



WHEN INFORMATION SAVES LIVES

Engaging Local Media in Humanitarian Crises



INTERNEWS



MOHAMMAD ABU SHAHMEH/INTERNEWS

“If we had no radio we would have been in complete darkness about what was going on around us.”

— ABU ALI, GAZA RESIDENT. WORKING WITH FOUR PALESTINIAN RADIO STATIONS, INTERNEWS ORGANIZED A HUMANITARIAN NEWS SERVICE FOR GAZANS IN JANUARY 2009.

ENGAGING LOCAL MEDIA IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Independent, local media can improve humanitarian relief and enable people in the midst of crisis to take an active role in their own survival and recovery.

In the past 20 years, the humanitarian community has dramatically improved the way relief is provided to people caught up in disasters and crises. However, much more could be done to keep those most affected by disaster informed of assistance efforts and able to engage in the relief process.

The first priority for humanitarian organizations is to provide services and critical aid. Dialogue between humanitarians and the local population is often limited and centers on relief activities. There is a significant opportunity for a more robust exchange between affected populations and humanitarians to improve the effectiveness of the immediate humanitarian response and to build more sustainable results over the long term. Strong, effective, local media are uniquely positioned to play a catalytic role in engaging communities during an emergency.

Lifesaving Information. Local media can interpret humanitarian information and report to their audi-

ences, providing critically important information during a crisis. This can be as simple as letting Gazans under siege know when and where food and blankets are being distributed.

Voice of the Community. Local media can serve as the voice of the community, creating an informed dialogue between humanitarian organizations and aid recipients. When relief agencies urged Darfur refugees to use solar cookers instead of hunting for scarce firewood, Radio Absoun, a community radio station in Iriba, Chad, covered the story. The station’s reporting helped refugees to voice their concerns—including objections that the cooking did not taste as good—but also made them more aware of the consequences of firewood collection on the environment and on relations with local Chadians.

Public Forums. Local media can also create public forums to guide reconstruction and future preparedness, while exposing corruption and inefficiencies in the rebuilding process. *Peuneugah Aceh* (Voice of Aceh) was a radio program providing news of relief and reconstruction for the Indonesian province of Aceh after the Asian tsunami. The program once reported that there was no clean water in the Lhong Raya IDP camp

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“People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources . . . Information bestows power. Lack of information can make people victims of disaster.”

— THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES, 2005 WORLD DISASTERS REPORT

because the roads were too muddy and difficult for the water trucks. A few days later, the camp leader called the reporter to thank him: water deliveries had resumed.

INFORMATION SAVES LIVES

In times of humanitarian crises, people affected by the unfolding tragedy need more than the physical necessities of life: they also have an urgent need for information. In the wake of crises ranging from earthquakes to civil war, survival can depend on knowing the answers to questions such as: What is the extent of the damage? Should I stay with my family or go for help? Where can I get clean water? Is it safe to go back home?

In these desperate circumstances, rumors and misinformation spread rapidly, making a bad situation even worse. For instance, after the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, a rash of deadly tent fires in the camps was traced back to a rumor that rubbing tents with kerosene could prevent malaria. The humanitarian radio program *Jazba-e-Tameer* was able to set the record straight, ending this dangerous practice.

“Giving vulnerable people the right information at the right time is a form of empowerment,” writes Jonathan Walter, Editor of the *2005 World*



JAIME LITTLE/INTERNEWS

RADIO BY AND FOR DARFUR REFUGEES: When two women in a refugee camp in eastern Chad had to give birth by C-section, a rumor spread among the other camps that pregnant women who went to the Western-run clinics would have their babies cut out of their stomachs. Many women decided to give birth in their tents instead, without medical assistance. An Internews-founded radio station was able to clear up the misconception by interviewing doctors as well as women who had given birth normally at the clinics. The camps soon saw an increase in the number of women seeking to give birth at clinics.

Disasters Report published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. “It enables people to make the decisions most appropriate for themselves and their families and can mean the difference between being a victim or a survivor.”

Local media can play a vital role in ensuring that people get the accurate and timely information they need

to save lives and reduce suffering. Known and trusted by the local population, speaking in the local language, and deeply familiar with local politics and culture, local radio stations and other media can fill an important need that international relief agencies and other outside groups cannot meet on their own.

“*Jazba* gives a voice to the voiceless. It has become the local BBC of Pakistan.”

