The Right to Know

The Challenge of Public Information and Accountability in Aceh and Sri Lanka

Office of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery
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About the OSE: In February 2005, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed former United States President William J. Clinton as the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery to help sustain global political will in the recovery effort. President Clinton's role has included keeping the world's attention on tsunami recovery, supporting coordination efforts at the country and global levels, and promoting transparency and accountability measures. The Special Envoy has also championed a new kind of recovery that not only restores what existed previously, but goes beyond, seizing the moral, political, managerial, and financial opportunities the crisis has offered governments to set communities on a better and safer development path. The Special Envoy is supported by the Office of the Special Envoy at UN headquarters in New York.

All photos in this report were taken by the author.

Cover photo:
Community radio on air, Jantho, Aceh Besar, Aceh, June 2006.
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This study breaks the downward communication challenge in post-tsunami Aceh and Sri Lanka into four main areas. The first looks at the nature of communication problems between organisations and communities. The second covers mass information campaigns, including an overview of the information channels in Aceh and Sri Lanka and how best to use them. The third section investigates complaints mechanisms, and, finally, the fourth section is a brief glance at what has been done to bridge information gaps in Aceh and Sri Lanka.

Many organisations are still paying for mistakes made in communicating with communities in the early days of the tsunami recovery effort, resulting in what many call the “broken promises” phenomenon. The inherent problems of managing expectations were exacerbated by a widespread use of translators and jargon and the extreme levels of trauma experienced by beneficiaries. A number of organisations, however, have started to address these mistakes and build communications strategies into projects, developing models that potentially have wide application. For example, IOM’s innovative use of beneficiary drop in clinics in Aceh, beneficiary contracts and community MoUs, and ActionAid’s work to empower communities in Sri Lanka. In addition, there are a number of simple solutions to communication challenges: bulletin boards, community based monitoring and evaluation, and the use of written communication.

The design and implementation of mass information campaigns is one of the biggest challenges. Only in Sri Lanka has any real progress been made, with the impressive outreach efforts organized by the Human Rights Commission in particular. More commitment is needed, starting with recognition of the required resources, greater dedicated technical assistance both within organisations and governments, and increased funding commitments.

No accountability and transparency system is complete without a strong complaints mechanism. Aceh would benefit greatly from something similar to the excellent Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit set up by the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, which has a very high level of recognition among beneficiaries.
The BRR is on the right track with its anti-corruption unit, but it lacks the public profile and scale necessary to ensure success.

Donors must also take these issues on board, both by requiring downward accountability and communications strategies in projects they fund and by exploring ways in which they can receive feedback on projects from beneficiaries. They should also consider funding efforts similar to that used by ActionAid in Sri Lanka (which trains communities to implement projects being funded by outside agencies) providing technical expertise for governments and exploring means of developing independent complaints mechanisms.

Until information is properly shared with beneficiaries, they will never be equal partners. And until they are provided with a voice and the ability to judge a project’s viability, organisations will never be able to claim that they enabled tsunami survivors to rebuild and move on to as bright a future as possible.

**Key findings**

**What information do people want?**
Primarily, beneficiaries want practical information that explains what aid is available, how to apply for it, why what they have received might differ from their neighbour, and what to do if they are not satisfied. They are not interested in — and can recognize — materials that simply promote a particular organisation. Secondly, they are very interested in hearing how the aid effort is going, how money is being spent, what problems are being experienced elsewhere, and what solutions are being found.

**A systemic, comprehensive approach is lacking**
Although a number of excellent public information initiatives are being implemented in Aceh and Sri Lanka, overall, the level of institutional commitment to and implementation of communications strategies varies widely from organisation to organisation. Good communications initiatives tend to result from the efforts of one individual and his/her determination to apply principles of outreach and transparency. As a result, they are usually localized and are not applied across the board even within the organisation. There is also a general lack of commitment to good mass outreach campaigns with regard to policy and rights of the affected.

**Cheap, simple solutions**
On a more positive note, enhancing communications and downward accountability, especially at an organisation to community level, need not be an expensive or complex process. Many of the best ideas are cheap and simple. Leaflets and posters do not always have to be professionally designed or printed, and low-tech solutions are almost invariably better. A simple bulletin board can do more to enhance transparency and accountability towards beneficiaries than any website. What is needed is institutional commitment rather than elaborate projects or huge cash injections.

**The need to balance upward and downward accountability**
Most aid groups place higher value on upward accountability — to those who supplied the money — than to beneficiaries. This study does not dispute the importance of accountability toward donors. Rather, the means must be developed to ensure that organisations are at least equally accountable to beneficiaries, thus addressing this imbalance. Donors could do a great deal to effect this change by insisting on downward accountability and outreach strategies.

**Public information, not public relations**
Broadly speaking, the aim of public relations (PR) is to promote an organisation; the aim of public information (PI) is to channel information to the relevant audiences. But most communications expertise within international aid organisations, with a few notable exceptions, is geared toward public relations. For those organisations lacking community liaison staff, outreach falls to the public relations or information officer, for whom this type of work generally comes second to other work. Communications officers in Aceh and Sri Lanka agree that outreach gets put on the back seat when the public relations imperative takes over.

**The need for better coordination mechanisms**
The lack of professional expertise for outreach partly explains how organisations in Aceh and Sri Lanka have struggled to create effective coordination mechanisms for public outreach. The Media Working Group in Sri Lanka and the Public Information Working Group in Aceh, led by OCHA and CARE, respectively, and comprised of representatives from UN
agencies and NGOs, ultimately became information sharing bodies, while also working as advocates for beneficiary outreach. Most members, however, have public relations and not public information as their core duty and consequently are unable to give beneficiary outreach the necessary levels of attention. Moreover in both Aceh and Sri Lanka the chairs of these working groups lie with public information officers from the international community — and not government authorities who could have more power to effect change.

