Wake: Media and the Coverage of Disasters in Asia





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**In the Tsunami's Wake:  
Media and the Coverage of Disasters in Asia**

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Cover photos taken from a Channel 11 video

## Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary of Conference Proceedings</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Understanding Disasters</b> Dr Suvit Yodmani	<b>15</b>
<b>Role of Media in Disasters</b> Vicente G. Tirol	<b>22</b>
<b>Media Sensitivities in the Coverage of Disasters</b> Maude Froberg	<b>26</b>
<b>Vulnerabilities in the Relief Effort</b> Mohammad Mohiuddin	<b>29</b>
<b>Transparency and Access to Information in Burma</b> Aung Zaw	<b>33</b>
<b>Case Study on Corruption: Mount Pinatubo</b> Luz Rimban	<b>36</b>
<b>Case Study on Corruption: Aceh</b> Luky Djani	<b>38</b>
<b>Case Study of Tsunami Coverage in a Conflict Zone: Banda Aceh</b> Don Bosco Selamun	<b>43</b>
<b>Case Study of Tsunami Coverage in a Conflict Zone: Jaffna</b> Uvindu Kurukulasuriya	<b>46</b>
<b>Covering Disasters: Safety, Logistics and Options</b> Chaitanya Kalbag	<b>49</b>
<b>Role of Community Journalists: 68H Radio in Banda Aceh</b> Heru Hendratmoko	<b>51</b>
<b>Role of Community Radio: Anna FM, Chennai</b> R. Sreedher	<b>56</b>
<b>Role of Community Journalists: Channel 11 Phuket</b> Wanpen Upton	<b>59</b>
<b>Tsunami Early Warning System in Thailand</b> Smith Dharmasaroja	<b>62</b>



## Foreword

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One would be excused for not knowing which type of natural disaster has killed the most number of people in the last two decades of the last century. One would be excused, that is, unless one were tasked precisely to know such things. The media that's always first on the scene of a calamity, for example, reporting, assessing, analyzing, calling for government's quick response, appealing for the public's understanding and generosity. Or disaster managers funded and employed precisely to study the subject. Such professionals ought to know as much, and if you were to ask, say, the director of the Thailand-based Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (APDC), he actually can give you the correct answer.

Confronted with the question, however, around 60 senior journalists that the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) gathered from around Asia surmised (wrongly) that earthquakes, or perhaps floods, are the most fatal among all of nature's tantrums. On April 28 and 29, 2005 — four months after the devastating tsunami of December 26, 2004 — SEAPA and FES brought the editors, producers, reporters and news executives to Phuket precisely to discuss how they can better cover disasters. Soon enough we were all off to a telling start.

For the record, this is the reality: More than tremors, more than floods, more than hurricanes, typhoons, and erupting volcanoes, it is plainly and simply *droughts* that claim the most lives. The APDC, whose expert guidance and input helped to finalize the conference program, says that from 1982 to 2001, floods affected the most people, and earthquakes caused the heaviest damage to property, but it is droughts that have consistently been the grimmest reapers. Dry spells killed more people in two decades (more than 277,000) than floods and earthquakes combined. Even now, as the world shakes off its daze from the tsunami, a quick survey — from Zimbabwe to the United States, China, and yes, South and Southeast Asia — will tell you that enduring dry spells have indeed returned to the top of nations' and entire continents' agendas.

For APDC Director Suvit Yodmani, however, this begs the question why the topic of drought hardly goes to the world's headlines as well. He suspects that basic

misperceptions are part of the problem, but more fundamentally, he makes the point that authorities, relief agencies, development workers, and the media are evidently failing to give the public — and themselves — the right information.

That in itself is a formula for disaster. From a disaster manager's perspective — where information spells education, and education invites action, which hopefully redounds to preparedness — any gap in knowledge or leap in logic can only lead to a reliving of tragedies.

The SEAPA-FES conference, “In the Tsunami's Wake: Media and the Coverage of Disasters in Asia” started off on that concern precisely. The region's journalists were asked: what responsibilities does media take on whenever disasters occur, and how does it improve on every role it plays?

The days following the tsunami demonstrated that the modern journalist does not only bring an unfolding story to the world. He or she also helps to heal communities, rebuild lives, keep families intact, raise funds. The media also keep an eye on government and relief agencies, helping to ensure that aid gets to the people who need them, and that those who deliver the goods remain accountable to the world.

Such responsibility! But what happens when the press is not prepared to play so many roles? The question should be particularly troubling for Asians: According to the World Bank, in recent years 52 percent of populations affected by natural disasters lived in Asia. Eighty-seven percent of all casualties also came from the most populous continent on Earth. Even more ominous, by virtue of geology, burgeoning populations, poverty-driven settlements and even poor governance, Asians will continue to have a higher probability of being a casualty in a future disaster than other citizens of the world.

The important news to first communicate is that certain impacts and elements of disasters are mitigatable, manageable, and even preventable, were it only so that information can flow as powerfully as the tragedies — natural and man-made — that they confront. From this standpoint, the media may have a clearer idea of what needs to be done.

For starters, journalists can realize that they needn't wait for disasters to strike before they actually cover their implications. The Phuket conference was capped by a presentation from Dr. Smith Dharmasaroja, proponent and lead designer of Thailand's new tsunami early warning system — the same scientist who had been advocating for just such a system since the 1990's. Nobody listened to his pleas until it was too late, and the Phuket conference thus challenged its participants to develop a “disaster beat” based on already existing data, research, and a global community of scientists still crying out for attention.

It is not just media circumspection that is needed, of course. During the conference, journalists from Aceh spoke of the need to guard against corruption in the relief process. Their colleagues from the Philippines spoke about the same issue, drawing from their experience in tracking billions of pesos in relief funds released after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991. From the democracies of Thailand, Indonesia, India, and the

Philippines, to the strife-torn regions of Sri Lanka and Indonesia, to the closed societies of Burma (where the ruling junta didn't immediately allow independent verification of the tsunami's impact on its people), there was collective recognition of the importance of government transparency in the face of chaos — the inescapable conclusion being that more and better access to information lends itself to better problem-solving capabilities of all sectors involved in rescue, relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Put another way: Restricting media and a culture of free information stifles prevention, confuses relief and rehabilitation, and perpetrates a cycle that — contrary to popular and outdated belief — is not inevitable at all.

This documentation of the SEAPA-FES Conference on Media and the Coverage of Disasters in Asia hopefully contributes to the press's freedom and capacity to deliver on all its responsibilities when it matters most: when lives are on the line.

**Roby Alampay**

Executive Director

SEAPA





## Summary of Conference Proceedings

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### **In the Tsunami's Wake: Media and the Coverage of Disasters in Asia**

*April 28-29, 2005*

*Royal Phuket City Hotel, Phuket*

### **28 April 2005**

About 70 participants including print and broadcast media representatives from Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, disaster management experts, donor and international non-governmental organizations attended the Media and Disasters Conference, which began with an ice-breaker session to set a relaxed tone for the meeting.

The exercise involved how participants perceived a disaster management challenge and came up with appropriate rescue responses. These ranged from “philosophizing” about the bureaucratization of rescue operations to innovative solutions.

In his opening remarks, *SEAPA Executive Director Roby Alampay* pointed out that the objective of the meeting was to bring together media professionals and disaster management experts from the region to share knowledge and experiences from their respective fields to facilitate more effective media coverage of disasters.

Explaining the role and interest of his organization in supporting the conference, *Dr Stefan Chrobot\**, *Resident Director, FES Thailand*, emphasized the importance of media coverage in both immediate and long-term relief and rehabilitation efforts. For example, did the media follow up on the aid commitments/donations made in the immediate aftermath of disasters, he asked?

He stressed that preoccupation with reporting a massive disaster should not be at the cost of media coverage of other crises demanding public attention, citing how the tsunami had diverted media focus away from equally important press coverage of the Islamic insurgency in southern Thailand.

FES had set up a team to follow up on what happened to the people thrown out of work after the disaster in Thailand's tsunami-hit areas. It had also organized meetings between representatives of local people's groups in tsunami-affected areas of Thailand and the government in Bangkok. Dr Chrobot then introduced members of FES mobile assistance center teams working in Phang nga and Phuket as well as members of the FES contact team in Bangkok representing workers' interests.

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\* Dr Chrobot is now director of FES Ukraine.

Speaking on the role of media in disasters, veteran Filipino media trainer *Vicente Tirol*, who lectures at the *Ateneo de Manila University* in the Philippines, underlined the need for continuing education for the profession.

He analyzed the multiple roles of journalists covering a disaster situation, which range from merely reporting the facts and educating readers in the various aspects of disaster preparedness, to providing public services to victims and keeping an eye on official and non-governmental relief and rehabilitation efforts. He listed haste, ignorance, laziness, cultural insensitivity and a “formula” approach as the main obstacles to effective press coverage of disasters.

Explaining the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how to’ of disasters, *Dr Suvit Yodmani*, *Executive Director* of the two decade-old *Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)*, emphasized that disaster management involves addressing both risks and consequences — before and after the calamity. Contrary to what most people think, statistics show that the biggest killer is a ‘silent’ natural catastrophe like drought and not an earthquake. He informed the meeting that the APDC, which is to be one Asia’s three regional tsunami warning centers, will have its facility operational by December 2005.

Former Swedish TV journalist *Maude Froberg* of the *International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Southeast Asia)* dispassionately dissected the positive and negative aspects of media coverage of the December 2004 tsunami and other recent natural disasters. While noting the exemplary role of media in sounding the first alarm, reporting from the disaster “frontline” and catalyzing financial support for the victims, she noted the tendency to report “photogenic relief” involving celebrities and a “lack of will to investigate relief work”.

As a representative of the world’s biggest humanitarian assistance organization, she pointed out that the focus on outside help “shadows the power of community action”. In this context, she was really impressed with how Thailand coped with the crisis with its own resources: “...still the big thing is how Thailand is saying no to international assistance...community resilience is very, very important.”

She advised the media that in reporting relief efforts by humanitarian groups they must ask the right questions: “Why don’t you ask me: How do I know why this person needs so much food and water? How do I know that the water and sanitation has to be put there and not over there?” Journalists should try to familiarize themselves with the international standards and code of conduct for humanitarian organizations, she said. Among other things, these specify how to treat people in disasters, how to behave, how much food disaster victims are entitled to, how much water, etc. However, she had not seen any journalist asking these questions.

The Red Cross is not supposed to depict people affected by disasters as helpless victims. “So how are we doing in our advertisement campaign? Are we doing better? Are we depicting people as helpless victims? I don’t know. But have a look at it,” she suggested.

During the ensuing question and answer session, Dr Suvit and Mr Tirol emphasized that the media and disaster managers should be partners in handling a crisis. Dr Suvit

pointed out that as a disaster manager he thought that media have to be involved in the preparedness phase as well as during and after a disaster. Mr Tirol referred to the National Emergency Forum in the United Kingdom, comprising of representatives of emergency services, planners and editorial managers from media organizations.

Dr Suvit said it was important that media be at the disaster spot “as soon as possible”. He cited the example of a recent fire in a building in Bangkok when media were “tremendously useful”. However, there are times when reporters have to understand why they are denied entry to a disaster area such as when there is a danger of a building collapse or other risk of injury to journalists if they try to go in, he said. “...they (journalists) are after all just people, just like us. So we have to save their lives,” he pointed out.

Sometimes the press is not fair to disaster managers, though “more times than not, you (media) are very beneficial”, Dr Suvit said. He urged the media to strive for the correct balance between the compulsion of ‘selling’ the news in a competitive market and sensitivity to disaster managers’ legitimate concerns.

Ms Froberg pointed to the need for media attention to the plight of those who volunteer assistance in the aftermath of disasters and who are often not prepared for coping with the intense negative psychological impact this entails.

There was also a discussion on whether the media should have a role in disaster management other than reporting the crisis. It was observed that some media personalities are engaged in distributing relief when they should in fact be doing more serious reporting. It was pointed out that journalists covering a disaster have a key role in sensitizing disaster managers, donors and the broader community to the issues. They certainly can influence wealthy NGOs or international agencies in supporting the relief and rehabilitation efforts. It was observed that there were cases where the aid cannot be utilized because of a lack of capacity and the media should make the donor community aware of the importance of supporting appropriate capacity building.

The issue of “sensational” media reportage, especially by television, in the aftermath of a disaster was also raised with some finding fault with the emphasis on showing dead bodies. Western media organizations, especially CNN came in for criticism for doing this during their coverage of the December 26, 2004 tsunami. Comparisons were made to Western media’s self-imposed restraint on showing dead and mutilated bodies after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

Dr Suvit observed philosophically that the media are business oriented: “They have to sell copies otherwise they don’t get advertisements and most of their income comes from the advertisements. The copies have to be really sensational. So I think we have to live with that a little bit, though there must be this discussion all the time among the government and the media.” The arrival of the international media on a disaster scene complicates the situation further in that the government cannot influence their coverage policy, he added.

A suggestion was made that media organizations in Asia should agree on a self-imposed code of ethical conduct for coverage of disasters: “let BBC show it, let CNN show it, we will not show it.”

The recent tsunami also highlighted the issue of media access to credible information as elaborated in the case study of Burma presented by *Aung Zaw*, Editor of the *Irrawaddy* magazine which articulates, among others, the Burmese political dissidents' case against Rangoon's military rulers.

Barring a few representatives of the international press, no Burmese journalist working in that country “dared to go” to the tsunami-hit area of Burma. It was left to the Burmese media in exile, such as his publication, to provide some perspective on what could have happened.

It was especially important for Burmese media based outside the country to develop sources of accurate information within Burma and also to occasionally identify them for the sake of international credibility. He also spoke of the need for sensitive reporting by the Thai media, referring to negative media characterizations of Burmese migrant workers by a section of the Thai press in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami.

After the presentation, FES Director Dr Chrobot intervened to say that while some of the problems pointed out in the presentation were true, his organization's experience in providing tsunami relief and rehabilitation in Thailand showed that there was no discrimination on the basis of nationality in this regard.

For instance, FES mobile assistance teams reached out to all hotel industry workers in Phuket both Thais and Burmese. The Thai people also showed strong solidarity with the Burmese victims, he said, citing donations made by the Thai railway workers' union, for instance.

“Despite some problems which may arise on another level, I think when people meet on this level there is normal human solidarity. Of course, it is important to mention these problems, but it is also important to mention positive examples,” he observed.

*Mohammad Mohiuddin*, Director, *Field Operations and Emergencies*, *Save the Children (USA)*, *Bangladesh*, explained how Bangladesh, as one of the most natural disaster-prone countries in the world was instituting a comprehensive, community-based disaster preparedness system. The 1991 cyclone which killed nearly 140,000 people in the country catalyzed a process of disaster preparedness which now includes annual observance of a National Disaster Preparedness Day, 32,000 trained Cyclone Preparedness Program volunteers and an early warning radio network covering remote islands in the Bay of Bengal.

In response to a question about protecting women in emergency shelters from the risk of sexual violence, Mr Mohiuddin pointed out that *Save the Children* was funding refresher training for Red Crescent Society volunteers in Bangladesh to emphasize the importance of this issue.

Addressing another question, he said there were no women police personnel at village level in Bangladesh and *Save the Children* was emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive policing in the rural areas.

Speakers from the Philippines and Indonesia presented case studies to explain the media's crucial role in ensuring accountability in disaster relief and rehabilitation.

*Luz Rimban, Broadcast Director, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism* told how the Center exposed the massive diversion of government rehabilitation funds after the 1991 Mount Pinatubo volcanic eruption in the Philippines. Persistence in asking the right questions and developing credible information sources are key to the effective discharge of the media's watchdog role in such situations, she explained.