— BILAL, BATHKOOL VILLAGE, BATTAGRAM, ABOUT INTERNEWS’ LIFELINE RADIO PROGRAM, *JAZBA-E-TAMEER* (THE DESIRE TO REBUILD) FOR SURVIVORS OF THE 2005 PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE

NEWS OF HOPE—Case Studies

Starting with the 2004 Asian tsunami, Internews has developed projects that engage local media in a wide range of humanitarian crises. These include **(1) rapid-onset, high mortality pandemics**, **(2) rapid-onset natural disasters** such as earthquakes, **(3) complex emergencies** such as war and political crises, and **(4) chronic or slowly unfolding crises** such as displaced populations. Internews tailors its response to each unique situation. The following four pages detail some case studies.

(1) DEATH ON THE WING—High-Mortality Pandemics

Avian Flu—Southeast Asia

THE NEED: As cases of the deadly new strain of H5N1, or avian flu, began spreading across Southeast Asia and beyond in 2005 and 2006, confusion, mistrust, and even panic began to grow along with the disease. Lacking a scientific background and in some cases fearful of contracting the virus themselves, many journalists in the region felt ill-equipped to cover this important story.

THE RESPONSE: To support journalists in their coverage of avian flu, Internews developed a journalism training program for Southeast Asia in 2006 to improve the technical skills needed to cover this complex and rapidly developing story in a scientifically accurate way. The program also trained journalists on safety precautions needed when covering “bird flu,” and provided access to accurate, up-to-date information in local languages. Internews also produced a trainer’s manual on how to conduct trainings on avian flu reporting.

“We have a moral and social responsibility through our media to save lives... Yes, avian flu is scary, but we can make a difference.”

— Internews journalist-trainee in Indonesia on covering avian flu



SONNY INBARAJ/INTERNEWS



ESTER HUTABARAT

“As well as saving lives, information reduces suffering in the wake of disaster . . . Aid organizations must recognize that accurate, timely information is a form of disaster response in its own right.”

— MARKKU NISKALA, INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES, 2005 WORLD DISASTERS REPORT

(2) TRAGEDY FROM EARTH, SKY AND SEA—Rapid-Onset Natural Disasters



WAYNE SHARPE/INTERNEWS

Asian Tsunami—Aceh, Indonesia

THE NEED: The Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004 was one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history, killing over 225,000 people in eleven countries. In the Indonesian province of Aceh, the earthquake and tsunami killed or injured many journalists. Much media equipment was smashed or washed out to sea, and all media outlets were forced off the air.

THE RESPONSE: Internews, which had been working with journalists in Aceh for six years, responded to the crisis by flying in a radio team and two suitcase radio stations. Internews enabled the only radio station back on the air to extend its coverage beyond the capital, Banda Aceh. Using a team of Acehnese and Javanese journalists, Internews began producing a popular daily radio program, *Peuneugah Aceh* (News from Aceh), which aired news of relief and reconstruction to 31 Acehnese radio stations and 200 IDP camps for an estimated audience of one million people.

“I know that this studio used to be a garage. But I believe that from here you could open everybody’s eyes to help Aceh to be better in the future. Please don’t leave Aceh. We still need people that are able to help the Acehnese to move forward in the future through their radio programs. The world is in this garage!”

— Professor Yusni Sabi, Ar-Raniry University in Banda Aceh, referring to the studio where Internews and local staff produced *Peuneugah Aceh*



MARK EDWARDS/STILL PICTURES/INTERNEWS

Kashmir Earthquake—Pakistan

THE NEED: On October 8, 2005, a massive earthquake laid waste to large areas of Pakistan-administered Kashmir and the North West Frontier Province. The quake killed some 80,000 people, including 30,000 children in classrooms, and left an estimated 3.4 million homeless. Landslides made the remote, mountainous regions of the quake nearly impassable.

THE RESPONSE: Within hours of the earthquake, Internews staff in Islamabad began an assessment of how local media had been affected. They soon began training a team of Pakistani journalists and helping them to produce a syndicated program, *Jazba-e-Tameer* (Desire to Rebuild) with vital information on how to cope with the disaster and rebuild their lives. Internews successfully advocated for emergency broadcast licenses for the earthquake-ravaged areas and helped build seven humanitarian information radio stations to reach populations out of reach of existing stations.

“*Jazba* helped end confusion about seismic reports in the red zone areas and stopped rumors about mass evacuation. Now people have enough information and have started rebuilding their homes.”

— Gul Pervez, Thakot Village, Battagram, about Internews’ lifeline radio program, *Jazba-e-Tameer* (The Desire to Rebuild)

“If information can flow as freely as nature’s elements, the consequences of many calamities . . . are manageable . . . Absent such freedom in news and information, all ‘natural’ disasters are ultimately man-made.”