The need to consider women
There is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that women are frequently cut out of the information loop in both Aceh and Sri Lanka. Women are less likely to see newspapers or control the dial on the radio or television, and they often rely on their husbands for information. In Aceh, they are frequently left out of community meetings altogether. While projects involving traditionally women-oriented work, such as health and education, often consider how to reach women, the housing, livelihoods, and infrastructure sectors rarely contemplate this.

**Key Recommendations**

- Public outreach, downward accountability, and transparency strategies should be built into all projects, along with a dedicated budget. Donors should include this as a basic requirement in project design. All organisations should consider bringing in public outreach specialists — as distinct from public relations or external relations officers. The participation of marketing and communications experts from the private sector — on a pro bono basis — should also be investigated.
- Aceh badly needs an effective and high profile complaints mechanism, such as the Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit in Sri Lanka. BRR and donors should make this a high priority.
- Both BRR and RADA should look into outsourcing the design of major public outreach campaigns on policy issues to private companies.
- Both BRR and RADA should consider creating a local citizens’ advice bureau system or information centres for beneficiaries — at district offices — where people can register for assistance, inquire about available aid, and register complaints.
- In Sri Lanka, more research is required on information flow to and within tsunami affected areas, especially in conflict areas.
- More capacity building is needed for local government officers in accountability and transparency, not just in the context of tsunami response but as an exercise in good governance.
- All organisations should consider, where appropriate, incorporating some form of community-based monitoring and evaluation systems into their projects.
- All IDP locations, especially camps and transitional shelter areas, should be required to have a bulletin board, and aid organisations should be required to display basic project information and contact details.
- Written community contracts between organisations and beneficiaries should be adopted wherever possible.
- In addition to the current public information working structure that exists now, in both Aceh and Sri Lanka, a core public information working group should be established, which would have a budget for mass information campaigns/outreach work, and would be headed by officials from BRR and RADA.
Introduction

We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources. As the article from the Code of Conduct illustrates, the principle of downward accountability has been an official tenet of humanitarian response for over a decade. In the context of tsunami response, however, a number of factors have resulted in this kind of accountability taking a secondary role to accountability towards those providing resources. While the response to the tsunami brought unprecedented levels of funding and international attention to affected populations, it also created an acute need for the highest possible standards of accountability towards those who had been so generous and created strong pressures to spend quickly and account for these expenditures.

The lack of commitment towards downwards accountability, however, has created a key tension at the heart of tsunami response. The principle of downwards accountability goes to the heart of many of the current ideas behind development — the rights-based approach and community driven development — which have been placed firmly at the centre of tsunami reconstruction.

In both Aceh and Sri Lanka, organisations quickly made an explicit commitment to reject top-down management of reconstruction, placing communities in the driving seat and making them architects of their own recovery. Without ways in which beneficiaries can access information, such pledges are drastically weakened. And while it is clear that efforts have been made, it is also clear that they have been inadequate. Most communities in Aceh and Sri Lanka know little about how money has been spent — either on a macro level or on individual projects, and study after study has cited communities’ ignorance of the recovery process as a key failing. Confusion about policies, an inability to report misuse of aid, ignorance about where to turn for assistance, cynicism and anger stemming from broken promises about aid, and mismanaged expectations have all been noted. Most of these were avoidable to some degree.

A key factor has been the tendency on the part of aid organisations to regard communication with beneficiaries as an optional extra, rather than seeing information as a vital commodity and a humanitarian right, the key to empowerment, better relationships with beneficiaries and a more effective recovery effort. There has also been a failure to understand that information deprivation, on the other hand, causes stress and exacerbates trauma: leaving a community of IDPs in tents for a year with little explanation of when they will get houses or to whom to apply or complain to, inflicts harm.

Communication and public information are not cure-alls for what has gone wrong in tsunami-
mi recovery. A good communications strategy will not fix a fundamentally misconceived project, hide problems that emerge as it progresses, or gloss over defects in government policy. But information flow to communities almost always enhances projects, contributing considerably to a good working relationship with beneficiaries and higher satisfaction levels. Effective outreach for service-based projects also increases uptake of services. Transparency in projects is recognized and appreciated by communities and rewarded with increased credibility and trust. Even difficulties, such as those encountered by one organisation in Aceh which halted some activities while it investigated corruption allegations, can actually enhance the relationship between the community and the organisation if handled transparently.

This study presents an overview of the challenges and puts forth recommendations, based on practical experiences in the field, on how to meet these challenges.

**Methodology**

This study is not a comprehensive overview of public outreach projects in Aceh and Sri Lanka. The aim was rather to provide an overview of the current public information and accountability challenges in both areas, examine some of the solutions applied by various organisations and, from among them, identify the solutions that have worked best as well as provide some insight into why they may have been successful. Every effort was made to provide independent confirmation of a project’s success.

The author spent time in Aceh and Sri Lanka, talking to a wide range of stakeholders including beneficiaries, UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, local government actors, donors, journalists, marketing and advertising companies, media analysts, and outreach experts. Most interviews were conducted informally and off the record to encourage people to speak freely; only those who gave explicit permission to be quoted are mentioned by name. Conversations with beneficiaries were held, wherever possible, without the presence of anyone from any of the organisations working in their communities.

A number of previously completed studies and assessments on Aceh and Sri Lanka were also consulted. Of particular importance were the Knowledge and Aptitudes Survey conducted in Sri Lanka by the Academy for Educational Development and the Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) Listening Project, the IFRC’s *World Disasters Report 2005*, and *A People’s Agenda? Post-Tsunami Aid in Aceh* by Eye on Aceh and Aid Watch. In addition to these, materials from a number of organisations working on wider questions of downward accountability and beneficiary outreach in development were consulted, in particular the findings of the Humanitarian Accountability Project.
Managing communications with communities is key to successful community-driven development. Knowledge is power. Without information, communities cannot participate, make choices, or ask questions. Good communication is also about trust and partnership, and is thus at the heart of successful community partnerships.