*Luky Djani, Vice-Coordinator, Indonesian Corruption Watch*, explained what and why journalists should be asking in order to ensure proper utilization of the multi-billion dollar aid package for the rebuilding of Aceh after the December tsunami. He cited discrepancies in official statistics on victims, the needed assistance and the estimated costs. He added that Indonesian journalists' access to official information was far more restricted than in the Philippines and investigative journalism was still in its infancy in his country.

Mr Djani also appealed to the Indonesian journalists attending the SEAPA-FES workshop to probe the tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts in Aceh for evidence of corruption.

In reporting the aftermath of the tsunami, journalists also faced the challenge of balancing political sensitivities with human interest concerns in their coverage of the disaster in countries torn by internal conflict. *Don Bosco Selamun, Chief Editor, Metro TV, Jakarta*, explained the political and human dilemma faced by reporters in differentiating between separatists and others in Aceh.

*Uvindu Kurukulasuriya, from the Free Media Movement, Sri Lanka*, noted political bias in national media coverage of the disaster in his country's rebel-controlled areas. Only a handful of Sri Lankan media organizations refrained from using the calamity to "demonize" the separatist Tamil Tigers. Few bothered to highlight the sufferings of tsunami affected people in the rebel-held areas, preferring to write about the disaster's perceived impact on the internal conflict.

The presentation was followed by a stimulating exchange of views on different perceptions of the role media should play while reporting on disaster in an internal conflict situation.

A Sri Lankan journalist who covers the Tamil Tiger conflict in his country spoke of the difficulties of putting aside political angles to the reportage of disasters in conflict-affected areas. It helped to keep editorial managers 'pleased' by filing both reports dealing exclusively with the human impact of the disaster with those analyzing its implications for the conflict.

An Indonesian journalist who also covers the conflict in Aceh voiced the dilemma faced by local journalists if they wrote about the conflict situation while reporting on the aftermath of the natural disaster. There was a risk that this may 'scare off' badly needed foreign assistance.

The overwhelming opinion, however, was that ignoring the conflict was not going to stop the violence and it was much better that those providing assistance to disaster victims in such areas know the facts fully before traveling there.

Other participants raised the issue of providing training to reporters in peace journalism and highlighting the plight of women victims of disasters.

## **29 April 2005**

The session began with an introduction of *Reuters* journalistic operations in the region by its *Asia Managing Editor Chaitanya Kalbag*. The December 26 tsunami was a “first of its kind” disaster for Reuters as it covered a number of countries simultaneously.

Reuters has a comprehensive disaster preparedness strategy for its journalist staff and their safety is a first priority. There are disaster recovery/backup plans for each of the 33 bureaus in 23 Asian countries.

The global news agency conducts Hostile Environment Training Courses for its journalists with 15 to 20 participants in each course. These prepare Reuters journalists for covering conflict situations and include training in how to identify different firearms, cope with abductors and provide first aid. The basic rule for Reuters’ journalists is: “no story is worth your life”. In response to a question whether journalists should conceal their identity while covering armed conflicts, he said it was important to make one’s identity as a journalist clear in such situations. Reuters did not send any of its correspondents to cover the aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh without first putting them through the training, he said. The news agency also provides training and counseling to its journalists to assist them to cope with post-traumatic stress disorders. “We believe people should be given time to de-stress”.

Mr Kalbag added that the Reuters main news Web site would have a ‘Tsunami Channel’ to follow up with media coverage of rehabilitation in areas affected by the disaster. The agency had appointed a senior journalist as Tsunami Coordinator. A Reuters ‘Aid Tracker’ Internet site would keep tabs on disbursement of aid promised after the tsunami. “It’s a huge story. It’s not going to end. We should not forget our responsibility,” he emphasized.

The other presentations highlighted the vital role of community media organizations during disasters with case studies from Indonesia, India and Thailand.

*Heru Hendratmoko, Production Director, Radio News Agency 68H, Jakarta*, narrated how his agency and its partner community radio stations based in Aceh coped with the extraordinary challenges thrown up by the 2004 tsunami, which severely crippled all communications infrastructure and destroyed a number of local radio stations in Aceh. Together with the pre-tsunami restrictions on media accessibility to the area due to the political conflict there, the extensive damage resulted in the near ‘media silence’ on Aceh in the first few days after the disaster. Radio 68H took a decision to rebuild damaged community radio stations in Aceh. This was vital for supporting the immediate rescue and rehabilitation efforts in the area where locals were living in

constant fear of a subsequent tsunami and highly prone to believe rumors. With help from donor agencies, Radio 68H helped revive four of its 14 partner radio stations in the area which had been completely destroyed by the tsunami.

*Dr R Sreedhar, from Anna University, Chennai, India*, who helped launch India's first community radio station, explained how the tsunami made decision makers in the country realize the crucial role locally responsive media can play during a disaster.

His radio station was faced with a dilemma when the tsunami struck as, despite having reporters in the area, it was restricted by Indian laws from broadcasting current news. This was particularly galling because the big commercial TV stations which are the first to break the news were slow in responding in the first few hours after the disaster struck.

The strength of community-based media reportage also became evident in the station's focus on problems faced by the local people in the aftermath of the disaster at a time when mainstream media was 'obsessed' with reporting the death toll. The radio station also began educating local people about the risks of future tsunamis. India is now setting up 20 more community radio stations and there are plans to have 5,000 community radio stations across the country.

A Channel 11 documentary with some images of the tsunami and its aftermath showed how the TV station in Phuket went into action immediately after the earthquake that triggered big waves. Channel 11 Phuket was transformed into an action center, providing not only news and information, but also temporary shelter for foreign tourists affected by the tsunami. The station provided the link between the public and relief agencies.

Prominent Thai expert *Dr Smith Dharmasaroja, Chairman, Committee for the Development of an Early Warning System, Thailand*, explained the working of the satellite-based National Disaster Early Warning System being set up in Thailand. Indeed, this was the first time in Thailand's history that a disaster warning system was being set up in the kingdom, he pointed out.

The system will trigger simultaneous disaster alerts through radio stations, coastal warning towers and the country's mobile phone network. A key element of Thailand's disaster preparedness strategy is to promote greater public awareness of the risks of various types of disasters, he said. Mass media play a crucial role here, he pointed out.

Thailand's disaster early warning system will also be helpful to other countries in the region, Dr Smith said. In response to a question, he asserted that it was foolish to try to assess the cost-effectiveness of the system purely in monetary terms as no expense was too much to save human lives.

## Field Trip

The Conference participants later went on a field trip to villages in the neighbouring Pha-nga province which was the worst hit by the tsunami. At Thai Mai village, in Tap Tawan district of the province, the journalists met the native Morgan community and saw a project to rebuild their houses which were swept away by the tsunami.

In Nam Khem village, a once prosperous fishing community of some 2,000 families was devastated by the tsunami. Lamai Rodson lost her husband, house and two boats in the disaster but is working hard to rebuild her livelihood. She plans to set up a fishing and tourist cooperative in the village to take advantage of the tourist potential of the area.

The village also had a large number of Burmese workers employed on the large fishing boats trawling the seas off Nam Khem. They are among the large population of unregistered Burmese working in the coastal disaster areas, mostly on fishing boats, in restaurants and on construction projects.

The SEAPA/FES media workshop was also an opportunity for Asian journalists to learn about the little publicized impact of the December tsunami on formal and informal sector workers in Phuket and other Thai beach resorts along the Andaman Sea. The FES is supporting the Mobile Assistance Center for Affected Workers which has conducted a survey of the tsunami's impact on workers in the tourist industry and fishing villages in six provinces along the Andaman coast.





## Understanding Disasters

**Dr Suvit Yodmani**

*Executive Director*

*Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, Bangkok*

### Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) was established in 1986 at the initiative of the then UN Disaster Relief Organization now known as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It was set up as an outreach activity of the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, Thailand with the aim of strengthening national disaster risk management systems in the region.

The Center has implemented programmes and provided technical services and training in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Maldives, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Countries in Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the South Pacific, besides Australia, New Zealand and the United States have also participated in ADPC disaster management training courses.

### Elements of a disaster

A *disaster* can be defined as an event, man-made or natural, sudden or progressive, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses which the affected area is not able to cope with, using its own resources. A tsunami, an earthquake or a flash flood are examples of sudden disasters. A drought, an AIDS or other public health pandemic, are examples of slow onset disasters.



The 26 December  
2004 Tsunami hits  
Thai coastal resort

### December 26, 2004 Tsunami impact in Thailand

Area affected	Dead	Injured	Missing
Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Trang and Stoon	1,961	6,065	1,937

Source: Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, April 25 2005

A *hazard* is an event or occurrence with the potential for causing injury to humans and damage to property or/and environment.

*Vulnerability* is a condition or set of conditions that reduces people's ability to prepare for, withstand or respond to a hazard.

*Capacities* are those positive conditions or abilities which increase a community's ability to deal with hazards.

*Risk* is the probability that the geographic habitation or structure of a community will be damaged or disrupted by the impact of a particular hazard on account of its physical proximity to a hazardous area or the nature of the community.

*Elements at risk* are the buildings, crops, persons or other societal components which are likely to be adversely affected by a hazard.

### Disasters worldwide

If we look at global disaster statistics, the most striking thing is that contrary to what one would expect, it is a slow onset disaster like drought and starvation which is the most fatal. According to global disaster statistics, more than a quarter of a million people were killed by drought and the resulting hunger between the years 1982 and 2001.

Floods were the second biggest killer among disasters, claiming nearly 100,000 lives while earthquakes killed nearly 80,000 people all over the world during the same period. The maximum deaths from drought and starvation in this period took place in Asia while floods and earthquakes claimed about 50,000 lives each in the region between 1982 and 2001.

However, in ranking disasters by frequency, road accidents take the top spot worldwide followed by floods, storms and industrial accidents. In Asia, during 1982-2001 floods were the most frequent disaster followed by storms, earthquakes and landslides/snowstorms.

Floods affected the maximum people — more than 1.2 million — during this period, mostly in Asia. Droughts affected nearly half a million Asians and storms about 250,000 people in the region in the past two decades.

The maximum economic damage worldwide and in the region was caused by earthquakes and was estimated at more than 170 billion US dollars in Asia. Floods and storms caused economic losses of over 120 and 45 billion US dollars respectively in the region between 1982 and 2001.

In Thailand, a UN Development Programme (UNDP) listing of disasters by severity, ranks floods, transportation risks and mines as the most hazardous, followed by droughts, fires and landslides.

### Global disaster records 1982–2001 (*natural disasters*)

Natural disasters	Number of disasters	Registered dead	Affected people	Economic loss (Million USD)
Landslides/ snow storm	183	9,461	2,128	1,757
Droughts	253	277,574*	445,936	32,505
Earthquakes	215	77,756	34,942	237,615*
Climate change	126	10,130	6,278	13,990
Floods	963	96,507	1,261,880*	191,950
Wild Fires	132	574	3,421	25,043
Volcanic eruptions	50	259	1,043	513
Storms	783	60,447	245,189	180,790
Others	25	2,708	58	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,730</b>	<b>535,416</b>	<b>2,000,882</b>	<b>684,414</b>

Source: World Disaster Report 2002, IFRC and RCS

### Global disaster records 1982–2001 (*man-made disasters*)

Man-made disasters	Number of disasters	Registered dead	Economic loss (Million USD)
Industrial/business hazards	386	11,073	2,824
Others	338	12,125	4,224
Road accidents	1,535	63,749	2,962
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,259</b>	<b>86,479</b>	<b>10,011</b>

Source: World Disaster Report 2002, IFRC and RCS

### Ranking of disasters and impacts worldwide

Ranking of Disasters	Number of disasters	Registered dead	Affected people	Economic loss (Million USD)
1 <sup>st</sup>	Road accidents (1,535)	Drought & starvation (277,574)	Floods (1,261,880)	Earthquakes (237,615)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Floods (963)	Floods (96,507)	Drought & starvation (445,936)	Floods (191,950)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Storms (783)	Earthquakes (77,756)	Storms (245,189)	Storms (180,790)
4 <sup>th</sup>	Industrial hazards (386)	Road accidents (63,749)	Earthquakes (34,942)	Drought & starvation (32,505)
5 <sup>th</sup>	Others (338)	Storms (60,447)	Climate change (6,278)	Wild fires (25,043)

Source: World Disaster Report 2002, IFRC and RCS

### Natural disaster records in Asia-Pacific, 1982-2001

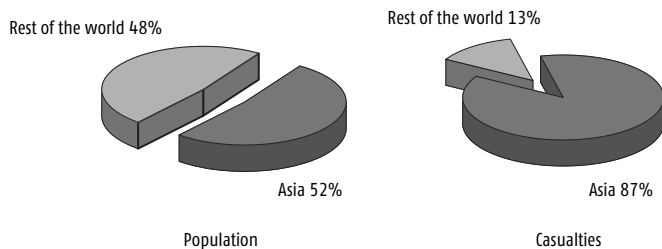
Natural disaster	Number of disasters	Registered dead	Affected people	Economic loss (Million USD)
Landslide/ Snow storm	106	6,185	1,672	439
Drought	88	271,149*	309,945	17,784
Earthquake	120	52,511	28,844	170,433*
Climate change	39	5,492	5,494	4,497
Flood	387	50,054	1,227,621*	120,029
Wild fire	27	188	3,166	21,198
Volcanic eruption	22	189	519	490
Storm	380	35,124	215,192	45,263
Other	16	2,693	57	124
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,185</b>	<b>423,585</b>	<b>1,792,453</b>	<b>380,249</b>

### Significant disasters in Thailand: UNDP 1994

Hazards	Magnitude Hazard	Weight average
Floods	High	2.39
Transportation Hazards	High	2.37+
Dangers of mines	High	2.34-
Droughts	Medium	2.24+
Fires	Medium	2.2
Landslides	Medium	2.15+

### Asia more vulnerable to disasters

According to a World Bank estimate, although Asia accounts for slightly more than half the world's population, it is likely to account for 87 percent of disaster casualties worldwide.



### Disasters ratio

Inhabitants of Asia are more likely to be a disaster casualty than elsewhere in the world.

Source: World Bank

### Disaster management

This is a collective term encompassing all aspects of the planning for and response to disasters. It includes activities undertaken both before and after a disaster has struck and refers to the management of both the risks and the consequences of disasters.

Disaster management includes a broad range of activities designed to (i) protect human lives, (ii) minimize human suffering, (iii) inform the public and authorities of the risk, (iv) minimize damage to property and other economic losses and (iv) speed up the post-disaster recovery process.

### Prevention

The best option is to avert a disaster, if this is possible.

Disaster  
preparedness



### ***Preparedness***

If a disaster cannot be prevented it is better to be prepared for it with anticipatory measures to ensure appropriate and effective response as soon as it strikes.

These include mitigation measures to minimize the effects of the disaster. Mitigation measures are sometimes referred to as structural and non-structural. Examples of structural mitigation measures can be building a dam or dyke to hold back flood waters, a mangrove forest to slow down a tsunami or locating a residential area on higher ground in flood or tsunami-prone areas.

Examples of non-structural mitigation measures include raising public awareness and knowledge of disasters, training and capacity building for disaster management, establishing volunteer networks, food provision and advisories.

