

Post-Tsunami Information on the Air in Indonesia

Immediately after the tsunami hit Southeast Asia in December 2004, Internews began assisting media outlets in Indonesia that were destroyed or damaged to ensure that important public health and relief information reached the most vulnerable in these communities.

The Internews Emergency Radio Program *Peuneugah Aceh* (“News from Aceh”) went to air on March 7, 2005. The daily program is produced by a team of local journalists in a production studio Internews built in Banda Aceh, the capital of the Indonesian province of Aceh.

Using satellite technology provided by First Voice International (FVI) Satellite Network Services, *Peuneugah Aceh* is transmitted via satellite and rebroadcast by radio stations throughout Aceh. The program is also broadcast to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps throughout Aceh.

Recently the BBC World Service reported that the hundreds of thousands of Acehnese affected by the earthquake and tsunami have adequate food, water, and shelter, but they are desperate for information.

Media were either destroyed or severely damaged by the tsunami, and although Aceh’s daily newspaper and several radio stations are back on the air in Banda Aceh, the vast majority of the province is not aware of what help is available from their government and from the international community in Banda Aceh, and are uncertain about what programs are in motion to give them back their normal lives and livelihoods.

Furthermore, the stations that have managed to get back on the air are broadcasting with depleted and traumatized staffs, and are mostly playing music – they are not ready to provide emergency reports themselves.

Peuneugah Aceh provides a mix of news, features, and talk shows devoted to the recovery and rebuilding of Aceh, as told through the voices of the Acehnese people. In the debut broadcast, the mayor of Banda Aceh was joined by the leader of a local NGO working on Aceh’s rehabilitation and reconstruction, to discuss the blueprint for the rebuilding of the capital. Another story on the first program followed a young person living in a camp for displaced persons, as he interviewed people about their experiences since the December 26 earthquake and tsunami.

So far 23 stations throughout Aceh have signed on to rebroadcast the program, and a growing number of IDP camps will receive the broadcasts. To enable the stations and camps to receive *Peuneugah Aceh*, Internews and FVI have distributed digital radio receivers

to radio stations on the air in remote areas of Aceh and in several IDP camps, and trained local staff in how to operate them. Internews is also coordinating the efforts of several international development organizations to distribute small battery-operated and wind-up radios to people in the camps so that they can tune in to the programs. For many, this will be their primary source of information about the rebuilding effort.

According to Wayne Sharpe, Country Director for Internews Indonesia, the Emergency Broadcasting project has two goals: to get vital information to



PHOTOS BY WAYNE SHARPE/INTERNEWS INDONESIA

Delivering a digital radio receiver to an IDP camp. The programs can be taped and replayed on this receiver.

the people of Aceh and to assist the local journalism community.

“Many of the journalists in Aceh lost everything to the tsunami – family members, their homes, and the radio stations where they worked,” Sharpe said. “With this project we are able to provide work for several local journalists, so we not only provide a radio service for Aceh, but we also help individual journalists return to work and rebuild their lives.”

The response to the first *Peuneugah Aceh* programs has been positive.

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*– Wayne Sharpe
Internews Indonesia Country Director*

Zulkarnaini, the Director of Megaphone Radio in Sigli, said “I like this program, especially the interview with Christine Hakim.” (Hakim is a well-known Indonesian performer and UNICEF envoy to Aceh). He said their listeners called in during the interview, hoping to talk to the celebrity. “They thought she was in our studio,” Zulkarnaini said.

Rusdyi, the village chief in Lampu Krueng, listened to the first broadcast. “I think it is useful for the IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) because many important things are there in the program,” he said. “But many people can’t hear that program because we only have one radio. I hope you can also give us small radios, one radio for each family. Now, 35 families live here.”

When distributing the digital receivers to the IDP camps, Elvira Iskandar, a member of the Internews/FVI training team, was surprised by the reaction. “When I came to a refugee camp in remote area,” she said, “they were very happy to get the digital



Trainees learn how to operate the solar panels that will power the digital radio receivers. Where electricity is scarce and batteries expensive, these solar panels will keep the radio programs on the air at no cost.

satellite receiver. They also said thanks to me. Really, there is no information or communication tools there, so the satellite receivers and the program can help fulfill their need of information.”

The *Peuneugah Aceh* program will expand from one hour per day to two hours by April, and will run for six months, while the radio community rebuilds. With the distribution of digital receivers and small radios, radio is now reaching parts of Aceh that were previously beyond reach. It is hoped that the satellite system that Internews and First Voice International have put in place will be used by the radio community of Aceh long after this project has ended.

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An Internews trainer demonstrates the receiver to a curious group of Achenese living in an IDP camp in Calang on the remote west coast of Aceh.

ABOUT INTERNEWS

Internews® Network is an international non-profit organization that works to improve access to information for people around the world by fostering independent media and promoting open communications policies. Internews’ programs are built on the conviction that providing people with access to vibrant, diverse news and information empowers them to make their voices heard and to participate effectively in their communities.

Internews projects currently span Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Formed in 1982, Internews Network, Inc. is a founding member of Internews International, whose members work in 47 countries.

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INTERNEWS

Internews Administrative Headquarters

P.O. Box 4448 • Arcata, CA 95518 USA • +1 707 826-2030 telephone • +1 707 826-2136 fax
Email: info@internews.org • Website: www.internews.org