— ROBY ALAMPAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN PRESS ALLIANCE, IN AN OP ED IN THE **NEW YORK TIMES**

(3) MISSILES AND MACHETES—Complex Emergencies



BENJAMIN CHESTERTON

Post-Election Violence—Kenya

THE NEED: In the wake of bitterly contested elections, violence erupted in Kenya in early 2008. Ethnic groups battled in the streets and thousands of people were terrorized and turned out of their homes. Some vernacular radio stations broadcast hate speech in thinly veiled metaphors. A year later, many Kenyans were still displaced, impoverished and traumatized.

THE RESPONSE: Within days of the outbreak of violence, Internews convened a meeting of Kenyan journalists desperate



BENJAMIN CHESTERTON

to discuss the media's role in inciting the bloodshed. Later Internews worked with staff in the small radio stations in the conflict-torn Rift Valley, helping them report sensitively on the volatile situation. Working with an Internews trainer on humanitarian reporting, the Kalenjin-language radio station KASS FM invited Peter Kariuki (in photo, above left) as a guest for a three-hour call-in show. Peter is a member of the Kikuyu tribe who was forced to flee during the ethnic violence. The program put a human face on "the other" and Peter's story moved many callers to tears.

"The night the violence started some of the listeners were calling in saying, 'We are being burnt inside our house, please help us.' You don't know who it is, you don't know where they are, you are in the station. All you can hear is screams and see fire . . . We lost many of our listeners. Now people just come to our office with death announcements for us to air."

— Overnight announcer at community radio station Sayare FM in Eldoret on Kenya's post-election violence in January 2008

War—Gaza

THE NEED: The military conflict between Israel and Hamas in late December 2008 caused electricity outages and shortages of diesel fuel that quickly forced Gaza's independent broadcasters off the air. Mobile phone services were also cut off, leaving ordinary Gazans with no reliable source of information in the crisis.

THE RESPONSE: On January 9, 2009, during the height of the conflict, Internews became the first and only international organization to organize the broadcast of vital information on distribution of food and blankets, safe havens, road closures, medical care, and other humanitarian news to the people of Gaza. Produced by a team of Palestinian journalists, the special broadcasts, which currently focus on the fragile ceasefire and reconstruction period, air on three independent radio stations in Hebron and one in Gaza.



MOHAMMAD ABU SHAHMEH/INTERNEWS

"It was darkness, no electricity, and the only thing that connected us to the world was a small radio. We were more than forty people, men, women, and children sleeping in the living room, listening to the radio and moving the tuner from one station to another; no one could sleep."

— Um Ibrahim, a mother of eight living in Khan Younis, south of Gaza City, during the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

"The national consciousness was raised by the voice of the victims represented by Peter. It caused many of us to interrogate our collective guilt. Never in broadcasting in Kenya has radio been engaged so effectively."

— MITCH ODERA, FORMER EDITOR OF THE STANDARD AND FOUNDING CHAIR OF THE MEDIA COUNCIL OF KENYA

(4) WHEN HOME IS A TENT—Chronic or Slowly Unfolding Crises

Refugees and IDPs—Darfur/ Eastern Chad

THE NEED: The six-year conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan has made millions homeless and sent hundreds of thousands of traumatized Darfuris across the border to refugee camps in eastern Chad. Meanwhile, fighting in neighboring Chad has displaced many local Chadians and forced them into IDP camps.

THE RESPONSE: Starting in 2005, Internews has built three community radio stations along the Chad-Sudan border and trained local journalists to run them. The stations allow Darfur refugees and displaced Chadians to hear and produce news that directly affects their survival, including information on security, food rations, and water distribution; news on their home areas; and special programming on women's issues. The stations also serve as a communication channel between relief agencies and camp dwellers.

“Imagine an African widow with eight children and nothing to eat and whom you give five to eight kilos of millet a month. It's very difficult. We go to camps, we meet people, and we hear their complaints. Then we talk to humanitarian workers to see if there is a solution.”

— Houda Mahamat Malloum, a journalist for *The Ouaddai Voice* (La Voix du Ouaddai), a radio station Internews established in eastern Chad



GEORGE PAPAGIANNIS/INTERNEWS

Internally Displaced Persons —Sri Lanka

THE NEED: The conflict in Sri Lanka has killed an estimated 70,000 people and displaced over 500,000 people since it began 25 years ago. Many people have lost everything, from their houses and rice paddies to their family photos. Thousands have been living in IDP camps for years. They are largely cut off from the news and information that might help them improve their lives.