### ***Response***

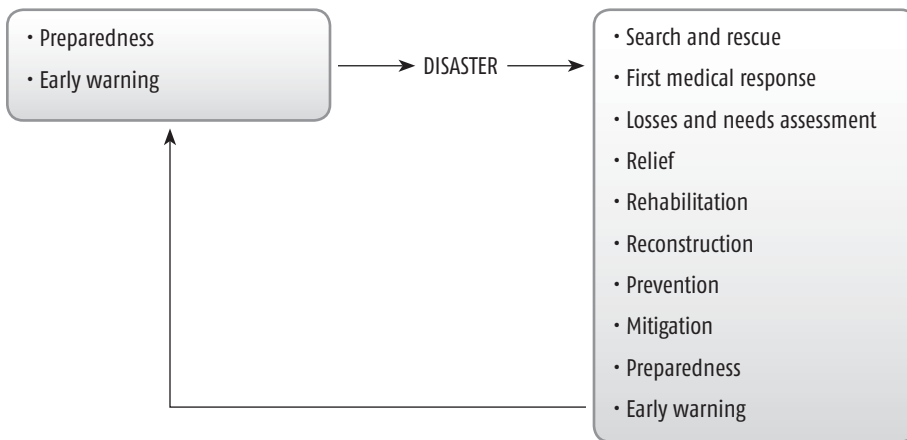
A series of urgent steps have to be taken in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. These include relief measures to search for and rescue survivors, as well as meet their basic needs for shelter, water, food and health care.

Relief is followed by rehabilitation measures including assisting victims in repairing their damaged dwellings, re-establishing essential services and reviving key economic and social activities

### ***Reconstruction***

Short-term rehabilitation has to be followed by more durable and lasting measures such as replacing damaged dwellings and infrastructure and setting the economy back on course. This involves sustained efforts aimed at restoring or improving the pre-disaster social and economic well-being of the community.

All the above elements make up the disaster cycle depicted in the diagram.





## Role of Media in Disasters

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**Vicente G. Tirol**

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### What is good journalism?

The first question to be asked is what is journalism? It is story telling with a purpose. What is the purpose? To provide people with information they need to understand the world they live in. The media, of course, also have a watchdog role. As such their purpose is to make those who wield power transparent in its use and to make the use of power known and understood. This requires a focus on wrongdoing, bad service, mistakes, incompetence, successes and failures.

What stands in the way of good journalism? First of all, I would put this as haste in filing the news story without cross-checking the facts or getting more than one point of view. This is no different from ignorance which is fatal for good journalism. And all this is due to laziness. Laziness to check the facts, follow up on different leads, etc. There is also the tendency to lapse into “formula reportage”. Moreover, journalists must guard against bias and cultural blinders which stand in the way of a balanced assessment of the facts as required by basic reporting.

### What draws the media to disasters?

The human tragedy of death, grief, despair, distress and destruction has a powerful emotional appeal to the public and therefore the media. Add to this the scenes of daring dramatic rescue and you have all the ingredients of a gripping narrative.

### Role of media in disasters

The first role is obviously to tell the story by conveying news from the scene. Closely related to this is the responsibility to educate the public about the issues — the why and how of disasters. For example while natural disasters are inevitable, they should not be seen as disasters but as natural phenomena. While human beings cannot prevent a natural disaster, there is much within human power to minimize or even avoid the damage that these can inflict.



Journalists covering natural disasters need to focus on factors that are under human control and that determine the level of destruction and loss of life. For example, much of the damage and human injuries in a natural disaster are caused by falling masonry from buildings which do not comply with stipulated construction norms. It is also important to focus on:

- i. how much was learnt from previous disasters;
- ii. quality of planning for the inevitable occurrence of more disasters;
- iii. disaster preparedness;
- iv. early warning systems;
- v. coordination and readiness of responses.

By spreading awareness of the disaster around the world, journalists also play an important role in mobilizing external relief and rehabilitation support for the victims. Another crucial media role during disaster coverage is to provide a link between those affected by the disaster with those not affected.

### **Obligation to inform and educate**

"Because relocating towns or tourism facilities at risk cannot be done, authorities must let residents and business people know, understand and accept the risk of being located in tsunami-prone areas. They must be educated on what to do when there's an impending tsunami." *Are we Ready for a Tsunami? Yes and No*, Raymundo Punongbayan, former director of the Philippine Volcanology and Seismology in *The Sunday Inquirer*, Manila, Jan. 2, 2005.

## **What disasters require of journalists**

In order to fulfill the role described above in an effective manner, journalists need the following: (i) learning/study to understand disasters and disaster management; (ii) preparedness; (iii) awareness of limitations (e.g. being unable to always see the bigger picture); (iv) networking; (v) training.

## **Covering a disaster**

### ***For reporters/editors***

- Don't assume your editors know everything; they are desk-bound.
- Keep going to the scene. Walk into the story like you own it. Don't sit still and await orders.
- Cover the disaster like a beat — check with the principal players every day.
- When covering unfamiliar territory, call reporters at other papers and ask how they covered similar stories.
- Pick good people for disaster coverage. Detach them from everything else. Give them a clear purpose.
- For big ongoing disasters, don't burn out the whole staff in the first two days. Rest people. Rotate.

### ***For the newsroom***

- Build own database.
- Put together a list of independent experts that the newsroom can call on at short notice.
- Get to know local emergency management officials even before a disaster has occurred and let them know that the news organization will be on their side during a disaster.
- Emphasize that the officials (i) provide accurate information to newsrooms as soon as possible and (ii) are honest with the media during emergencies.
- The officials may not have immediate answers but they should communicate openly with the media from the beginning.
- Know who is in charge.

“Media agencies covering the disaster over the long haul were rotating their journalists in and out of Aceh, as much for their mental health as for physical rest. After a week I was flying out of Aceh too, my senses stuck in a gray area between numbness and depression. You try not to get emotional about what you see, but how can you not?”

– *Howie Severino of Manila's GMA-7*

*Source:* “Explosions & Collapses: investigating disasters. Tips that will help your newsroom get on top and stay on top when disaster strikes.” Bill McGraw, Roy Wenzl, David Washburn

### ***Media and disaster managers***

The two are different ‘animals’. While journalists see their job during a disaster as telling how bad things are, disaster management agencies are working to make things better on the ground. However, it is important to stress that media and disaster managers are not adversaries.

That media and disaster managers can be partners is evident from the UK’s National Emergency Forum which was set up to offset the effects of what is often an adversarial relationship. The membership of the Forum includes news editors, representatives of the emergence services and emergency planners.

They (i) discuss problems that emerged during previous disasters; (ii) draw lessons from them; (iii) plan for forthcoming emergencies; (iv) discuss how information is passed to the public when civil emergencies occur to see how communication can be improved in the future.

### **Challenges facing a journalist covering a disaster**

The journalist has to find information that people need to live their lives and to make this information meaningful, relevant and engaging. The questions to be asked by the journalist are (i) who is the audience for the story? (ii) what sort of people will take an interest in the subject; and (iii) what do these people need to know about the subject.

It is useful to follow this advice for converting a news report into an interesting narrative. The basic questions to which all reporters seeks answers are WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW. Think of WHO as *the character*, WHAT as *the plot*, WHEN/WHERE as *the scene/setting*. WHY as *the motive or cause* and HOW as *the narrative or how all the elements fit together*. (Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Professor*, Poynter Institute, Florida)

The advantages of this approach are that it

1. directs coverage towards citizens and away from interest groups, insiders and other direct participants;
2. can lead journalists to new sources;
3. steers coverage away from routine.

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## Media Sensitivities in the Coverage of Disasters

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### **Red Cross / Red Crescent response to the December 26, 2004 tsunami**

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are the world's largest humanitarian network with 97 million members and volunteers in 181 countries.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent provided assistance to 500,000 tsunami survivors. This involved mobilization of 9,000 volunteers and 300 international staff to deliver food, clean water, health care, psychological support, shelter material, household and hygiene articles to tsunami victims. The long-term tsunami recovery and disaster preparedness activities include rebuilding homes and social centers, reconstructing/upgrading clinics and hospitals, replacing water and sanitation systems, arranging livelihood support for local farmers, fishermen and other artisans, psychosocial support as well as additional training in first aid and disaster response.

### **Reflections on different roles of the media in the tsunami disaster**

One can think of the media as having played the following roles in its coverage of the December 26, 2004 tsunami. First and foremost it was the *alarm bell* informing the world as soon as the disaster struck. Here the response was swift and extensive. Information quickly spread around the globe creating pressure on governments and international organizations to act. Sounding the alarm also laid ground for continuous confidence throughout the crisis.

The next role of journalists was as frontline reporters who were at the scene for a first hand assessment of the tsunami's impact. The outcome was a lot of people-oriented journalism with human interest stories about the victims.

However, one noticed a disproportionate coverage of the plight of Western tourists affected by the tsunami, especially in Thailand.

On the negative side, the media preoccupation with death and destruction lingered on for too long. There was also the question of unethical pictures of the dead which the Red Cross has raised with the people responsible.

Then you had the instance of 'helicopter journalism' and the 'media circus', such as former US Secretary of State Colin Powell arriving in Jakarta.

Constant coverage is also open to the risk of blowing a story out of proportion, shadowing other important news. An example was that of the "US being stingy" in offering financial assistance for tsunami relief and rehabilitation.

How did the media fare in its traditional watchdog role of investigating the relief efforts? One noticed a lack of will to investigate relief efforts. There was too much focus on aid not getting through and too little on the conditions in which aid agencies and relief workers had to operate. The media focus on the disaster also saw "photogenic relief" initiatives involving celebrities. There was little interest in covering longer-term recovery issues.

One international newspaper article criticized relief organizations for organizing "meetings, meetings, meetings" instead of being active in the relief. Media need to realize that meetings are necessary to plan relief/rehabilitation.

Too much focus on outside help can also shadow the power of the communities' own resilience in coping with the disaster.

The tsunami also saw the media engaging in a new role — that of restoring family links. This was a highly useful and much appreciated role with media organizations — print, radio, television, online — publishing names of missing people and messages from their worried relatives. There was a swift response to the needs of people looking for their loved ones. However, there was a risk of wrong information being spread such as wrong names of victims.

Another major media role in the tsunami aftermath was that of fundraiser. Thanks to media reports, the world was moved into liberally supporting the tsunami relief and rehabilitation effort. There was an impressive demonstration of global solidarity with fundraising events in many countries. The Red Cross/Red Crescent raised an unprecedented 1.6 billion US dollars. There was a breakthrough in online donations.

However, the outpouring of compassion means that people want quick solutions. When I was working in the earthquake-devastated region of Bam in Iran, I met this man who told me: 'It took 12 seconds to shatter my life. Now I want it back in 12 seconds'. Of course he does and of course, all of us want our lives to get back to normal quickly, but it is not possible. So compassion is very, very good but we have to be very careful that the right aid is reaching the right people and the money has been used in the right way.

It is important to emphasize the importance of winding down fundraising campaigns. Compassion can shadow real needs. The outpouring of humanitarian feeling for the tsunami victims led to the Thai Red Cross being inundated with clothing and food. It is important for us also to say: "No, we can't accept any more". Are we supposed to be putting clothes in warehouses or assisting people? We have a responsibility to wind down campaigns as well.

Can media play a role in disaster management? It can be by questioning the level of preparedness for future disasters. Listen to the people affected. Listen to the volunteers. However, this kind of reporting is not easy as this tends to be boring!

In conclusion, media can play a positive role in promoting social solidarity in the aftermath of a disaster by reporting on humanitarian endeavors. I quote from the *Public Journalism Network*: "Civic journalism is a growing movement to force the media to inspire good citizenship and healthier communities. Find out what the media can do to maintain relevance and audiences in their communities, and how journalists can straddle the ethical questions of not just reporting the news, but actively participate in developing good citizenship."



## Vulnerabilities in the Relief Effort

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Bangladesh is one of the most natural disaster-prone countries in the world and accordingly places strong emphasis on being prepared for such an event. The comprehensive Disaster Management Program of the Bangladesh government covers both pre- and post-disaster preparedness.

### **Pre-disaster preparedness**

The pre-disaster preparedness begins with promoting awareness for individual household level readiness for coping with a likely disaster. What responsibility can individual households take to protect themselves in the event of a disaster? Bangladesh observes a National Disaster Preparedness Day once a year. Disaster management training is a part of development training for non-governmental organizations.

Bangladesh is regularly battered by strong cyclones from the Bay of Bengal and the country has a cyclone preparedness program with 32,000 volunteers who are trained in spreading advance warning messages, evacuation, rescue, emergency shelter management etc.

Other key elements of disaster preparedness include the setting up of an early warning system and a radio network, and construction of multi-purpose cyclone/flood shelters. Institutional preparedness is provided by disaster management committees, government standing orders as well as vulnerability mapping/local-level disaster action plans.

### **Post disaster preparedness**

Disaster messages are received either through the media or NGOs working in that area. The post-disaster preparedness drill begins with a rapid needs assessment in the disaster area before taking steps to meet these needs, including distribution of relief materials. The next stage of disaster management is to conduct a detailed needs assessment for recovery and rehabilitation of the disaster-hit area and community.

## Mobilizing assistance

Assistance for natural disaster victims comes in the form of services, goods, and funds and is mobilized both nationally and internationally. The Bangladesh government has an Emergency Fund for disaster relief and rehabilitation. The NGOs working in the country too have such contingency funds. Assistance can also be obtained from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, the donor community in the country and diplomatic missions. For example, the US Ambassador to Bangladesh has a US\$50,000 disaster relief fund.

PL 480 Title II-supported development programs in Bangladesh have a provision for diverting 10 percent resources to emergency relief in the event of a disaster in the country. External resources can be mobilized by local NGOs through their international partners.

In the event of a particularly severe calamity, the government issues an appeal for foreign assistance by declaring a National Disaster in the country. The donor community and UN agencies in the country can also issue appeals for international support. A visit by a United Nations goodwill ambassador is an effective way of mobilizing international support for disaster victims. Media organizations by their coverage of the plight of the disaster victims play a significant role in the mobilization of assistance for relief and rehabilitation.

The international assistance is usually channeled to NGOs working in the disaster area. It is not easy for the government to step forward to accept the aid because of political sensitivity.

Non-governmental organizations are well placed to use the assistance by virtue of their presence in the community which gives them a good understanding of local needs and priorities. NGOs also have the advantage of flexibility being free of the rigid rules which can slow down the response of the government machinery.

The assistance is mostly delivered as charity or gratuitous relief. It can be in kind and/or cash. Ready-to-eat food, high-energy biscuits, water purification tablets/powder, wheat/rice and clothes are typical examples of the assistance received after a disaster. Private donors have included rich local people, the Gates Foundation and the Coca Cola corporation. Textile mills in Bangladesh have provided blankets, *sarees* for the women and *lungis* (sarong) for the men.

## Coordination of assistance

Who are the biggest engines of aid? In most cases, assistance is first offered by the government. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the UN system, the British government's Department for International Development (DfID) and the European Union (EU) are the major sources of external assistance after a disaster.

Is there coordination among these various bodies? The answer is both yes and no. Donors have different priorities and are engaged in a 'competitive relationship'.



Moreover, donors may not trust the government. Aid usually comes directly to international NGOs and there is competition among the international NGOs.

However, Bangladesh has a Disaster Emergency Response Group including (i) all donor organizations in the country, (ii) relevant government ministries, (iii) the UN system, (iv) international NGOs and (v) the big national NGOs. At the government level there is an Inter-Ministerial Steering committee. At the field operational level there are Disaster Management Committees at the district, sub-district and union (village) level.

### **Capacity development for disaster preparedness**

Has the experience of disaster management led to development of disaster preparedness capacities within the country? A lot has been done. International NGOs and relief agencies maintain a global Emergency Response Team Roster for calling on the necessary human resources if a disaster strikes in Bangladesh.

The preparedness includes pre-positioning of some emergency relief items, preferably those of a non-perishable nature. Then there is the 'Office in Box' concept where the essential administrative infrastructure for disaster management can be physically transported to the disaster area. Organizational emergency contingency plans have been established at headquarters, regional, country and field level.