Putting communities at the centre of tsunami response requires that adequate provision be made for community access to information about projects, channels through which they can ask questions, and mechanisms by which they can register dissatisfaction or complaints. Such efforts both supply information and create space for dialogue between communities and aid agencies, a two way information flow that is beneficial to both parties.

This chapter examines the nature of information flow between an agency and a community in the context of project implementation, looking at what has gone wrong, what the consequences have been, and how improvements can be made. It begins with an analysis of the environments in which the tsunami response was launched in Aceh and Sri Lanka and how these impact communications challenges. In Aceh in particular, there is an ongoing and systemic problem with regard to communications with beneficiaries, with a number of studies emphasizing that communities lacked sufficient information about the projects and thus could not make informed choices about their future. In addition, beneficiaries found that extracting information from agencies was often a frustrating and difficult process.1

One key problem is that many people in Sri Lanka and Aceh simply do not realize that they have a right to information. In one case cited below, a community in Aceh had been explicitly told by the local government that they could not ask any questions. Communities that have monitoring committees or have demanded information often report that they feel more well-informed and empowered.

The complexity of communications problems and the need for expert help in developing solutions should not be underestimated. Aid agencies tend to believe that good communication does not require special attention and will just happen, and many lack dedicated in-house expertise in this area. But a good communications strategy requires carefully thinking, planning, expertise, and a budget. With these in place, there are a number of simple, cheap and effective strategies that can improve downward accountability and communications. Successful solutions from Aceh and Sri Lanka, which can be applied elsewhere, are outlined in detail below.

The Nature of the Challenge

There are key differences between Aceh and Sri Lanka that shape the different communications challenges they present. Sri Lanka had numerous advantages over Aceh in terms of capacity to

implement a public information strategy. Many organisations had already been working there for decades and had well-established branch offices in areas hit by the tsunami, strong national staff at all levels (with language skills), strong partnerships with Sri Lankan NGOs, and, in some cases, longstanding relationships with affected communities. As a result, strong communication channels with communities already existed or were easier to develop. Set against this, however, was an entrenched anti-NGO sentiment among the political sectors, which was also echoed by the media.2

The circumstances in Aceh were very different. Three years before the tsunami, martial law was declared, and all international organisations had to leave the province. Because of this, few international organisations had relationships with local NGOs and almost none had any Acehnese staff. Although many organisations brought in Indonesian staff after the tsunami, most were not from Aceh. In a province that had been the scene of an insurgency for 30 years, this brought its own set of sensitivities.

Cultural understanding of the province’s particular circumstances and mentality, including the conflict’s impact, was very limited, and almost no one spoke Bahasa Aceh. The ways in which the conflict impacted communications issues — attitudes toward INGOs, the extreme reluctance to complain or question — are still not well understood. In addition, Acehnese who were quickly hired to implement recovery programs often had little institutional knowledge about their employers, limiting their ability to supply information about the organisations to communities. In a wider context, concerns regarding corruption and severely damaged local government infrastructure also contributed to transparency and accountability problems, especially when combined with a low level of trust in government institutions, particularly in conflict affected areas.

In Sri Lanka, some communities expressed concern that powerful neighbours unaffected by the tsunami were getting aid when they were not, but said they would not complain because they feared that their aid could be withdrawn. As in Aceh, communities are reluctant to voice criticisms or complaints for the same reasons. Some communities, by contrast, are very aware of their rights and very vocal about making demands. One community north of Galle famously erected a roadside billboard bemoaning their plight and demanding to know where the government assistance was. In the east, however, the picture is closer to that found in Aceh: communities alienated from the authorities, reluctant to ask questions or complain and with limited rights and entitlements awareness.

Since good transparency and accountability techniques are greatly facilitated by good communication, improving the ways in which organisations supply information to beneficiaries will go a long way to addressing these issues. Communications problems between communities and aid organisations exist in both Aceh and Sri Lanka, but largely because of the circumstances outlined above, these problems are much more acute in Aceh. As a result the points below, while relevant to Sri Lanka, outline issues which refer mostly to the Acehnese experience.

Broken Promises

The phenomenon of broken promises has become one of the catchphrases of the relief effort in Aceh and, to a lesser extent, in Sri Lanka. There have been local radio phone-in shows dedicated to the topic, and a popular song was even released. But while cases of actual broken promises — commitments made by organisations that were never fulfilled — undoubtedly occurred, the majority of perceived broken promises actually seem to have resulted from communications problems. Typically, after the tsunami, an aid organisation would approach a community, carry out a needs assessment, or discuss possibilities, and then leave. The organisation might think they had merely gathered some information that would form the basis of a decision on possible assistance. The community, meanwhile, would assume that they had just received a firm commitment for assistance. Sometimes the organisation did not return. But the community would wait, growing more impatient, sometimes turning away aid from other organisations. The organisation might think they had merely gathered some information that would form the basis of a decision on possible assistance. The community, meanwhile, would assume that they had just received a firm commitment for assistance. Sometimes the organisation did not return. But the community would wait, growing more impatient, sometimes turning away aid from other organisations. The organisation might think they had merely gathered some information that would form the basis of a decision on possible assistance. The community, meanwhile, would assume that they had just received a firm commitment for assistance. Sometimes the organisation did not return. But the community would wait, growing more impatient, sometimes turning away aid from other organisations.