THE RESPONSE: Internews, which has been working in Sri Lanka since the 2004 Asian tsunami, began its *Lifeline* project in early 2008 to help displaced Sri Lankans get vital humanitarian information. The local *Lifeline* team

produces a weekly newspaper and broadcasts daily radio programs on national radio stations about services that the government and relief agencies are providing. *Lifeline* also covers key topics such as how to replace birth certificates that were lost as people fled their homes, or when the next health mobile clinic in their area will take place.

“Today we finally got something we really needed. Now we can get news and information to help us. Now we won't be so lost.”

— Kowsalya Murugaiah, leader of an IDP camp in Eastern Sri Lanka where Internews' *Lifeline* project distributed radios and provides news.



INTERNEWS SRI LANKA



INTERNEWS SRI LANKA



WAYNE SHARPE/INTERNEWS

TEXT MESSAGING EMERGENCY NEWS SERVICE: In the aftermath of a devastating May 2006 earthquake on the Indonesian island of Java, which killed over 5,000 and left 1.6 million homeless, Internews worked with more than 180 Indonesian journalists to establish a quick, low-cost text messaging service that enabled local radio journalists to use their mobile phones to report on humanitarian relief. Reports on emergency services such as vaccinations, or health warnings such as a tetanus outbreak, also enabled Indonesian journalists to play a rapid-response role by helping to get vital information to the quake-affected populations.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Some humanitarian organizations and funders are beginning to understand the role of local media in humanitarian response. The *2005 World Disasters Report* by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies focuses on the vital role of information in disaster response. A 2008 report by the BBC World Service Trust also addresses this issue. Internews and the Fritz Institute are partnering on an in-depth research project to increase the use and effectiveness of local media in humanitarian response (see box). Internews also has a web section on reporting on humanitarian crises: www.internews.org/humanitarianmedia.

Yet much more remains to be done. Humanitarians and the media development community must raise awareness among stakeholders, conduct solid research that provides the data necessary to make the case, and foster an ongoing dialogue that will continually examine and improve the way people work in the field. This process will result in a community that includes funders, implementers, and government officials who are willing to ensure that this issue is nurtured and developed.

The ultimate goal of this work is to save lives and reduce suffering by improving the flow of information during humanitarian crises and disasters.

INTERNEWS-FRITZ INSTITUTE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Exploring the Role of Local Media in Humanitarian Response

To complement international efforts to improve the efficiency of humanitarian operations, Internews and the Fritz Institute have undertaken a research partnership to document the ways that local media can make humanitarian response more effective.

Under this partnership, a three-day roundtable in Nairobi in September 2008 brought together African journalists and humanitarian groups to explore this issue through real-life case studies from four countries. The discussion highlighted local media's accomplishments but also identified barriers to effective local media engagement with humanitarian agencies and affected local populations. The meeting gave rise to a research agenda on these key themes:

- **The News vs. Information Debate:** Neither humanitarians nor local media make it a priority to provide information to affected populations for their own survival and recovery.
- **Knowledge, Perceptions and Trust:** A dysfunctional relationship

with the humanitarian community represents the greatest hindrance to local media's potential to play a lifesaving role in humanitarian emergencies.

- **Resource Constraints and Ethical Concerns:** Local media's limited resources reinforce their dependence on humanitarians and may present ethical challenges to journalistic integrity.
- **The Need for Institutional Change:** The onset of an emergency is too late to introduce institutional change in the humanitarian sector and build capacity in the local media; such efforts must be proactive.
- **Leapfrogging the Technology Divide:** New technologies are expanding the space in which media, affected populations and humanitarians interact.

In collaboration with the Fritz Institute, Internews plans to disseminate this research widely through international roundtables, seminars and events.

“The right kind of information leads to a deeper understanding of needs and ways to respond. The wrong information can lead to inappropriate, even dangerous interventions.”

— THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES, 2005 WORLD DISASTERS REPORT

“In a crisis situation, the sooner an effective two-way flow of information can be established between the local population and those providing assistance, the sooner those affected by the crisis can become active participants in their own recovery.”

— MARK FROHARDT, INTERNEWS VICE-PRESIDENT FOR AFRICA, HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN MEDIA, IN A 2006 INTERVIEW

Q AND A WITH MARK FROHARDT

Reprinted from the *Internews*
Report, October 2006



LAURA STEIN LINDAMOOD / INTERNEWS

Mark Frohardt's nearly twenty-year career in humanitarian relief has led him to coordinate health services for refugees on the Thai-

Cambodian border; work for Doctors Without Borders in Chad and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Sudan and Somalia; assist with the repatriation of Kurds into northern Iraq after the first Gulf War; consult in Sarajevo during the Bosnian war; and manage UN human rights field operations in Rwanda following the genocide. Frohardt, who joined Internews in 1999, serves as Vice-President for Africa, Health, and Humanitarian Media.