Donors are providing funds to educational institutions and universities in Bangladesh for courses on disaster management capacity building. The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) is an example with more than 500 ADPC graduates in Bangladesh. Disaster management training is a compulsory part of the Bangladesh Civil Service Officers Foundation Training Course.

Bangladesh is improving its early warning system for tsunamis and cyclones, setting up the appropriate infrastructure besides emphasizing the implementation of safety construction codes in earthquake-prone areas.

Other examples are the SPHERE Project (Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response) and the Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in disaster response programmes.

### **Vulnerabilities**

In assessing the vulnerability of the disaster-affected people, the following questions are relevant:

- What is their access to information?
- What aid is coming for them and how much?
- What is their entitlement?
- What is the SPHERE standard?
- What is in the ICRC code of conduct?
- Who is monitoring the procurement?
- Is the food culturally and religiously appropriate?

- What is the security situation?
- Do women in emergency shelters have reasonable privacy?

The efficiency of disaster management depends on:

- The timeliness of the response: response within 72 hours is considered timely.
- The quality of the Rapid Needs Assessment.
- Aid workers being provided necessary life saving equipment.
- Availability of appropriate transport.
- Awareness of SPHERE standards and code of conduct.
- Availability of optimum human resources.
- Knowledge of local food habits, dress, religious beliefs, culture and social practices.



## Transparency and Access to Information in Burma

**Aung Zaw**  
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### Credibility of Burma tsunami damage information

According to an Associated Press report, the number of people killed in different countries by the December 26, 2004 tsunami is as follows (as of 17 January, 2005): Indonesia (115,229); Sri Lanka (30,920); India (10,714); Thailand (5,291); Somalia (298); *Burma* (90); Maldives (82); Malaysia (68); Tanzania (10); Seychelles (3); Bangladesh (2); Kenya (1).

On 6 January 2005, the *International Herald Tribune* published a news report titled "Minimal damage in Burma". The story was about a United Nations independent assessment of the tsunami damage in the country. The assessment found that several thousand people in Burma had been affected by the tsunami and a little more than 50 persons were confirmed killed by the disaster. How many people were killed? We are told that 34 people were killed. How do you know?

There are no photos of the tsunami damage in Burma because no journalists were allowed to visit the area hit by the tidal waves. We disputed the figures put out by the government. Why did Burma escape the tidal wave? We were all scratching our heads.

A cartoon titled "Giant Fish Save Burma from Tsunami" showed Burma's ruling generals as giant fish ordering the tsunami waves to stop with the command "Stop! We've already destroyed the place ourselves".

The official Burmese press published reports of ruling generals sending "message of sympathy" to other tsunami-hit countries. However, do we know what happened in Burma?

"There is not much news from Burma. We do not know which part of Burma (was hit by the tsunami) and how many people were killed. Is it in Irrawaddy, Rakhine or Taninthayi? It is like nothing has happened here."

*A famous song writer from Rangoon speaking to the exiled print media*

"We can cope with the situation"  
— *Burmese Prime Minister Soe Win*

Other reports said: "Some buildings collapsed in Taninthayi, Yangon, Bago and Ayeyawady Divisions and some regions in Rakhine and Shan State due to the tidal waves." According to the latest information, 138 buildings were destroyed and 788 people were homeless, 36 people killed, 45 injured and 14 missing.

The *Myanmar-Tsunami Assistance Coordination Group* in its January 10, 2005 report concluded that Myanmar has been largely spared from the destructive forces of the earthquake and tsunami and that the initial emergency needs had been met by the government and aid community. The group confirmed a death toll of between 60 and 80 and estimated the long-term affected population at between 10,000 and 15,000. Of these, 5,000 and 7,000 are directly affected.

In their efforts to visit the tsunami-hit areas, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Burma faced resistance from the government. The NGOs had to negotiate with the government in order to go to the delta region and the southern part of Burma which were affected by the tsunami.

The NGOs' statements were initially met with skepticism and opposition groups did not believe the tsunami damage statistics given by the NGOs.

### **Media inside Burma**

The Burmese official press issued tsunami warnings and provided information on the earthquake and tsunami. In the past, the Burmese press usually avoided covering natural disasters and plane crashes, issuing only heavily censored news.

However, the media inside Burma lack access to areas affected by the tsunami. In addition, they work in fear of the heavy-handed censorship law in the country. While lacking trust in news provided by the government, the local media are not able to conduct their own investigations. Local media organizations do receive information from international NGOs, relief organizations as well as from international radio broadcasts, but are unable to use this. They can, however, freely cover news from other tsunami-hit countries.

### **Role of exiled media**

- Critical of government relief operations and skeptical of official figures.
- Have access to NGOs, UN and relief agencies operating in Burma (in the past, NGOs in Burma were reluctant to talk to the press outside); in *Irrawaddy*, our policy is that if there is no danger to our sources, we will ask for permission to use their names in our stories for the sake of credibility.
- Can freely report the plight of migrant Burmese workers in Phuket area; the media in exile were critical of Thai police treatment of Burmese migrant workers.
- International radio stations such as BBC, RFA, VOA and DVB played an active role in providing information, Q & A and fast information to Burma.
- Some radio stations and on-line media organizations also questioned the transparency of relief organizations set up by the Burmese; asked important questions such as whether aid had reached those in need.

## Role of regional press/English language press in Thailand

There was a delay in reporting the plight of Burmese tsunami victims but many reports in the English press in Thailand as well as in the regional and international press seemed to be fair, critical, constructive and well-balanced. There were critical editorials, features and human interest stories in the *International Herald Tribune*, *Economist*, *CNN*, *BBC* and other well known international media outlets.

In its editorial of January 11, 2005, the *Irrawaddy* expressed concern over reports of insensitive treatment by Thai authorities of Burmese migrant workers affected by the tsunami in southern Thailand. It also criticized the irresponsible comment on the issue in sections of the Thai language press where Burmese migrant workers were accused of criminal activities such as looting after the disaster. Such reports created a climate of fear and uncertainty among the Burmese working in south Thailand.

There are 30,000 registered Burmese workers in Phang Nga province in south Thailand who are employed at construction sites, tourist establishments and on fishing boats. According to Burmese relief agencies, between 600 and 1,000 Burmese are believed to have been killed by the tsunami in southern Thailand.

There were reports of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand's tsunami-hit region facing racial discrimination, harassment, and unlawful arrest. They also lacked access to medical treatment. We were forced to ask these questions: "Where is the Thai *nam jai* (generosity)? Where are the officials from the Burmese embassy in Bangkok?"

There was also no word of sympathy from the Burmese government which still keeps quiet about the plight of the Burmese tsunami victims in Thailand. This only created confusion and misunderstanding.

What will happen if Burma faces devastation similar to that which hit Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka? It was evident that the Burmese junta was unwilling to accept assistance offered by international agencies and NGOs.

"I don't have this information. These people came to Thailand illegally so we cannot identify who is Burmese and who is Thai. But we try to help our people wherever they live."

— *Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win*

## Transparency Needed

The media in and out of Burma will have to work harder in order to provide accurate information as well as to keep the public and international community informed. The junta's information committee has credibility problems and therefore independent media, international press and the Burmese press should continue to play a vital role in this regard.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that the government in Rangoon has released figures that seem to be close to the truth. But it does not mean that the government is transparent and accountable. Thailand is installing a tsunami alarm system. As of now there is no news whether Burma is also setting up a tsunami warning system. Last time, Burma was lucky, but what about the future?



## Case Study on Corruption: Mount Pinatubo

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On 14 June 1991, Mount Pinatubo volcano on the island of Luzon in the Philippines erupted after more than six centuries of inactivity. It was one of the biggest volcanic eruptions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. More than 5 billion cubic meters of ash and debris spewed forth from Pinatubo's fiery depths. The ash cloud rose nearly 20 km in the sky. The gases from the eruption reached the stratosphere and it is estimated that these caused a global temperature decrease of about 0.5 degree Celsius for about two to four years after the eruption.

The *lahar* (volcanic debris) spread over 1,000 sq. kms covering 39 towns and 4 major cities. More than 800 people were killed and 1.3 million people were affected, with 50,000 persons left homeless. Pampanga province in the centre of Luzon bore the brunt of the *lahar* which covered the historic Bacolor Church in Pampanga. The Clark military base in the same province, which is one of the biggest military bases of the United States, did not escape the *lahar* fury either.

The rehabilitation efforts undertaken by the Philippine government included the dredging of rivers silted by the flowing volcanic debris, relocation of communities which lost their homes and the building of a 2 billion peso mega-dike to contain the flow of the *lahar*.

In 1992, the Philippine Congress enacted a law setting up the Mount Pinatubo Commission (MPC). The Commission was provided with a fund of more than 10 billion pesos (then equivalent to 400 million US dollars).

Four years later, an investigation by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) found that 10 to 30 percent of these funds had been misappropriated. Who were involved in siphoning off the MPC rehabilitation funds and who were the beneficiaries of this corruption? The PCIJ investigation pointed the finger at a clique of ex-military officers, politicians and contractors who were cornering the projects and controlling the funds

At PCIJ, we had been hearing reports about graft and corruption in the Mt Pinatubo Commission. For example, when the law that set up the Commission was being drafted,

some military officials lobbied with members of the Congress to insert provisions in the draft legislation allowing the purchase of equipment that was unnecessary and overpriced. So they made graft and corruption legal by putting this into the law.

Among these purchases were two amphibious trucks worth 50 million pesos. On checking the prices with another supplier, we found that the actual cost of an all-terrain vehicle was only 200,000 US dollars (about five million pesos). Bids were also rigged and there was collusion between the contractors and officials, especially public work officials.

Someone inside the implementing agency, for example, would leak the estimated budget to the companies which were interested in securing a work contract for the project. This information made it easy for them to tailor proposal to win the bidding. Commissions of 10 to 20 percent were given to officials approving or implementing the projects.

Padding, of course, was also common — contractors would charge much more for the work they had done and the equipment they had purchased. This was done in collusion with heads of the offices which were disbursing the funds.

This went on for a number of years. How did they get away with it? It was not very easy to probe the corruption. Usually investigators faced a blank wall because nobody wanted to talk. Those under investigation gave 'gifts' to those who were carrying out the probe or to congressional investigators.

But thankfully, we have a very vigilant media in the Philippines. The media investigators had various sources to rely on. There was first of all the paper trail. This included reports of the audit of various transactions entered into by the Mt Pinatubo Commission, contracts between the Commission and construction firms as well as letters exchanged between the MPC and various companies.

We then had the human sources of information. These included officials who were serving or had retired from the Commission, contractors, auditors, ex-military officials and finally the *lahar* victims themselves.

The uncovering of the Mt Pinatubo Commission corruption demonstrated that persistence in asking the right questions and developing credible sources of information can be powerful weapons in the hands of a vigilant media in protecting the public interest.



## Case Study on Corruption: Aceh

**Luky Djani**

*Vice-Coordinator*

*Indonesian Corruption Watch, Jakarta*

Banda Aceh on the north-western tip of Indonesia's Sumatra island was the worst hit of all places devastated by the December 26, 2004 tsunami. A huge amount of public funds have been mobilized for relief and rehabilitation in Banda Aceh.

The funds available for relief and rehabilitation in Aceh and Nias include 9.1 trillion Indonesian rupiah (IDR) in state budgetary support. In addition there is off-budget financial support from the United States worth 489 million U.S. dollars. Private and individual financial contributions for relief and rehabilitation in Banda Aceh add up to IDR 13.5 trillion.

Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) is keeping a close eye on the use of these funds because of the country's bad record in managing public funds meant for humanitarian purposes. The monitoring also aims to ensure that rehabilitation programmes are implemented efficiently. The table below lists the various rehabilitation schemes indicating the amount of funds available in U.S. dollars, their source and purpose as well as the status of the rehabilitation activity.

Country	Commitment (USD)	Purpose	Status
USA	489.15 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Housing and sanitation</li> <li>* Roads, bridges and irrigation</li> <li>* Early warning system and emergency planning</li> </ul>	Unknown
Australia	418 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuilding Zainoel Abidin Hospital</li> <li>• Revitalization of health service</li> <li>• Educational infrastructure and training for teachers</li> <li>• Rebuilding service delivery capacity of local governments</li> <li>• Strengthening the Bakornas institution</li> </ul>	Signed



Country	Commitment (USD)	Purpose	Status
Austria	10 million (loan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconstruction</li> </ul>	Unknown
China	24.75 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TLC and housing</li> <li>• Early warning system</li> <li>• Road</li> </ul>	Unknown
Japan	147.49 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road between Banda Aceh and Meulaboh</li> <li>• Clean water and sanitation</li> <li>• Irrigation and mud control facilities</li> <li>• Rebuilding markets, fishery, health centers and child care</li> <li>• Assistance for university, vocational schools, Madrasah and pesantren</li> </ul>	Project proposal submitted
Germany	7.86 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education, health, clean water</li> <li>• Housing and transportation</li> </ul>	Signed
Canada	63.9 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small and medium enterprise development</li> <li>• Gender and governance</li> </ul>	Unknown
Kuwait	100 million (grant); 70 million (loan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehabilitation and reconstruction</li> </ul>	Unknown
South Korea	13.7 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuilding schools and training centers</li> <li>• Reconstruction of hospitals and health supplies</li> </ul>	Unknown
Norway	2.19 million (grant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping west coast of Aceh and North Sumatra</li> </ul>	Unknown

ICW is campaigning for accountability in the implementation of the rehabilitation schemes to ensure that these are based on community needs. The affected people must be involved in the implementation of the schemes and have a voice in decision-making. This includes the right to know the budget.

### **Monitoring methods/activities**

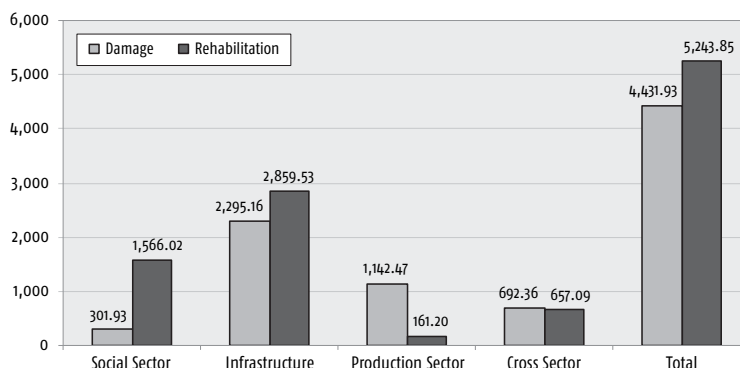
The monitoring of the tsunami rehabilitation schemes by ICW involves a review of national and local policies and plans as well as case study investigations of specific sectors. We are monitoring the process for awarding project contracts, the disbursement of funds and construction of public facilities. The sectors being monitored are education, health, housing, sanitation, water supply, transportation and economic infrastructure.

## Types of irregularities detected

Several irregularities have been detected. Among these are wrong targeting of beneficiaries, diversion and sale in the open or black market of goods meant for the victims, misallocation of funds, mark-up of project budgets, awarding contracts to cronies and provision of substandard public infrastructure. Then there are the 'phantom' projects which divert rehabilitation funds to non-existent victims or property that is damaged only in the records.