The perception of broken promises has done a great deal to shape the perception of aid organisations. Aid representatives visiting communities are often met with cynicism or
downright mistrust, and assessment teams find that communities are reluctant to talk to them. In recent months, some communities have actually held public protests outside the offices of aid organisations, demanding information, and have burned materials supplied for building projects and even attacked I/NGO staff.3

Broken Promises: Anatomy of a Communications Problem

It is important to understand how the broken promises phenomenon arose because many of the contributing factors linger and must be addressed to stop these cycles of miscommunication. The first issue is simply the huge cultural gulf between INGOs and beneficiaries.

First impressions
In both Aceh and Sri Lanka, communities suffered the bewildering experience of being swamped by dozens of organisations, speaking languages they did not understand, asking hundreds of questions, and providing everything from buckets to boats. Moreover, they often did so in a way and using a selection methodology that made little sense to beneficiaries. Because of the lack of past contact with development organisations, this problem was much more acute in Aceh. Since the tsunami, communities have had a crash course in the development industry, with mixed results.

Organizations are often unaware of how they are perceived in the field and do not consider that something as simple as the choice of car can send a damaging message. Understanding how an organization is per-

The Big White Car: Reputation Management

International aid organisations often purchase large white cars, usually Land Cruisers or pickup trucks. While this makes sense in terms of staff security, it sends a message that INGOs have spent aid money on their own vehicles, the needs of their staff are more important than those of beneficiaries, and aid workers place themselves above those they are helping. For beneficiaries, they are frequently symbolic of all that is wrong with the relief effort. A recent article in the influential Indonesian newspaper Kompas, titled “The Humanitarian Lords of Aceh,” wrote that “aid workers are flashy,” citing their choice of transportation as evidence. “They have private drivers to take them anywhere they want to go. It’s a common to see luxury cars — four-wheel drives — visiting tents and barracks.”

In Sri Lanka, one study found that politicians saw the expensive cars as symbolic of the way aid organisations wasted resources. One community, when asked why they were so loyal to a particular INGO, immediately recounted how that INGO had arrived for the first time on foot, not in a big car. This made a strong and lasting impression, convincing them that the INGO saw themselves on a par with the people they were helping. By contrast, another aid worker said that several communities reported that when they had been offered similar projects by different INGOs, they chose the organisation with the biggest and newest cars, on the rationale that those organisations had more money.

3 See section on Complaints Mechanisms.
ceived and what messages are being sent are the first steps to understanding how to communicate. The aid world has a tendency to assume that everyone understands the different organizations, what they do, and how they differ, but beneficiaries often just see foreigners driving around in big white cars.

**Lost in translation**
Understanding among beneficiaries of who the various organizations are and what they do is very patchy. Another key problem is the widespread use of translators, especially in Aceh. Because of the lack of Indonesian-speaking staff members, initial consultations were often handled through translators, which was problematic on several levels. The demand for translators was overwhelming, and the quality obviously varied. Non-Acehnese staff, while speaking Bahasa Indonesian, did not necessarily understand Acehnese culture or Bahasa Aceh. Acehnese staff with sufficient English, let alone translating experience, were scarce. As a result, many organizations used people who were not professional translators, whose linguistic skills were limited, or they used Javanese staff. In this context, crucial messages can easily be lost in translation — “we will consider” becoming “we will” and so on. Moreover, the audience were desperate, traumatized communities with a tendency to hear what they wanted to hear.

**Use of jargon**
Compounding the above problem was the fact that the language that needed to be translated was jargon-filled “development-speak.” International aid workers tend to use industry-specific terms, such as “capacity building,” that are generally not well understood outside the development industry and often do not lend themselves to translation.

**Needs assessments and expectations**
Organisations have also not realized the extent to which simply conducting a needs assessment raises expectations. Assessment teams, especially in the early days, often did not explain clearly that they were only collecting information. Communities, meanwhile, understandably assumed that the questions would lead to aid. Once again, when aid failed to materialize, communities were disappointed and angry.

**Speaking only to village leaders**
One common mistake is to communicate only with the village head, assuming that he will share information with community members. But many communities complain that the village head is corrupt or does not share information. Not informing the community about what they can expect, especially in terms of aid distributions, makes it easy for village heads or corrupt camp coordinators to siphon off aid or charge an “administrative fee” for distributing it.

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One group reported that an NGO had given them funds to start a cooperative. However, they had needed the money to purchase items for the Eid festivities. Now the NGO wants them to pay it back with interest. The Listening Team interpreted this as a miscommunication in which the NGO was launching a credit program, but people did not understand this so used the funds for the end of Ramadan. Now they cannot pay the money back.

*Collaborative for Development Action (CDA)*

“*Our headman is not a good man….He never comes to visit us, the ones who are left behind. So maybe people are telling him things — we don’t know.*

*IDP community, Galle, Sri Lanka*

“*If we understand, we can be patient*”
A particular problem has been with organisations failing to inform communities about problems or delays. Communities report that delays in delivery or funding are not communicated to them, which has been a source of intense frustration. Several aid workers bluntly stated that the failure to update communities is based on fear. According to one aid worker in Aceh, “No one likes to be the bearer of bad
news. We are worried about how people will react if we go and tell them they will have to wait another three months before they have their houses. There is definitely a tendency to wait until the news is good before updating communities.”

The irony, of course, is that failure to communicate problems will damage the working relationship and erode trust. Communities, especially in Aceh, are actually very understanding of the problems faced by organisations and are used to delays. As one man told the CDA Learning Project, “If we understand what is going on, we can be patient.”

“The problem is fear. We never make promises because we are afraid we will not be able to keep them, and that is wrong. But we need to be fair. These are rational concerns coming from NGOs. We need to clarify, to assure, to walk people through their fears. Part of the problem is definitely that NGOs do not tend to have people in-house who can do this. Communication is not an art known by every NGO — there is definitely a lack of capacity and prioritization in this area.”