What drives your interest in using media in crisis situations?

My initial interest arose from seeing how the lack of information in a complex emergency could have enormous negative consequences for people affected by the crisis.

In a crisis situation, the sooner an effective two-way flow of information can be established between the local population and those providing

assistance, the sooner those affected by the crisis can become active participants in their own recovery.

In a crisis, isn't media support a luxury compared to food and shelter?

It is not a zero-sum game. Support for local media doesn't detract from humanitarian response; accurate information dramatically improves the delivery of assistance.

Information abhors a vacuum. So the absence of reliable broadcasts or other forms of information coming from trusted sources creates exceptionally fertile ground for rumors.

In Chad we found that when the government imposed travel restrictions, rumors spread that the government was trying to make life difficult for the refugees to make them go home. Actually there were serious security problems. Once local radio shared this, people's attitudes changed.

What are some of the roles media play in a humanitarian crisis?

In the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, people only know what they can see of their immediate surroundings. Broadcast media, particularly radio, can provide a critical assessment of the extent and severity of the crisis for the entire community. This helps families to decide whether to pack up and move or hunker down.

Local media can play a key role in informing the response and the process of reconstruction. Reporters who have been covering the community for years are well-placed to create a forum for discussion, giving voice to the community in the reconstruction process.

To what extent do relief agencies recognize the role of media in disasters?

Humanitarian organizations often find it easier to communicate through controlled information campaigns rather than local media, whom they perceive as overly focused on the problems in assistance delivery.

Support for local media can help reporters better understand the complexities of delivering aid in an emergency and form more constructive relationships with humanitarian agencies. This helps local reporters provide the information that communities need to maximize the use of assistance and report on the problems of aid through a constructive public dialogue, rather than simply critical reporting.

The best way to ensure effective communication between the humanitarian community and the local population is not through information campaigns, but through local media who speak in a voice that the community trusts.

REBUILDING THE MEDIA IN POST-TSUNAMI SRI LANKA:

After the Asian tsunami, Internews set up mobile radio production units in tsunami-affected areas of Sri Lanka. For six months these units produced a daily 40-minute radio program—in both Tamil and Sinhalese—that told the story of the reconstruction through the voices of those affected. The journalists received training in how to produce and package field-based reports—a groundbreaking format in Sri Lankan radio—and worked with government agencies, humanitarian relief agencies and local community groups to provide information to people uprooted by the disaster.

INTERNEWS SRI LANKA



MARK EDWARDS/STILL PICTURES/INTERNEWS

WATCHDOGGING RELIEF EFFORTS: After the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, Internews' lifeline radio program, *Jazba-e-Tameer (The Desire to Rebuild)*, closely covered the relief and reconstruction. When *Jazba* reported that ten thousand refugees in the tent village of Tariqabad, Muzaffarabad, had been without electricity for nearly two months, authorities restored power within the week.

EMERGENCY MEDIA FUND

A New Internews Fund Enables Local Media to Provide Lifesaving Information in Emergencies

With a three-year, \$500,000 challenge grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Internews Network has established the Emergency Media Fund to enable local media to provide vital news and information to survivors of humanitarian disasters and other crises.

This includes immediately disseminating vital humanitarian information to affected populations and providing a channel of communication between relief organizations and those they are trying to help. The MacArthur grant enables Internews to respond to disasters more quickly and comprehensively. Donations to the fund are matched dollar for dollar by the MacArthur grant. The fund launched its first crisis response in January 2009 during the Israeli assault on Hamas in Gaza (see page 4).

“MacArthur has long provided support to ensure a diversity of voices and expand the availability of high-quality content, both at home and abroad,” said Elspeth Revere, Vice President of General Programs at the MacArthur Foundation. “Internews Network is well-positioned to ensure the free flow of information across the globe.”

DONORS

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Chad - refugees and IDPs: USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, the US State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, UNHCR, JWW/Equal Access, AJG Foundation, Richard Marks, and DFID.

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ABOUT INTERNEWS

Internews® is an international media development organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect, and the means to make their voices heard. Formed in 1982, Internews Network is a 501 (c)(3) organization headquartered in California. It has worked in over 70 countries, and currently has offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America.

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