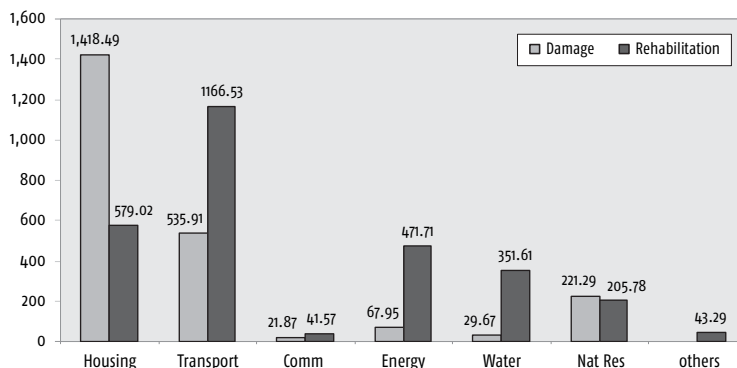
The following tables show the budget allocation for rehabilitation activities in different sectors. A total of 5.24 billion U.S. dollars have been committed for restoring and rebuilding the social, production and economic infrastructure in Banda Aceh.

Total budget allocation (Million USD)

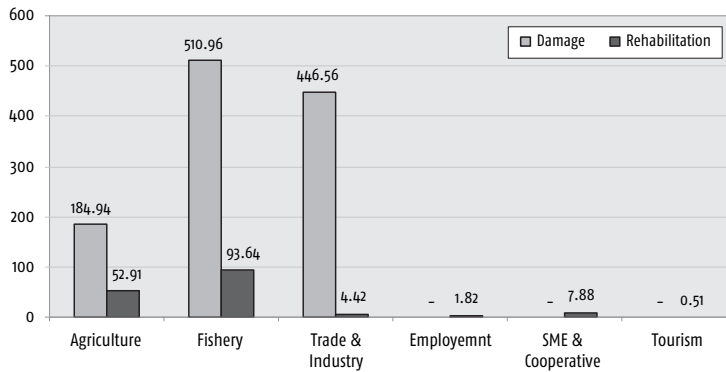


The infrastructure rehabilitation budget is divided among housing, transport, communications, energy, water, natural resources and others.

Budget allocation in infrastructure sectors (Million USD)

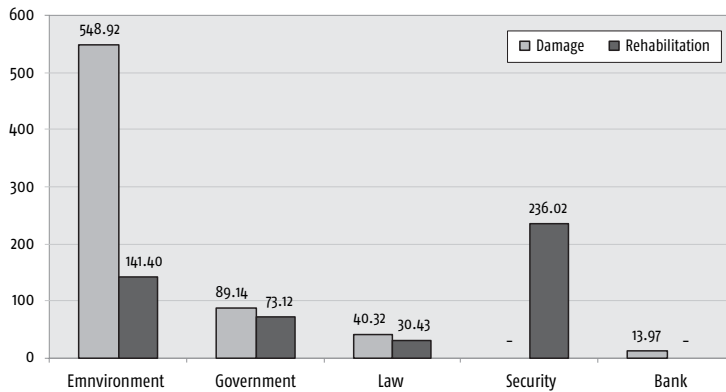


The funds earmarked for rehabilitation of economic production activities are to be used for the agriculture, fishery, trade and industry, employment generation and tourism sectors.



Budget allocation in production sectors (Million USD)

Financial support has also been provided for the environment, government, law, security and banking sectors.



Budget allocation in cross sectors (Million USD)

### Tsunami victims in Aceh & Nias

The table below shows the food and cash subsidy entitlements of each IDP. A simple calculation shows that with a 0.4 kg daily rice allowance and a 0.3 U.S. dollar daily cash subsidy per IDP, there will be a huge difference in the food and cash requirements if the number of IDPs is put at the higher figure of 514,000.

IDPs	Rice (0.4kg/person/day)		Cash subsidy (USD 0.3/person/day)	
	1 Month	1 Year	1 Month	1 Year
400,000	4,800,000	57,600,000	3,870,968	46,451,613
514,000	6,168,000	74,016,000	4,974,194	59,690,323
Difference	1,368,000	16,416,000	1,103,226	13,238,710

Analysis of the data also reveals another discrepancy. Taking the number of displaced people in Aceh as 514,150 and with an average household membership of 4.28, this means that there are 120,129 displaced households in Aceh. If every household is to get a new house, then 120,129 houses will have to be built. However, in the rehabilitation blueprint, the total number of houses to be built is shown as 196,975. According to the blueprint, the construction cost of each house is IDR 28.8 million. However, another agency is building a house for only IDR 15 million.

The goal of Indonesian Corruption Watch's advocacy for transparency is to bring about a change in national and local policies, ensure that those guilty of misuse of funds are punished and to develop lessons for the future. The ICW national office supervises seven regional monitoring offices covering 11 *kabupaten/kota*. It also has a partnership with Acehese NGOs, especially those concerned with *anti-corruption* and/or *governance* issues.

### **ICW regional monitoring offices and coverage**

- Banda Aceh + Aceh Besar
- Pidie
- Aceh Utara + Lhokseumawe
- Aceh Jaya
- Aceh Barat + Nagan Raya
- Aceh Selatan + Aceh Barat Daya
- Simeulue

ICW is hoping for government support in the following areas:

1. Understanding the importance and the relevance of civil society oversight initiative.
2. Information sharing of the detailed national/regional plan on Aceh reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes.
3. Updated Blueprint of Aceh Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme.
4. The break-down of National Budget into projects/programmes



## Case Study of Tsunami Coverage in a Conflict Zone: Banda Aceh

**Don Bosco Selamun**

*Chief Editor, Metro TV, Jakarta*

I visited Banda Aceh three days after the December 2004 tsunami struck. It was a period of silence. Everyone was in a state of shock. The scale of damage was immense. It is estimated that 176,000 people were killed in the disaster. More than 100,000 people were injured and 400,000 people were without homes. Eighty percent of the buildings and urban infrastructure in Banda Aceh and some coastal cities of Aceh were completely destroyed.

The first week after the tsunami was a period of silence and tears. This is why Metro TV launched a special news program for Aceh named “Indonesia Menangis” or “Crying Indonesia”. The program carried round-the-clock breaking news and special reports for the next 20 days.

Metro TV journalists who reported from Banda Aceh over the next two weeks found that there was an absence of organized local authority. Local authorities somehow seemed disabled. Many felt this added to the chaos. It was a confusing period.

One reason for this lack of administrative orientation was the fact that the deputy governor of Aceh had lost his family in the tsunami. Another important factor was that the Governor of Aceh, Abdullah Puteh was facing criminal charges of corruption at that time. He was subsequently sentenced to eight years of imprisonment.

Financial support for the relief and rehabilitation effort came from both international and local sources. These included foreign governments, the United Nations, the Red Cross, the World Health Organization and several local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The governments of Japan, the United States, Germany, Italy, Singapore, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia and a number of Middle East countries provided financial support for relief and rehabilitation. The Indonesian government also provided assistance. In addition, large sums of money were collected by way of contributions from individuals who responded generously to appeals by national newspapers, television stations and others.

However, local authorities seemed to be slow in their handling of the relief. This was most likely because of the shock and lack of preparedness for the aftermath of such a disaster. As a result, thousands of tons of food, medicine, clothes and other relief material began piling up at the Iskandar Muda airport of Banda Aceh. It was obvious that there were not enough motor vehicles, helicopters or boats for use by the army, civil authorities and NGO relief organizations engaged in rescue and relief operations. The army had only five helicopters in Aceh.

It was not long before questions began to be asked whether the assistance was being distributed properly. According to reliable sources, there were instances where relief was wrongly cornered by members of the armed forces whose families had also become homeless after the tsunami.

This was troubling as everyone in Aceh was looking up to the army to help the tsunami victims at a time when the civil administration was unable to deliver. The situation was also complicated by the fact that the army was originally in Aceh to fight the GAM separatists. On the third day of my stay in Aceh, I noticed that the soldiers involved in relief operations were being cautious as if they suspected GAM members to be among the thousands of tsunami victims in shelter camps.

An end to these distribution problems seemed to be in sight when the US Navy's Abraham Lincoln ship reached Banda Aceh nearly a week after the tsunami. It was followed by naval vessels from Southeast and East Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and South Korea.

In my opinion, if the international assistance had reached Aceh later than this, many people would have died of hunger while growing social unrest and crime would have pushed the disaster-hit area further into chaos.

I would also like to speak about the role of some political parties in Indonesia, especially the PAN and PKS which are two modern Muslim parties. The two parties have used their charitable activities for political gain. It is very difficult to understand why some religious leaders in these parties had to instruct the government and the people of Aceh to exercise care while accepting foreign assistance.

One month after the tsunami, Dr Anwar Nasution, chairman of Indonesia's Audit Board (BPK), declared that it would be very difficult to conduct an audit of the use of relief funds. The BPK is still trying to determine the different sources of the financial donations for tsunami relief and rehabilitation in Aceh. After three months, there is still a lack of transparency.

At least, until this point, there has been no report of corruption in the use of these funds though we must continue to be alert as there is no guarantee that it will not occur.

### **What is the next step?**

The Indonesian central government has earmarked 46 trillion Indonesian rupiah (about US\$5 billion) for the reconstruction of Aceh over the next three years. The

national planning and development board has prepared a blueprint for Aceh's reconstruction.

Of course, we cannot predict the outcome - whether it will be a success or a big failure. Why? There are too many authorities involved in Aceh - the central government, local and military authorities, the separatist movement and other agencies.

I dream of a successful outcome of this rebuilding effort, resulting in a prosperous Aceh. I would encourage my fellow journalists and the international community to keep a close watch on this major reconstruction until it is complete or else this will be a continuing disaster.



## Case Study of Tsunami Coverage in a Conflict Zone: Jaffna

**Uvindu Kurukulasuriya**  
*Free Media Movement*  
*Sri Lanka*

More than 65,000 people have been killed since Tamil extremists in Sri Lanka launched their armed struggle for self-determination in the early 1980s. In areas controlled by them in the country's north and east, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have their own administration system including the police, courts and laws. They now even have an air base. In early 2002, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE reached a ceasefire agreement which recognizes both sides as equal partners.

The December 26, 2004 tsunami also struck Sri Lanka's northern and eastern coastal areas controlled by the Tamil Tigers. In my presentation I will examine how Sri Lankan media covered the tsunami and its effects on the LTTE-controlled areas of the country.

The first thing to be noted about the tsunami media coverage in the country is that there was greater coverage of areas inhabited by the majority Sinhala community although the damage there was less. Areas inhabited by the minority Tamils received less coverage although they suffered greater damage from the tsunami.

Media reports and comments promoted the impression that assistance for tsunami victims in Sri Lanka's northern areas was cornered by the Tamil Tigers and did not reach the people in need. A view was also promoted that the tsunami had inflicted heavy damage on the LTTE. Media reports also suggested that along with international assistance for tsunami relief and rehabilitation, the Tamil Tigers also received arms and ammunition. The media reports portrayed the Sri Lankan army as doing a good job while the LTTE was demonized as usual.

The following headlines and reports in Sinhalese and English language newspapers in Sri Lanka illustrate this point — *"The rackets of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation disclosed"* and *"Good rice provided by the government is given to the LTTE and low quality rice is issued to the displaced!"*

Another newspaper report in a government newspaper said that the LTTE were collecting 100 rupees from the tsunami relief cash given to every person living in camps for the tsunami displaced in Ampara district. However, the report did not specify the



camps. It is not clear if it is claiming that such extortion is taking place in every camp in Ampara district.

The report then quotes humanitarian organizations accusing the LTTE of the extortion racket in the shelters for the tsunami displaced people in Ampara. However, it gives no indication as to the identity of these humanitarian organizations. Should not a government newspaper which reports such a heinous crime back the report with clear facts?

The article does not quote any source. Another prominent news item says: *"Tigers plunder the lorries bringing in tsunami aid"*.

Several examples of such media coverage only discouraged those who wanted to help the people in distress in Sri Lanka's north and east. Those who had provided vehicles to send tsunami assistance to Tamil Tiger-held areas later refused to do so.

Another front page news report said that two helicopters had been brought in dismantled form for tsunami relief operations in Sri Lanka's north and east. According to the report, defence sources said this was illegal.

A subsequent report on the issue said: *"Norway representatives are silent about the two planes"*. The news reports had been written in a way to make the readers feel that the two helicopters were meant for the LTTE. Must the LTTE be supported in their campaign on the pretext of helping the tsunami affected? Actually, the two helicopters were given by the South African government for relief work.

The report added that if the Sri Lankan government had conceded the Tamil Tigers' demand before the tsunami struck to set up an interim administration in the north and east, LTTE would have become stronger.

This article interprets tsunami assistance provided to affected people in Sri Lanka's north and east as aid given to the LTTE. Newspaper reports spoke of the LTTE collecting funds from ten countries supposedly for tsunami rehabilitation work. The reports claimed that tsunami aid shipments flown in from London to Sri Lanka's north and east also contained body armor suits. Investigation, however, revealed that the body armor suits were for foreign troops engaged in tsunami relief work in the area. However, the suspicion was created that the armor was for the LTTE.

The news reports created the suspicion that the LTTE would purchase arms with the tsunami aid money. It was on this ground that one news report criticized Italian government aid provided directly to the Tamil Tigers.

Other news reports spoke of "confirmed" tsunami damage to the LTTE. For example, this report says that large numbers of LTTE cadres were "washed away" by the tsunami, weakening the military strength of the rebels. And this one says that four LTTE radar centers at Mulathiv were destroyed by the tsunami.

*"The tsunami demolishes Prabhakaran's military mechanism"* said another report referring to the LTTE supreme. Other newspapers carried stories claiming that the LTTE leader had died in the tsunami. They also published pictures of seven Prabhakaran 'dummies'. The government radio station aired this news item.

Comparisons were drawn between the damage suffered by the armed forces and the Tigers in reports such as these: “38 members of the armed forces are killed” and “The Tigers request for 750 coffins”.

How many LTTE members were actually killed in the tsunami? According to *The Lakbima* newspaper, 2,100 persons detained in a LTTE prison camp, 1,600 members of the Black Tigers and 1,400 Sea Tigers perished in the tsunami. Two days after the tsunami, *The Island* newspaper reported that at least one half of the Sea Tigers' brigade had been washed away by the tsunami. *The Sunday Times* said the probability of resumption of the war had decreased because the LTTE camps had been washed away in to the sea. The government's *Dinamina* newspaper published an article that the Sea Tigers had sustained heavy damage during the tsunami.

However, these Sinhala and English newspapers were not equally interested in investigating and reporting the damages suffered by the government forces.

The Jaffna high security zone is along the sea coast. There are large army camps facing the eastern coast too. However, there were no news reports on what had happened to the army camps at Kalladi and Kalkudah during the tsunami.

Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army have officially admitted that less than 50 people were killed on their side by the tsunami. The question can be asked: “Under what media principle is it possible to believe that one party is wrong and other right? If the tsunami had no effect on the army camps by the sea, is it logical to claim that it had wiped out the LTTE cadres?”

The duty of the media is to report facts and not to turn rumors into news headlines. If journalists report rumors in place of facts, knowingly or inadvertently, they are open to the charge of being partisan in their coverage of the conflict. The post-tsunami coverage by the government and Sinhalese media organizations depicted the Sri Lankan army as essentially good and demonized the LTTE.

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion it can be said that such media reports do not reflect the basic principles of journalism such as, accuracy, impartiality and responsibility. Moreover, these news reports reflect an ethnic bias.

Disaster reporting guidelines have also not been followed in such coverage. The Sri Lankan tsunami coverage also highlighted the need for a new concept of disaster reporting. Journalists must develop disaster reporting skills that are sensitive to internal conflict situations.



## Covering Disasters: Safety, Logistics and Options

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**Chaitanya Kalbag**  
*Managing Editor,*  
*Reuters Asia*

Reuters is one of the world's oldest news organizations with over a century of experience in the field of news gathering. Disaster reporting is not new for Reuters, but the December 26, 2004 tsunami was a first of its kind disaster for Reuters. It also occurred at a time when most people were away on year-end holidays.