NGO coordinator, Sri Lanka

“Primarily, IDPs want practical information about available aid, what assistance they can expect, when it will arrive, and where they can go to get it. They do not want — and can recognize — promotional materials. These public relations tools are not appropriate and can often backfire, inflaming community anger if the community feels that there is a gap between the work portrayed and what they have received.

Of course, answering such questions is a great deal harder than asking them. One solution is a system of information kiosks of the kind that BRR is investigating as it moves to a more district based model. This is an interesting idea that merits wider consideration. Another effective example is a helpline (see the TAFREN case study on page 41). But an overall improvement in the amount and nature of information supplied to communities is unquestionably the best place to start.

Solutions: Expectation Management

With reference to the problem of generating expectations by needs assessments, more careful attempts to explain assessments, such as written consent forms for beneficiaries, would go a long way. These are used by some INGOs but not consistently. The model below, which is currently being employed in psychosocial needs assessments in Aceh’s conflict areas, uses clear

“I am a small businessman whose rented house was destroyed by the tsunami: do I have a right to receive the assistance from INGOs?”

Transitional shelter resident, Aceh

“BRR has promised to build 190 units of housing for us but until now construction has not started and we don’t know what is happening.”

Transitional shelter resident, Aceh


5 Where’s My House? Improving Communications with Beneficiaries, UN-OCHA, August 2005.
verbal briefings and written explanations of the research to combat this problem.

There are disadvantages to this approach: the formal nature of a written consent form can make people nervous and certainly mitigates against the ease of verbal communication. It is also probably too formal for a quick needs assessment. The researcher leading this project, however, reports that communities read the consent form carefully and frequently ask detailed questions. Yet even with the written statement, this assessment team still received many inquiries about when aid would arrive. One local schoolteacher has inquired repeatedly about the start date for his school’s reconstruction despite being told clearly that the interviewing team had no power to provide assistance. Desperation can be so strong that even such preventative measures will not prevent raising expectations. These inquiries, though, seem to come more from the hope that some assistance will be provided rather than anger that promises have not been delivered.

Solutions: The Potential of Written Communication

For most organisations, verbal communication is the main method of imparting information. Face-to-face discussions and community meetings are the key methods of building trust and developing community relations as well as transferring news and information. Yet verbal contracts can be easily misunderstood and easy to dispute afterwards. A written statement can become a record of a discussion or an agreement that is less open to dispute by either side and, as such, has considerable advantages.

As the work of a few organisations in Aceh and Sri Lanka illustrates, written materials have an extremely valuable — and at present underexploited — role to play in tsunami response. In both places, literacy rates are extremely high (95.8 percent in Aceh, 90.4 percent in Sri Lanka).6 This suggests written contracts could be effective.

Some organisations have recognized this and have begun to incorporate written communications into their community work. In Aceh, CRS began to produce ad-hoc written contracts with its beneficiaries to clarify the exact nature of the aid and have found the model very helpful. Others are posting codes of conduct for their staff in community areas, explaining, for example, that local staff should never accept or ask for money.

Solutions: Bulletin Boards

One of the simplest ways to introduce written communication within communities is through bulletin boards. These are a simple and low-cost — but very effective — method of improving communication. A wooden board, placed in a community’s central area, can be used for everything from posting information about upcoming aid deliveries to beneficiary lists, including explanations of how beneficiaries were chosen. And the use of a central, accessible location increases access to information for groups like women and youth, who are often excluded from community meetings. The bulletin board is also readily accepted by communities. In Aceh, a study produced in August 2005 found that 68 percent of communities had some kind of bulletin board, many of which were not provided by INGOs, and were spontaneous community creations.

Organisations that have used boards have found them to be useful in myriad ways. One INGO in Aceh reports that attendance at community meetings increased dramatically when the meeting date and time was advertised on a
board a week in advance. Everyone who wanted to attend was able to make arrangements to be there, which also helped prevent meetings from becoming dominated by the usual clique of community leaders. By the same token, simple announcements of the date and time of an aid delivery ensure that beneficiaries can be present to receive their entitlements. When deliveries are ad hoc and unannounced, some community members miss out because they are out of the area at the time. Posting details of what beneficiaries can expect in a standard aid pack (such as a food parcel) can also help prevent local corruption and deter people from siphoning off aid.

The use of bulletin boards has, however, been piecemeal. In Sri Lanka, ActionAid is one of very few organisations that mandates the use of bulletin boards (see page 21). Of course, it is not sufficient to just place some information on a board without any subsequent discussion, and most organisations using boards recognize that they are not a substitute for community meetings but a complementary tool. Although boards are an easy tool for communication, communities complained that aid organisations showed little inclination to use them. “We like the board because we need more information, but I/NGOs need to make sure they use them.

Our board has out of date information, which means no one looks at it,” is a typical comment from an Acehnese IDP. Thus it is not sufficient that IDP camp administrators install a bulletin board, but organisations must ensure that information is posted regularly. Research indicates, however, that those who do so will find that simply displaying beneficiary lists, criteria for selection processes, house designs or village plans, dates and times of upcoming meetings, basic budget lines for projects can all make a critical difference in empowering villages, not to mention improving an organisation’s credibility and increasing trust.

Solutions: Beneficiary Information Packs and Feedback Mechanisms

Some organisations are now starting to go further and look at techniques for supplying information directly to individual beneficiaries. As discussed above, IOM is starting to implement a comprehensive approach to information supply for beneficiaries. At this point, though, it is impossible to evaluate how
What Makes a Good Bulletin Board?

A number of board types have been used in IDP communities. Some key lessons have emerged on what types are the best.