Reuter journalists responded admirably to the situation. People cut short their holidays as soon as they came to know of the disaster and returned to their duty stations. Some who happened to be on holiday not far from where the tsunami struck, immediately altered their travel plans to reach the disaster area and started reporting from the scene.

As an international news organization, Reuters also uses local journalists. They were our most important source of information during the tsunami. There are about 600 journalists reporting for Reuters Asia which also includes four national language news services — Thai, Korean, Japanese and Chinese.

The basic principles in Reuters' reporting of disasters are accuracy, freedom from bias and speed. Equally important for us is staff safety. In their preoccupation with gathering news, journalists and media managers must not forget the safety of the reporter in the field. They must be prepared to respond to situations that can be unpredictable and hazardous.

Reuters has disaster recovery plans in every Asian country and disaster back-up plans for each of the 33 Reuters bureaus in 23 countries in the region.

As part of their preparation before being sent to conflict zones, Reuters journalists have to undergo hostile environment training. Each hostile environment training course has from 15 to 20 journalists. Here they learn how to cope with gunfire, what to do if they get kidnapped and to provide first aid in an emergency.

The hostile environment training is conducted by experts. In Britain, there is a private organization called Centurion, in Australia there is another group which conducts the training for us.

As media managers, we have to consider many factors before sending reporters to a conflict zone like Afghanistan.

There are some circumstances where we might have some kind of advice from people around us that the situation is dangerous. In that case I would make sure I ask all the questions. I would ask questions like “are other journalists going there?” I don't think we consciously want to get into a situation where we are seen as participants. The basic rule for Reuters journalists is: “no story is worth your life”.

We don't believe in using armed escorts when traveling to a conflict zone. It is very dangerous to go down that road. It is important for a journalist in a conflict zone to be upfront about identifying himself or herself.

All Reuters journalists sent to Aceh to cover the tsunami aftermath were provided hostile environment training. Reuters journalists assigned to such situations are also provided training in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We believe our people should be given time to de-stress.

Besides reporting the news, Reuters also runs a charitable organization, the Reuters Foundation. Set up in 1982, the Foundation is engaged in a variety of educational, humanitarian and environmental causes and projects. These include AlertNet, an online news and communications service for the international disaster relief community at [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org).

AIDfund [www.aidfund.org](http://www.aidfund.org) was established by the Reuters Foundation in January 2000 as additional support for the AlertNet community. AIDfund provides relief organizations emergency financial support in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster.

The main Reuters news wire [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com) has a Tsunami Channel to follow up on the progress in tsunami rehabilitation. There is also a separate Aid Tracker which keeps track of the aid for tsunami relief and rehabilitation.

It is a huge story which is not going to end and we should not forget our responsibility to keep on covering it.



## Role of Community Journalists: 68H Radio in Banda Aceh

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**Heru Hendratmoko**

*Production Director*

*Radio News Agency 68H, Jakarta*

On Sunday, December 26, 2004, a short message came to the editorial room of Radio News Agency 68H in Jakarta. The message was very brief: “Earthquake in Aceh, sea water rising.” Immediately, the editorial team working on that day tried to make a telephone call to the 68H correspondent in Banda Aceh, the capital of Nangroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) province. But the phone call was not answered. Eventually we learnt that the entire telephone network in Banda Aceh had been totally damaged. We were not able to obtain any information from Aceh on that day. The only information we got was from sources outside the Aceh area.

A day after the tsunami, we sent a 68H reporter from Jakarta to Banda Aceh. He carried a satellite phone and traveled to Medan in West Sumatra. Fortunately, he was given a ride on the plane which was carrying Indonesia's Vice President to Banda Aceh.

Our reporter's account from Aceh made us realize the severity of the damage caused by the tsunami. Bodies were lying all over the place. Buildings and houses had been destroyed. The house of the 68H stringer in Banda Aceh, which was located near the coast, had been washed away. After a three-week-long search, we finally accepted that we had lost him.

A few days after the tsunami, the Indonesian people remained under the impression that the damage in Banda Aceh was not as severe as in Sri Lanka and Thailand. This was understandable because several international TV news channels were beaming pictures of the devastation from the tsunami-hit areas in Sri Lanka and Thailand.

In comparison, Aceh seemed isolated from the rest of the world with no live TV images from the disaster area. It was perhaps four days after the tsunami that the real nature of the horrific disaster in Aceh began to emerge.

And we were very surprised at the scale of the devastation which was much bigger than we had expected. It was obvious that the magnitude of destruction in Aceh was much larger than in other countries hit by the tsunami.

68H Radio then sent five reporters from Jakarta to Aceh to provide on-the-spot coverage of the disaster. As the world realized the scale of the destruction, there began an outpouring of international humanitarian assistance for Aceh's tsunami victims.

The assistance came not only in the form of money and material relief but also manpower to assist in the rescue and relief efforts in Aceh.

However, this spontaneous global humanitarian reaction in solidarity with the people of Aceh was not matched by adequate post-disaster management by the Indonesian government. There were obvious cases of lack of coordination among the various agencies. For example, relief materials were piling up at the airport and harbors because there was not enough capacity available to transport these to Aceh.

In a situation like that we asked ourselves: "What can 68H do to assist in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation efforts in Aceh?" We decided to help uplift the morale of the Acehnese so that they could be in a position to start rebuilding their lives.

Of course, this was not an easy task and we could not handle this on our own. A major problem was that the Acehnese had no means of knowing if there would be another tsunami. Consequently, they were highly susceptible to rumors of another tsunami which spread panic among the people.

68H Radio decided to rebuild the radio stations damaged by the tsunami stations. These were 68H affiliates in Aceh and it was important to get them working again in order to provide accurate information to the local people. Before the tsunami, 68H Radio had 14 partner radio stations in Aceh. Four of these were completely destroyed and some were heavily damaged.

With support from donor agencies, 68H Radio sent teams of experts to Aceh, led by the Radio's President/Director Santoso, to help repair and rebuild our damaged partner radio stations. The first to be revived was Prima FM Radio which became the first 68H Radio network station to resume broadcasting in Banda Aceh on January 20, 2005. It was followed by Megaphone Radio in Sigli on February 7, 2005.

Besides rebuilding the damaged radio stations, 68H Radio also collaborated with the Muhammadiyah organization to build two new community radio stations in Banda Aceh and Meulaboh. The Aceh community radio station made its first broadcast on January 7, 2005. 68H Radio plans to have 20 radio stations working in Aceh by the year 2006.

Besides restoring the public information network, 68H Radio also helped the people of Aceh meet their urgent need for potable drinking water. The cost for building water wells for this purpose was met entirely by contributions from 68H listeners.

We also launched a special radio news program titled "Kabar Aceh" (*Aceh News*) which has been on air since January 2005. This is a 30-minute news package broadcast from Monday to Friday. Every Saturday, 68H Radio broadcasts an hour-long interactive program carrying the voices and views of the Acehnese people. The material for this program was provided by 68H Radio correspondents working in Aceh.

## **68H launches first-ever Aceh radio news service**

*Launched on January 31, 2005, Kabar Aceh (Aceh News) is a half-hour radio program from Monday to Friday, which provides listeners in Aceh the latest news from all over the province. A one-hour Sunday radio programme allows listeners in Aceh to call on a toll-free number to discuss their views on the week's events.*

*Through Aceh News, hundreds of thousands of listeners across Aceh can, for the first time get information they could not obtain earlier. Now, by simply tuning in to their local radio station, they can learn about post-tsunami developments in other parts of Aceh and join a discussion on a range of issues concerning their day-to-day life after the disaster.*

Four months have passed since the tsunami and Aceh is now entering the phase of recovering from the disaster. But this does not mean the end of the problem. New issues have arisen such as relocation of people and the building of new infrastructure.

All this involves a huge outlay of funds, both from foreign and national sources. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has given assurances that his government would not permit misuse of funds.

But it is hard to believe that this assurance can be kept. Indonesia's track record in tackling corruption has made us determined to keep a close eye on the Aceh tsunami rehabilitation program. Mass media, NGOs in the country and the international community should also be involved in this monitoring.

## **Radio News Agency 68H and Aceh**

*Radio News Agency 68H is the only independent nationwide radio news agency in Indonesia with a countrywide network of over 400 stations. Every day, 68H Radio broadcasts information and education programming for 18 hours, reaching an estimated 20 million listeners all over Indonesia.*

*The December 26 tsunami destroyed four of 68H Radio's 14 radio station partners in Aceh. Others were severely damaged. Within the first three months after the tsunami, 68H had completely rebuilt three radio stations — Radio Prima in Banda Aceh, Radio Dalka in Meulaboh and Radio Megaphone in Sigli — and built two new community radio stations - Suara Muhammadiyah in Banda Aceh and Radio Matahari in Meulaboh. It is currently building a new radio station Radio Antero on the island of Sabang which is scheduled to go on air in late April. A new station is also being set up on the island of Simeulue.*

*From late January 2005, 68H Radio began broadcasting a daily radio news service for and about Aceh. The daily half-hour programme uses reports sent by 68H Radio correspondents from all over Aceh and is broadcast via satellite by 15 partner stations in Aceh. A weekly one-hour phone-in programme with a toll-free number enables listeners to participate in discussions about post-tsunami developments in the province. 68H Radio also produces programmes on health and youth issues which are broadcast by local stations in Aceh.*

*68H Radio has also distributed 3,000 radio sets to the tsunami-displaced people.*

*The "We Care For Aceh" appeal launched by 68H has raised about 13,000 US dollars worth of donations from listeners for tsunami relief and rehabilitation. These funds have been used to build 80 wells in Aceh, providing clean water to tens of thousands of people.*

*68H Radio plans to build or repair a total of 20 local stations in Aceh. It will also provide management, journalistic and technical training to the staff of the Aceh radio stations.*

*On 26 March 2005, the Aceh Arts Council conferred the Tsunami Award on Radio News Agency 68H in appreciation of its work in rebuilding the destroyed radio stations and for disseminating up-to-date and accurate information about Aceh after the tsunami. 68H Radio was one of 31 Tsunami Award recipients and the only media organization to be honoured in the radio category.*

### **Radio 68H's first Aceh appeal**

The following appeal was sent out shortly after the tsunami by Radio 68H Program Director Heru Hendratmoko.

*Once again, disaster has struck. With the earthquakes in Alor and Nabire still so fresh in our minds, we must now grieve for the victims of the disaster in Sumatera. On Sunday an earthquake shook the coast of Aceh, causing a 10 meter high tsunami. The sudden rise in the water level engulfed many seaside buildings and took over 12,000 lives not only in Indonesia but also in neighboring countries. In Indonesia, people have been reported killed in Aceh, North and West Sumatera. The highest number of deaths has occurred on the coast of Sri Lanka and India, with victims also in Thailand and Malaysia.*

*Given the high number of deaths and cross-border nature of the disaster, the international attention is not surprising. We are grateful for the sympathy of the international community which has been quick to respond to this terrible event. At the same time we would feel ashamed if we did not do something to help our fellow countrymen and women who have suffered such an ordeal. That is why we invite you all to send your condolences and sympathy to the victims and encourage our listeners to gather contributions for those who are clearly in great need. Once these contributions have been gathered together, we plan to send them to Aceh via the members of our radio network in the province.*

*This can be only a modest contribution compared to the scale of the need, but with it we hope to demonstrate our solidarity with the victims of this terrible disaster and help in a small way to reduce their suffering. At a time when support for our fellow human beings is so much needed, we must not be silent. Contributions can be sent to: Bank BCA, Utan Kayu, Kantor Cabang Pembantu, account number 5800091090, account name PT Media Lintas Inti Nusantara. Listen to updates on the latest situation in Aceh through 68Hs local radio network members throughout Indonesia and, in Jakarta, on 89.2 FM.*



## **Acehnese trace missing relatives via Suara Muhammadiyah Radio**

Ruslan Sangadii

*Jakarta Post*, Wednesday, 12 January 2005

*"You are listening to Radio Komunitas Suara Muhammadiyah 107.6 FM. We are presenting an update on missing persons..."*

*From a 12-sq meter room on the second floor of a building at Muhammadiyah University here, radio newscaster Rahmadi M. Sani read out on Tuesday a list of missing persons, compiled from reports filed by members of the public.*

*With the operation of this Radio Komunitas Suara Muhammadiyah (Voice of Muhammadiyah Community Radio) since Friday, Acehnese people have a new medium to trace missing relatives. Ahmad Husaini, 37, a resident of Lueng Bata, Banda Aceh, said he found Suara Muhammadiyah by chance. "When I turned my radio on, I could find no station except Suara Muhammadiyah." "Now I often listen to it. My favourite program is an Islamic program," he said.*

*But not all Acehnese know about the radio station such as Muhammad Syarif, 24. "I rarely listen to the radio. It's good if the station is on air," he said.*

*Suara Muhammadiyah is one of the radio stations people can now turn to since the tsunami disaster on Dec. 26. Before the tsunami, there were 16 radio stations in Banda Aceh, including Radio Nikoya 106 FM, Radio Flamboyan 105.2 FM and Radio Baiturrahman 98.8 FM, but many of them were affected by the disaster.*

*Radio Suara Muhammadiyah went on air after receiving equipment from Jakarta-based Kantor Berita Radio 68H, which provides radio wire news services. The equipment provided includes one mixer, one computer, one transmitter, one satellite dish and one generator, as well as 40 radios.*

*"We distributed all the 40 radios to various refugee camps in Banda Aceh and surrounding areas," said Rahmadi*

*According to Radio 68H director Santoso, his radio station provides technical assistance and equipment for Suara Muhammadiyah. Muhammadiyah — the country's second largest Muslim organization — provides manpower and the Asia Foundation provides the funding.*

*Rahmadi said his station focused on humanitarian programs. It has only five programs per day — news, information on missing persons, health information, counseling and religious programs. The missing persons program has attracted the most attention. Every day, Rahmadi said, about 10 people go to the studio to request that the names of their missing relatives be announced. The radio has two time slots for missing persons: at 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. No money exchanges hands for the announcements.*

*"We currently only have public service ads and they are all free. We don't have any commercial ads," Rahmadi said.*



## **Role of Community Radio: Anna FM, Chennai**

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**R. Sreedher**

*Head, Department of Media Sciences and Channel Manager,  
Anna FM@90.4 MHz  
Anna University, Chennai*

I live in the southern Indian coastal city of Chennai which was the last major coastal area in Asia to be affected by the December 26, 2004 tsunami. The tsunami claimed more than 10,000 lives in my state Tamil Nadu and another 100,000 people were rendered homeless. The Sumatra earthquake which triggered the tsunami occurred at about 6.30 hours Indian time and the tsunami followed about two hours later.

While news media outlets in India had reported the Sumatra earthquake within minutes of its occurrence, lack of knowledge, experience and expectation prevented India from predicting the subsequent tsunami.

The tsunami first struck India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands about 1,000 km southeast from Chennai. It took about an hour for the tsunami to reach the Indian mainland at Chennai. Because Sunday was a holiday and with no past experience of a tsunami, the people were caught unawares when the disaster struck.

On hearing of the tsunami, journalists rushed to the area and the first TV and radio reports of the disaster were based on mobile phone interviews with reporters on the spot. However, the television channels did not disrupt their usual Sunday commercial entertainment programs. When realization of the magnitude of the tragedy sank in, the TV news channels stopped airing commercial spots and began reporting eyewitness accounts from the disaster area. They also started coverage of emergency relief operations by government agencies.

A major reason for the delayed response of the TV channels was that TV time is heavily booked on Sundays with commercial spots and channel managers had to wait for channel owners' decisions before they could act. This delay caused some public resentment in the disaster area. It was nearly six hours before mainstream media organizations switched fully to public service broadcasting.

My university has India's first and only community radio station — Anna FM operating on 90.4 MHz. Anna FM is run exclusively by university students and the Sunday morning transmission is a recorded broadcast. As a result we were unable to respond immediately when the tsunami struck. Moreover, by law we were not allowed,

as a community radio station to broadcast news and current affairs programmes.

We faced a dilemma and it was a difficult decision for us. But finally we concluded that we were there for the benefit of the community and the community needed our services. We immediately sent student volunteers as reporters to the affected area, which is about three kilometres from our campus.

In our broadcasts, unlike the mainstream media organizations, we decided not to focus on the number of people killed. Instead, we wanted the victims to express their shock, grief and needs through community radio. We began broadcasting on the same day.

Our broadcasts highlighted the urgency of providing relief material for the survivors and protecting them from likely outbreaks of epidemics. Anna FM also started educating people about tsunamis. We told survivors how a tsunami is caused and tried to reassure them that it would not happen in the near future.

In our coverage, we took a neutral approach. Our reports were neither pro nor anti-government. Instead, our programs were plain-speak. However, the limited reach of our broadcasts meant that our programs could be heard by only a limited audience near our station.

But our effort came to the notice of the top official in the Indian government's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. He immediately requested our university to set up a similar community radio station in the Nicobar Islands, which were also badly hit by the tsunami and to train local people there to run the radio.

On his suggestion, we are going to install seven radio transmitters in the Nicobar Islands. This community radio station will also have a satellite-triggered disaster warning system. The government of India is keen on having the system in place there.

I would also like to highlight another example of community response in India which saved an entire village from the tsunami. I quote below an excerpt from a news report on this published in The Hindu newspaper of January 1, 2005.

*CHENNAI, Dec 31 - Fortunately, in the midst of the many heartrending stories of death and loss, chronicles of courage and miraculous survival are surfacing everyday: the latest being the tale of four coastal villages in the Union Territory of Pondicherry, which escaped obliteration thanks to quick thinking and sheer luck.*

*The most remarkable perhaps is the story of Nallavadu, whose entire population of 3,600 was saved by a phone call. Nallavadu, along with the other three villages, is involved with the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation's 'Information Village Research Project,' where the MSSRF's informatics division conducts classes from rural knowledge centres.*

*One of the former volunteers of this programme, Vijayakumar, who now works in Singapore, saw the tsunami warning there.*

*He immediately phoned the village knowledge centre, setting off instant reaction. A warning was repeatedly announced over the public address system and a siren set off. As a result, the tsunami claimed no victims there.*

It is a fact that media managers, practitioners, and mainstream media owners in India were late in responding to the tsunami. But once they got into the act, they realized that their first priority was public service broadcasting. Mainstream media reports then highlighted the tsunami damage, identified places that needed urgent help, societal action and voluntary initiatives and reported high acts of bravery.

In the second stage of their coverage of the disaster, media organizations focused on rehabilitation support provided by government and other agencies. The third stage of media coverage of the disaster highlighted remedial measures and future plans. There were also healthy discussions on the engineering, technological, economic and political aspects of various rehabilitation schemes.

The media did not politicize the tragedy. Two months after the tsunami, the Community Radio at Anna University organized a one-day seminar on Media and Disaster Management. We invited mainstream media organizations, both print and electronic and asked the journalists to look inwards. We are happy that the international community is doing the same.

We produced a publication titled 'Media and Disaster' from that seminar and copies are being provided to you.

India has a free and vibrant media. But on occasions during the tsunami coverage, the media exceeded their brief. This may have been due to the influence of western media and like their western counterparts, Indian media organizations became preoccupied with showing dead bodies and the tsunami death toll. The norms observed during the media coverage of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States were not followed.

I do hope and trust that this conference will try to formulate some do's and don'ts for media coverage of disasters and outline a moral code of conduct based on professional ethics.

Another lesson for us from the tsunami coverage was that community radio can be effective during a disaster only if it has access to authentic information. It cannot operate in isolation and must work in consonance with national media at such times.



## Role of Community Journalists: Channel 11 Phuket

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**Wanpen Upton**

*Chief, News Program Division  
Channel 11, Phuket*

*Following is the text of a film produced by the TV station documenting its coverage of the December 2004 tsunami in Phuket, southern Thailand*

Being a small local station situated in the busy tourist resort island of Phuket, the staff of Channel 11 are kept busy all year round. But during the Christmas holidays, the station only had a small team on duty as editors, producers and other staff were granted leave after a long, busy year. That team comprised two reporters and two cameramen.

On Christmas evening, the team toured the island, especially the famous Patong beach, to show how joyful the Christmas celebrations were. They worked until 2 am.

Next morning, washing his car at home not far from the station, Charn Muangsri, TV Channel 11's cameraman slightly felt the earthquake. He stopped immediately, rushed up to the station, which is located on Rang Hill in Phuket town in middle of the island, to get a camera and headed for the Meteorological office stationed near the Phuket International airport, 30 minutes drive away, to get information about the tremor. This is normal practice for our cameraman as we are a small station where most of the time in an emergency, a cameraman can act as reporter and a reporter can follow up the story by phone.

*In my mind then I thought there must have been quite a strong earthquake as we never felt this before. I told myself I should get accurate data so we can inform the public.*

Reaching the Meteorological Office, Charn was informed that an earthquake with a magnitude of 8.1 on the Richter scale occurred in the Indian Ocean. Nobody was talking about a massive wave. Heading back to the station to feed the news, Charn received calls from sources nearby — at Koh Katha, Racha Island and Patong — about a massive wave. Charn himself decided to go to nearby Koh Kata and then called a junior cameraman Noppadol to quickly go to Patong expecting something bad to have happened there. Little did he realize then that 'that something' was the worst ever to hit that island.

Following Charn's instruction, Noppadol and a driver rushed to Patong, which is about 15 minutes' drive from the station in Phuket town. Driving on, they were blocked

by a 'wave' of cars and people running up the hill in panic, which meant the press vehicle could not go forward. Noppadol then asked for a motorbike driver's help to take him to the beach, going down against people running for their life. He had to change motorbikes three times to get there, as drivers were concerned about their safety. The first footage of Noppadol's film that morning was subsequently used over and over by the Thai and international media all over the world. It not only showed the immediate devastation and panic caused by the tsunami, but those pictures also told the world how Thais care about others in time of crisis.

Realizing how bad it was near the sea, many people — Thai and foreign tourists — came up to the station, as it was on the hill. Meanwhile, Station Director Ampanwan Charoenkul, after sending news to Bangkok for the main station to broadcast nationwide and worldwide, and after consulting the regional Executive Director, decided to switch to its local programs to calm people down. The station informed the community what was going on and reunited them with their lost families. The director herself jumped in as chief editor. As most mobile communication lines then were down, especially cell phones, the station relied on its only two land lines which kept ringing non-stop.

The station became an action center for the tsunami. Thais and foreigners relied on it for fresh information. Hospitals brought in lost children to inform their families of their safety. Names of hundreds of missing persons were announced. The station devoted up to five hours a day for the tsunami relief, but other related programs were also broadcast nationwide. Even though it was busy with its own work, the director asked the staff to take foreigners seeking refuge at the station to the airport when it reopened for service.

Even though the government, led by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, took action immediately by setting up the central coordinating center at the Phuket provincial hall, people were still bringing donations of food, clothing and medicine to the station. Even though we wanted very much to help in that way, after assessing our limited capacity, we knew we would not be able to cope and redirected them to the center. We kept announcing relevant information. Our station served as the link between the public and the relief agencies. The people came to us to voice their needs and concerns and we informed them where they can get the assistance being provided by the relief agencies.

Our station is responsible for three provinces, which were all badly hit by the killer waves. It was difficult to cope with the demands of all three provinces at the same time so Channel 11 sought support from other regional stations in the south to provide assistance in the worst hit areas of Ban Nam Kem in Phang-Nga's Thakua Pa, while a team from Bangkok occasionally helped with the Phi Phi island in Krabi's rescue and relief coverage.

### **Working around the clock**

From the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, up until the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, our staff, especially the news teams, were working 24 hours, seven days a week. Both our Thai and English programs

were broadcast nationally and on the Internet worldwide for several weeks, though in normal times they are only broadcast in Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi provinces.

We made sure that after rescue work, relief, recovery, rehabilitation and restoration of people and families' lives were also covered. We made sure we informed our viewers and listeners of the generous donations, emotional memorials, visits by local, regional and international personalities to the affected provinces. We covered these alongside the identification of thousands of bodies, the government's rehabilitation programs and other concerns, while providing accurate information on the island's tourist resources to the world.

Stationed in Phuket town, it was not very difficult for the crew to work throughout the crisis, as we had good facilities and infrastructure support. The team also hopped onto helicopters of various organizations in order to film islands like Phi Phi, Racha or the Khao Lak area for aerial shots. At the same time, the station has been busy providing footage for several visiting international media as well as links for their feeds to home stations overseas.

The biggest challenge has been in finding enough time and staff to cover every event or meeting or focusing on the aftermath of the disaster since we are really still a small team.

Even though none of the staff got hurt from the waves, some of them had their homes flooded and damaged while others lost families or friends. But there was no time to cry, no time for grief, just no time for that, as the pictures of thousands of missing persons on the boards and everywhere around town haunted their minds — we had got to try our best to support these people, especially our visitors, who were so far away from home. They who came here expecting an enjoyable unforgettable experience in the exotic Andaman and who ended up holding pictures of their loved ones at the airport, hospitals and everywhere.

After things calmed down a little bit, we then focused on the government rehabilitation program and made sure that the affected people received proper assistance.

### **Serving International Media**

Alongside our work, the station also served other stations and international media with footage and facilities. Since December 26<sup>th</sup>, we have been continuously following up any event/activities and responses related to the Tsunami. Given our location and our station's coverage of the Andaman provinces' vulnerable areas, we realize that one of our main responsibilities is to keep people well-informed about natural disasters because they may strike when we least expect them.

We are trying to work closely with the National Early Warning Center, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) and the Interior Ministry's Department of Natural Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Department as well as the Meteorological Department. At the same time we air special documentaries to show that the Andaman is now back to normal and is more beautiful than ever, to attract more visitors back to the region.



## Tsunami Early Warning System in Thailand

**Smith Dharmasaroja**

*Vice Minister, Office of Prime Minister of Thailand  
Chairman, Committee on Study of Disaster Early Warning System*

After the December 26, 2004 tsunami and its destructive aftermath, we need to ask ourselves this question: “why were we not able to save the 250,000 human lives lost in the tsunami?”

The answer is that we were not prepared. Having learnt this lesson, Thailand is setting up a Tsunami Early Warning System so as not to be caught unprepared next time. Indeed, this is the first time ever that a disaster warning system is being set up in the country.

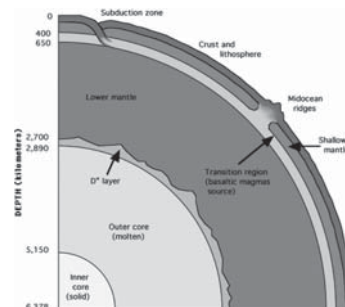
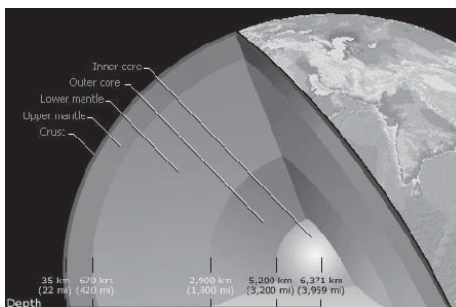
The disaster warning system will be able to issue simultaneous alerts to Thailand's radio and TV stations, mobile phone networks and tsunami warning towers located in areas where a tsunami can strike.

In order to understand how we can protect ourselves from a future tsunami we must know how tsunamis are caused. Tsunamis are mainly caused by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and landslides.

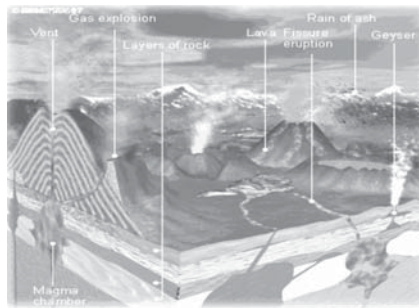
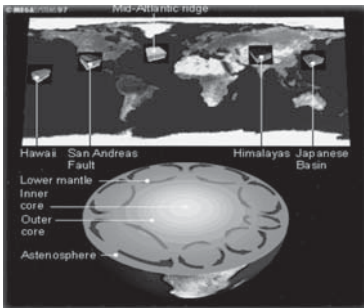
The core of the earth is a very hot, but solid mass of over 1,000 km thickness located about 6,300 km below the surface of the planet. This is surrounded by an outer core of 2,300 km thickness made up of molten material.

The inner and outer cores are encased in a mantle which begins 670 km below the earth's surface and extends to a depth of 2,900 km. Above this, lies the upper mantle of

Structure of the Earth





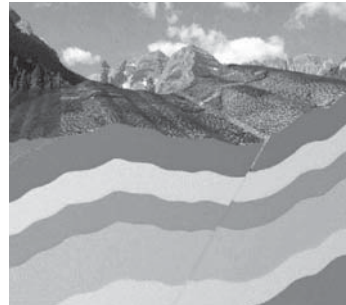
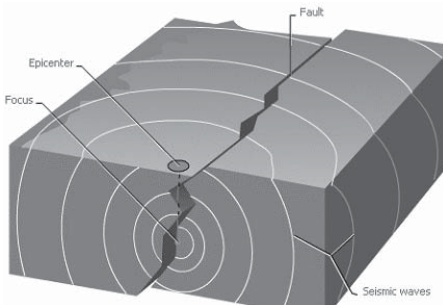


Convention currents and volcanic eruptions

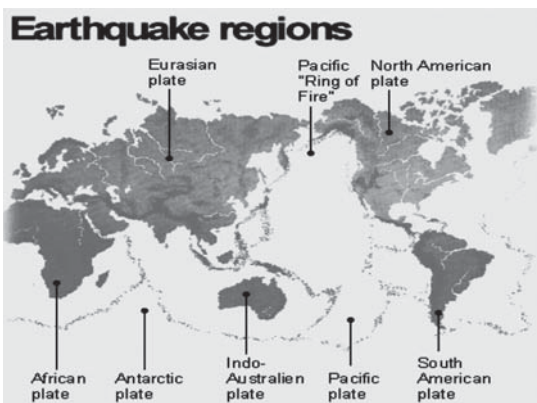
about 640 km thickness. This is topped by the 35 km thick crust making the surface of the earth. The crust is made up of a number of moving pieces known as plates.

### What is an earthquake?

An earthquake is the shaking of the earth's surface caused by the rapid movement of the earth's rocky outer layer. Earthquakes occur when there is a sudden release of the energy stored within the earth, usually in the form of strain in rocks. This energy is transmitted to the surface of the earth by earthquake waves.