**Stand-alone boards versus those specially built**

Many organisations have used specially constructed stand-alone boards with integrated roofs. A further variation is a whiteboard that needs to be attached to wall or a board with legs. These models have different strengths. Stand-alone boards cannot be moved once put in place, which means they will be neglected if they are not in the most opportune place. Organisations often put boards at the entrance to the community whereas communities generally prefer that they are close to areas of public use such as temples. At one location visited for this survey, communities had abandoned the purpose-built board in favour of using a wall in such an area.

**Branding**

This is a key issue. Most INGOs prominently brand their bulletin boards with their logo, which can have unintended negative consequences. First, other agencies often assume that the board is only for that particular organisation instead of it being available to everyone. If the board is only for the agency in question, communities that work with several agencies may end up with several boards. Branded boards also cannot become a true community resource. If a branded board is used by other organisations, misunderstandings can arise as to the source of information displayed.

A strong case for removing branding relates to the boards’ potential as community empowerment and transparency tools. An unbranded board can be a community resource that can be used to hold organisations to account. In Aceh, an anti-corruption NGO distributed boards to local mosques, which the community then used to publicly display the mosque’s financial records — a use for which branded boards would not have been appropriate.

**Glass covers and keys**

Several organisations have installed boards with glass covers that can be locked, with keys in the hands of both the community leader and the organisation. But this can deter other organisations and the community from posting information. One INGO in Aceh, however, said glass was necessary to protect beneficiary lists from being altered by those unhappy with the contents. They compensate by using a double-sided model with glass and an accessible white board.

**White boards**

This alternative to the traditional bulletin board has been explored in both Sri Lanka and Aceh. In Sri Lanka, ActionAid installs white transparency boards and trains communities and local partners to use them to post budget details. In Aceh, a UN pilot project distributed white boards to allow communities to create a written record of discussions with INGOs.

A short monitoring exercise found that communities were using the boards to write up dates of promised aid distributions and draw diagrams of proposed projects such as housing or water system installations. It was also found that the boards were particularly popular in areas that lacked reliable electricity and could not use the local menasa announcing system to spread community information.

The biggest drawback to whiteboards is the need for a pen. Even if supplied, they were often lost or dried up. Boards also have to be well-covered since the writing can wash away in the rain.

Of these various models, the best designed and most effective were those installed by CRS, which installed sturdy, well-covered permanent boards with glass on one side and a white board on the other.
successful this approach will be as it is only just being implemented. Nonetheless, it is certainly an interesting model and one of the few that is designed to mainstream the comprehensive supply of information within projects to beneficiaries.

**Solutions: Using Locally Based NGOs to Manage Communication**

There is a widespread — but unspoken — assumption among INGOs that local organisations, especially community-based organisations, are inherently more accountable to communities by virtue of being local, culturally closer, and more able to understand issues like community needs and behaviour. This is sometimes the case but cannot be assumed about every local organisation. While local NGOs usually do have a better grasp of the local context, it is dangerous to assume that they understand accountability or are transparent. “I think only around 20 percent of the organisations we work with have any real understanding of transparency and accountability,” says one civil society advisor in Aceh. “The rest are still learning. After about a year of working with them, we are seeing the good ones begin to emerge.” The assumption that a community will be happy to work with a local NGO is also not necessarily valid, he adds. “Many times, the community sees the local NGO initially as a middleman and assume they are basically there to take a slice of the money.”

In Sri Lanka, there is an additional problem with relying on local organisations to manage information flow. In such a highly politicized environment, some local organisations have been known to combine information about projects with rhetoric or conspiracy theories concerning INGOs. Records of community discussions in Sri Lanka illustrate that many local organisations opened community meetings (that were part of a collective engagement effort by NGOs) with a speech about the ulterior motives of organisations such as the World Bank, conspiracy theories regarding government land grabs, and comments on how the aid industry was “capitalist” and controlled by “big business.” Linking these highly political, highly opinionated statements with attempts to explain tsunami relief does not advance the goal of greater transparency.

Compounding these issues is the fact that local NGOs may actually adopt some of the tendencies that mitigate against downward accountability present in some international aid organisations. INGOs place heavy burdens of accountability on local organisations, which can then instil the emphasis on upward accountability at the grassroots level. As one INGO worker in Aceh put it bluntly, “What gives us

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**IOM: Information Packs and Drop-in Clinic**

In a recent innovation, IOM in Aceh has begun a programme to maximize access to information. Under its Permanent Shelter project, IOM is beginning to use written contracts, not just with communities, but with individual households. The Liaison Unit will also distribute a Beneficiary Information Pack to each beneficiary household, containing:

- Criteria for eligibility for housing;
- A copy of the housing agreement signed with the community;
- A copy of the household agreement between IOM and the household;
- Diagrams and drawings of the housing unit;
- A background sheet on the donor supporting the project;
- A background sheet on IOM;
- Details on how to withdraw from the process; and
- Details of IOM’s complaints mechanism.

IOM is also drawing up a Code of Conduct for its workers and field staff, which will be included in all contracts and will have to be signed by contractors in the presence of the community and publicly displayed. This will include contact numbers for questions and complaints.

IOM has also recently initiated beneficiary drop-in clinics, which are held twice a week at its office in Banda Aceh, and will soon be rolled out to the regions (including a mobile rotating clinic in areas where beneficiaries are too spread out for them to travel to the office without considerable inconvenience/expense). The clinics are held between 3 and 6 PM, a time selected to ensure that women can also join. The clinics have been publicized by IOM community liaison officers, who have put up simple, in-house designed posters inviting communities to join. The Community Liaison Officer, who keeps records of all questions raised, compiles a briefing note at the end of each clinic and circulates it to the rest of the IOM team to keep them informed about beneficiaries’ concerns.

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the right to teach local NGOs about accountability when we are so bad at it?"