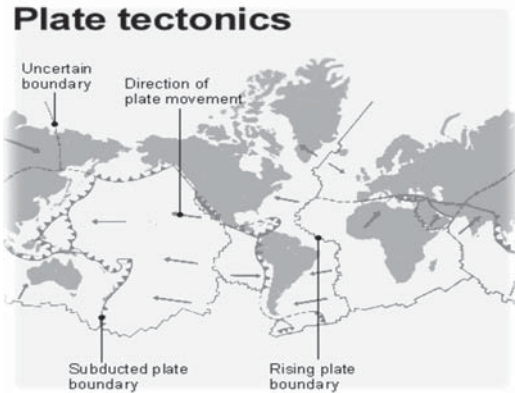
How an earthquake is caused



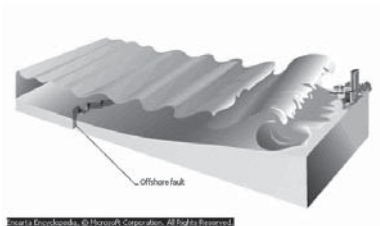
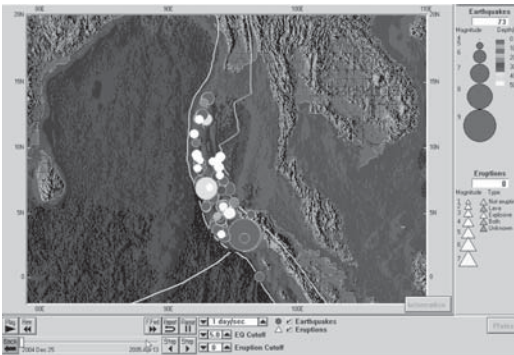
The map beside shows the main earthquake-prone regions in the world. The land and ocean masses rest on tectonic plates which are named after the different continental regions.

The tectonic plates are not stationary and it is their movement relative to each other that causes earthquakes.

The Sumatra earthquake on 26 December 2004 which led to the tsunami was caused by the movement of two continental plates against each other. The huge amount of energy released by this massive earthquake of magnitude 9 on the Richter scale set off the tsunami.



26 December  
2004 Sumatra  
earthquake and  
resulting Tsunami

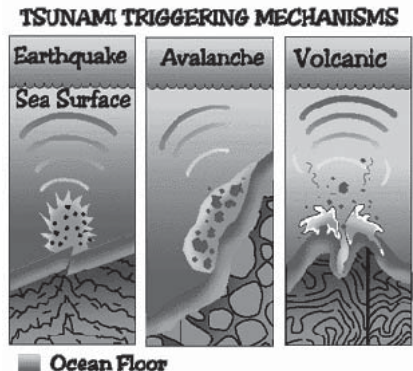


**What is a tsunami?**

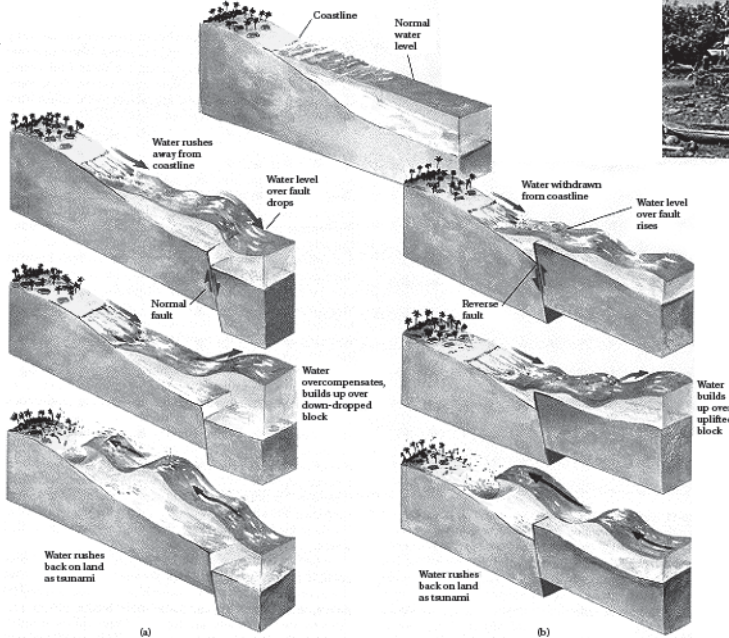
A tsunami (pronounced soo-nah-mee) is not a tidal wave but a series of waves (called a 'wave train') generated in a body of water by a pulsating or abrupt disturbance that vertically displaces the water column.

Earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, explosions, and the impact of extraterrestrial bodies such as meteorites, can generate tsunamis.

A huge volume of water can be displaced by an undersea earthquake. As water from other areas moves in to fill the vacuum thus created, large waves are generated.



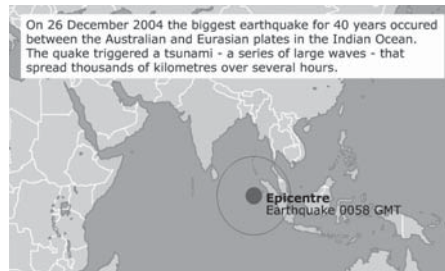
Part II Shaping the Earth's Crust



Tsunami caused by undersea fault displacement

### The 26 December 2004 tsunami

A day after Christmas 2004, the biggest earthquake in the area in 40 years occurred between the Australian and Eurasian plates.

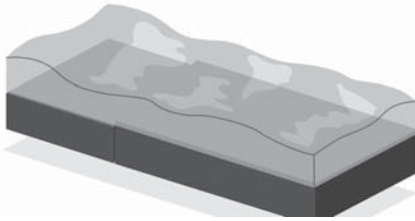


(Left)  
The continental fault lines  
(Right)  
26 December 2004 Sumatra earthquake

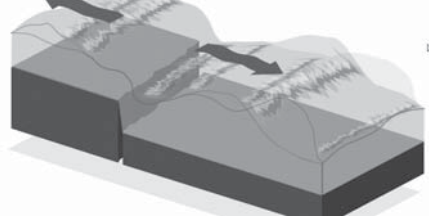
The earthquake caused the sea floor to rupture along the fault line north of the epicentre, producing a giant wave which carved a path of destruction across the 4,500 km-wide Indian Ocean over seven hours.

The tsunami was formed when energy from the earthquake vertically jolted the seabed by several metres, displacing hundreds of cubic kilometres of water. Large waves began moving through the ocean, away from the earthquake's epicentre. The tsunami's journey had begun.

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Large waves began moving through the ocean, away from the earthquake's epicentre. The tsunami's journey had begun.



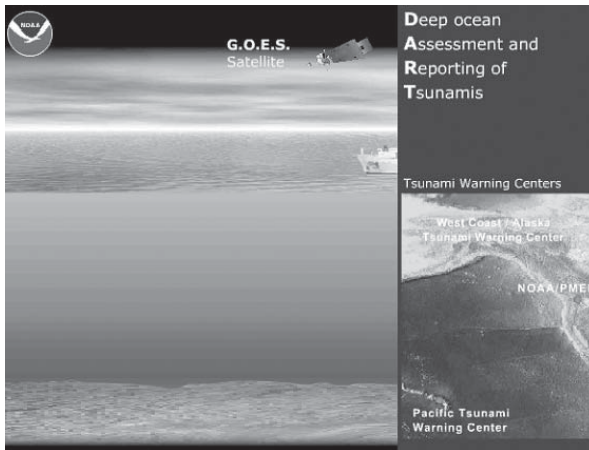
In deep water, the tsunami moved at up to 800 km per hour. When it reached shallow water, near coastal areas, the tsunami slowed but increased in height.

### **Deep ocean assessment and reporting of tsunamis (DART)**

The DART project of the U.S. National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program has developed *tsunameters* for the early detection, measurement and real-time reporting of tsunamis.

The DART system uses ocean floor-based tsunami detectors which transmit real time information to buoys moored on the sea surface. The data is relayed by a satellite to strategically located ground stations.

Dart tsunami warning system

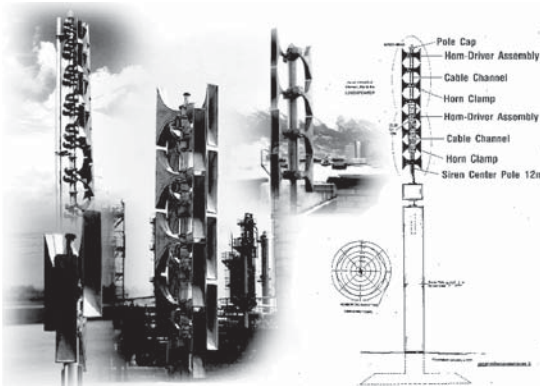


### **Tsunami early warning system in Thailand**

The tsunami early warning system in Thailand is based at the National Disaster Warning Center in Bangkok. At the Center, the National Disaster Early Warning Committee assesses information provided by various sources. These are the Thai Meteorological Department, the Mineral Resource Department, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation in the Ministry of Interior, the Royal Irrigation Department as well as other national agencies. In addition, the National Disaster

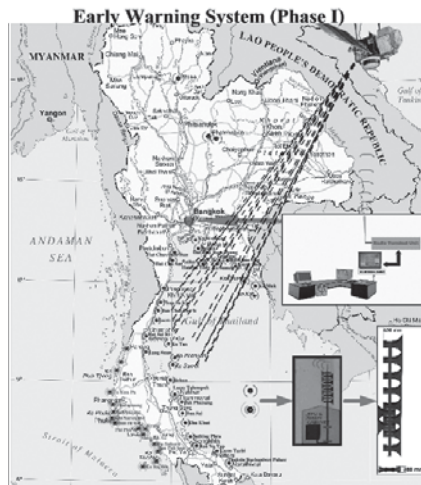
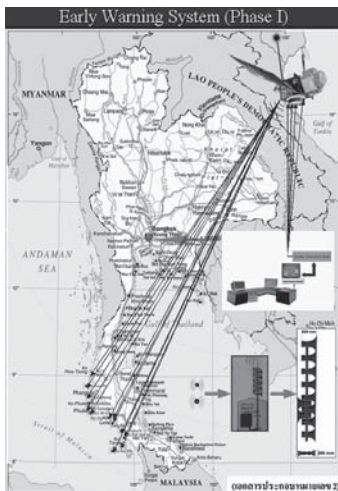
Warning Center receives data from international agencies such as the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center and the Japan Meteorological Agency.

In the event of a tsunami, alerts will be transmitted from a studio in the national disaster warning center to radio and TV stations as well as to mobile phone networks throughout the country. These include 10 TV stations, 211 AM radio stations, 312 FM radio stations, the amateur radio system in Thailand, 1,000 local radio stations, cable radio stations and the mobile telephone networks in Thailand with 20 million subscribers. The tsunami alert will also be transmitted to warning towers located in tsunami-prone areas.



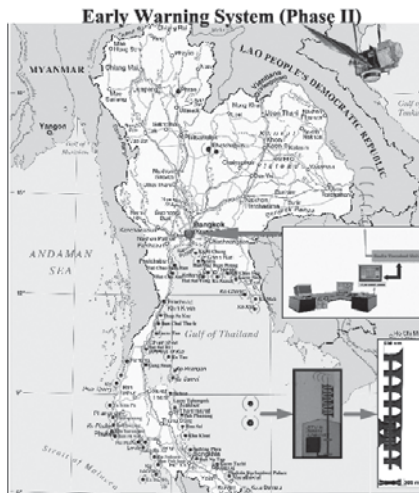
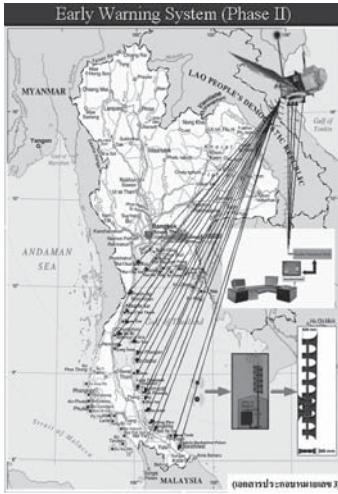
Tsunami warning tower

The early warning system will be implemented in three phases with tsunami warnings beamed along the country's western Andaman Sea coast and eastern seaboard on the Gulf of Thailand.

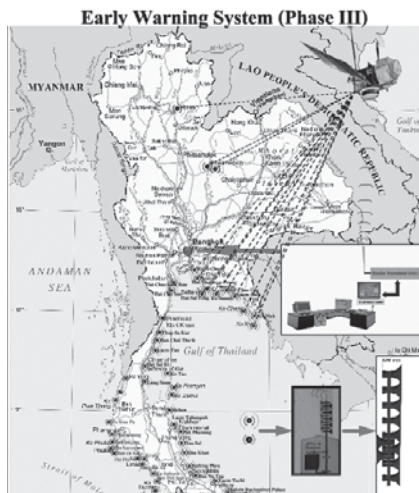
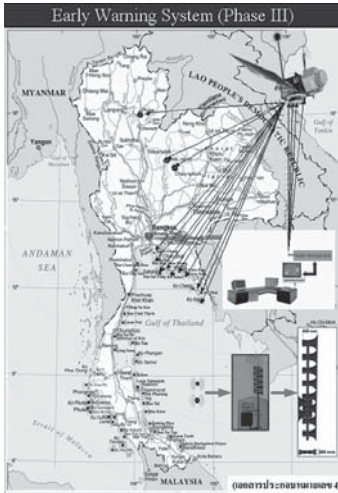


Early warning system phase I

Early warning  
system phase II



Early warning  
system phase III



## Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Thailand

FES is a German non-profit foundation committed to social democracy. Its cooperation with Thailand began in the 1970s with a focus on the promotion of democratic development and the social dimensions of economic development. Since the 1990s, FES has emphasized international dialogue both within Asian and between Asia and Europe, as well as issues related to international crisis prevention.

Current significant issues are:

- social justice and labor
- democratic media reform and human rights education
- gender equality in political representation and labor relations
- international understanding and peace

Means of cooperation are conferences, publications and exchange programs. FES offers an open platform for a constructive and fruitful exchange among social movements, government institutions and politicians in Thailand.

Some of our counterparts are the Ministry of Labor, the Human Rights Commission, workers' organizations, media associations, universities, parliamentarians, etc.

## **The Southeast Asian Press Alliance**

SEAPA is a non-profit, non-governmental organization with a mandate to promote and expand press freedom and access to information in Southeast Asia. Its goal is to provide a forum for the defence of press freedom, giving protection to journalists and nurturing an environment where free expression, transparency, pluralism and a responsible media culture can flourish.

SEAPA was formed in November 1998 as an alliance of established press advocacy organizations from the three countries in the region that have a free press – Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. They are: the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (Philippines), the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the Thai Journalists Association, the Institute for Studies on the Free Flow of Information (Indonesia) and the Alliance of Independent Journalists (Indonesia).

SEAPA supports independent media initiatives in Cambodia, Malaysia and East Timor and works with exiled Burmese journalists.

SEAPA headquarters are in Bangkok. The organization issues regular alerts on press-freedom violations in the region and holds seminars and conferences that bring together journalists from Southeast Asia to discuss issues of common concern. It runs an annual Journalism Fellowship. Its website (<http://www.seapabkk.org>) is a source of information and analysis on the Southeast Asian media.

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On April 28 and 29, 2005, just five months after the tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, South Asia, and even parts of Africa, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Thailand and the Southeast Asian Press Alliance called for a conference, titled, “In the Tsunami’s Wake: Media and the Coverage of Disasters in Asia.”

Held in Phuket, Thailand, the conference not only hoped to provide a venue for a collective debriefing and processing of media’s role in the coverage of the December 26 tsunami. More important, it sought to facilitate a sharing of disaster-coverage experiences among the region’s journalists, and thereby validate how access to information can help mitigate disasters, save lives, and foster better governance. For example, beyond strengthening media organisations’ capacities to cover future calamities, the two-day event also discussed the role of the press in disaster management and mitigation, and in guarding against corruption and inefficiencies in relief efforts.

The conference brought together resource persons from aid and disaster agencies and senior reporters, gate-keepers and editorial policymakers in the region.

This publication documents the proceedings and discussions from that important gathering, in the continuing spirit of strengthening free, independent media and access to information in Asia — and hopefully saving lives along the way.