The fact that aid organisations do not have the balance right is of course no excuse for allowing the problem to perpetuate however. All local partners should be trained and required to provide information and basic accountability mechanisms as an integral part of any project. Sustainability is also an issue; local partners trained in accountability can continue to implement those strategies long after the project has finished and the implementing partner has left.

**Solutions: What to Do When a Project Goes Wrong**

Many aid workers consulted for this study voiced an understandable dislike of having to inform communities when something had gone wrong with a project. If the problem is perceived as small, such as a late delivery of water, it is rare that the organisation will explain what is happening. But while these might not seem to be significant hold-ups for the INGO, they might have serious implications for the community. If the issue is serious, there is a clear reluctance to explain these to the community, usually through fear of a negative response.

**Case Study: Explaining Problems**

Oxfam recently suspended operations in Aceh Besar, where it administers projects for thousands of beneficiaries, so it could investigate allegations — subsequently substantiated — of corruption. As part of its response, Oxfam recognized the need to inform its communities of which services would continue (essential deliveries such as water) and which would have to go on hold (housing construction). Communities, who had heard rumours of problems, were understandably worried. Oxfam, which has established housing committees in its communities, sent representatives to each committee to explain what was happening. It also wrote letters outlining the problem and the action it was taking, signed by a senior staff representative, which were posted on community bulletin boards.

In the Oxfam community in Aceh Besar visited for this project, a housing committee member interviewed explained she had a mobile number for Oxfam’s community liaison officer, whom she could call regularly for updates. “This was especially important when the community was becoming impatient and really wanted to know when their housing project was going to restart,” she says. “Often the only thing he could say was that the investigation was ongoing, but it was helpful to have it from him.” Overall, while she felt the situation had been very stressful and put her under a lot of pressure from the community, she was satisfied with Oxfam’s level of support and said their good working relationship would continue.

As this case illustrates, if handled correctly, a problem can be turned into an opportunity to build trust. In this example, Oxfam’s reputation was enhanced in this particular community because it shared information on the difficulties and updated people on progress.

**Solutions: Community Based Monitoring and Evaluation**

Although a significant area that could be the subject of its own study, community monitoring and evaluation of aid projects should be discussed here as it clearly has a key role in projects based on community participation.

This is a particularly acute issue in Aceh, especially with regard to housing being built by local contractors. Community policing of such projects has obvious merits. Communities have the greatest interest in the quality of the final product and are physically located at the project site. Moreover, it is a means to bring them more fully into the process. In Sri Lanka, UNDP has been piloting a project that seeks to do exactly this.

There are, of course, difficulties with community monitoring of infrastructure projects. For safety reasons, for example, it is not desirable to have community members wandering around a construction site. In addition, requiring workers to answer frequent questions can slow down work. As a result, this approach is less popular among contractors and professional international housing experts. When CRS, for example, began encouraging communities to monitor housing projects in Meulaboh, Aceh, it found that often the community would complain directly to the builders. “The problem is that if
Community Monitoring and Evaluation in Sri Lanka

As part of a much larger support programme to Civil Society Organisations, UNDP Sri Lanka developed a project that builds AidWatch principles into its housing programme. Four AidWatch communities have been established to empower and train communities to monitor their own housing projects. The community visited for this study is in Galle and consists of just 11 families (in the case of larger communities, UNDP invites them to form a committee). Their new houses are being built next to their camp by a local company contracted by UNDP. The community has some expertise (one person is an electrician), and UNDP has an engineer who also advises them.

The families are encouraged to report any problems — for example, if the contractor does not turn up to work — directly to UNDP and to call with any questions. The local UNDP project officer reported that initially the families were hesitant and unwilling to voice their opinions. After a few weeks of training, however, they were very enthusiastic about the model. The community members stated that they are much happier now because they are confident they will get good houses, can see the construction progress, and are looking forward to them being complete. This model also provides a means by which communities can stay up to date with progress on housing construction.

UNDP is also seeking to use this model to promote community empowerment, encouraging community members to use these methods with other organisations.

the community see something wrong they directly intervene, the contractor complains to us and work sometimes stops until everything is resolved.” Now, CRS asks community members to report directly to them.

There will always be questions regarding how much information can or should be shared with beneficiaries. For example, giving full access to all financial data is impractical, and there is also an issue of confidentiality, especially with reference to contracts. Communities should be the driver of how much information will be shared. Usually, communities do not really want to go through the books, but rather just want to know how much is being spent on key elements of infrastructure, the workings of livelihood financing systems, and so on. The ActionAid model is probably the best example of budget information sharing: expenditures are publicly displayed, with a simple breakdown of costs such as for labour and material.

Solutions: Dedicated Information Staff

For most aid organisations, their primary face to the community is some kind of local liaison officer. In Sri Lanka, with its previously noted advantages vis-à-vis existing long-term aid projects, liaison officers had the advantage of in-depth understanding of their organisations. In Aceh, the standards have varied enormously, which is a reflection of the dearth of appropriately qualified and trained Acehnese staff. One study for Oxfam found that liaison officers could only be effective if properly trained and supported by the organisation in community liaison and outreach.8 This included training in how to use bulletin boards and an in-depth understanding of the organisation.

The World Bank’s KDP project, a vast community-based project that channels small grants to 28,000 villages across Indonesia, has taken this principle one step further, developing a team of dedicated Information Facilitators to ensure that communities have access to all necessary information.

Solutions: Empowerment for the Future

One interesting model is one that trains communities to demand information.

Unlike most conventional approaches to community empowerment, which are generally designed to help implement particular projects or manage the relationship with a specific organisation (such as the Oxfam housing committees), the ActionAid model seeks to teach communities how to form structures that all INGOs can be asked to work through. This is particularly relevant in the context of tsunami response, where many actors are working within the same communities. It is also far more sustainable since communities trained to demand participation and accountability will continue to do so long after the tsunami response is over.

Case Study: KDP Information Facilitators

Integral to the success of KDP is both an effective system of information flow to communities and a complaints mechanism (see Chapter 3). In Aceh, KDP employs a team of Information Facilitators, who both gather information (such as carrying out needs assessments) and supply information to participating communities. In addition, information boards are mandatory in all communities to post project information, including budgets and financial projections.

At regular meetings, community members can ask questions about the information posted on the board. Information Facilitators report that there are many questions. One Information Facilitator interviewed for this study stated that much of his job involved heading off disputes and problems before they began by investigating and responding to community questions and concerns. He quoted a case study in which one village had complained that they were not getting as much money from KDP as another neighbouring village, alleging corruption. He investigated and found that the first village’s proposal simply involved less money than that put forward by the second.

Another community complained about a road building project, specifically that it was not using local labour. The Information Facilitator went to the village to explain that the project required technical expertise and specialist equipment that the community did not possess, necessitating the use of an outside contractor. With this greater information, the community members were satisfied. “My real job is a mediator when conflict or problems arise in a project. I correct misperceptions. We all have the same aims, but the perception of how to reach that goal is different. My job is to be that bridge.”

This system is an interesting illustration of how good communication, particularly the opportunity for communities to raise questions and have their concerns investigated, can identify and tackle problems at a very early stage before they become entrenched or lead to violence.

ActionAid in Sri Lanka: Vigilance Committees

ActionAid Sri Lanka is implementing its “vigilance committee” model in all communities where it works. Under this very simple concept, communities are offered training and encouraged to form a committee of five representatives, selected internally, to handle the implementation of projects proposed by any aid organisation. The basic principle is to teach communities that they have a right to demand information about project development, including the right to refuse assistance if it is not being implemented in a way they prefer. To reinforce this training, ActionAid leads by example. A “transparency board” — a whiteboard that includes information including all project details, timeframes, and beneficiary lists are displayed — is mandatory in all its projects, and project budgets are also shared. This model is currently being implemented in 218 villages.

One such community visited for this study consisted of a camp of conflict/tsunami IDPs south of Trincomalee on Sri Lanka’s east coast. ActionAid’s local partner NGO, called WACO, is forward leaning on the subject of community rights. “The people here have the right to know about the organisations that work with them and what they can expect, otherwise they might be cheated. We are working for them — they should know what they are getting, and if it is 100% of what it should be,” said one WACO representative. “Lack of knowledge is one of the most important problems in communities,” said another. “They need to know who to go to for answers to their questions and problems. They need to find their own answers. If they have the information, they can solve their own problems. We don’t want them to be reliant on us.”

The beneficiaries’ view of the project was also positive. The five-person committee recalled a previous UN-implemented project, which rebuilt a school. Because the project took place prior to the committee’s establishment, it could not be sure who had provided the money or how much it had cost. “We would not accept that now,” said one committee member. “We would ask to know how much money they were spending and who was getting the contract.”
Communities trained to demand participation and accountability will continue to do so long after the tsunami response is over.

General Recommendations for Improving Communications with Communities

- Develop a communications strategy from the project’s earliest stages and ensure that there is a budget for communications. Donors should insist on this as a requirement for funding.
- Advertise community meetings in a public space, such as on a village notice board at least a week in advance.
- Use as little jargon as possible.
- Only work through translators as a last resort.
- Be very clear in the initial meeting with the community of the visit’s purpose; if the visit is an assessment that will not necessarily result in aid, make this clear.
- If possible, create some kind of written record of the conversation on the spot, outlining the nature of commitments.
- If meeting minutes are taken, make them available to the local community by translating them into the local language and posting them.
- Always leave a contact name, number, and address, ideally of the liaison person responsible for the community. If the community does not have access to a phone, investigate the possibility of supplying a representative with a phone and some method of crediting it.
- Put up a community notice board if one does not exist and ensure information is posted on it regularly. Encourage the community to use it for improving its own communications and transparency strategies.
- Provide written commitments, if not full contracts, to communities once a commitment has been made to provide aid.
- Explore the possibility of providing a beneficiary information pack where appropriate.
- Provide the community with advocacy and empowerment training so they understand that they have the right to ask questions, see details of project plans, be involved, and have their complaints responded to.
- Explain a project’s timeframe, including expected end date.
n effective complaints mechanism is a key part of any accountability and transparency system, particularly in the context of a major reconstruction effort. It is also an integral part of any rights-based approach to development. All communities have the basic right to register protests regarding unfair treatment, report cases of wrongdoing and to insist that their rights are fulfilled. None of the public information, transparency, and accountability efforts outlined in previous chapters will be truly effective without such mechanisms. Obviously, complaints mechanisms are very difficult to implement in the early days of a disaster and understandably, the pressure on all actors in Aceh and Sri Lanka to deliver, mitigated against developing such systems in the early phase of operation. This is no longer the case today.

A good complaints mechanism will serve several ends. First, it will help an organisation fulfil a basic requirement of transparency by creating a channel to register concerns. Second, it will provide a mechanism to identify and report corruption allegations and problems with projects (communities are often in the best place to notice when things go awry). Third, as in Sri Lanka, it will also provide an invaluable and unique source of regularly updated information on people’s concerns.

Complaints mechanisms can also be very successful in preventing conflict. Even in non-emergency situations, any project injecting funds or support into a community can create tensions over who controls the funding. These tensions must be carefully managed. The anecdotal evidence collected for this study also illustrates, as with a previous study analyzing the relationship between local conflict and development in Indonesia, that an effective complaints mechanism has an important role in conflict mitigation at a community level and in the prevention of violence.9 Put simply, communities that have recourse to an effective complaints management and mediation system are much less likely to let disputes escalate into violence.

This chapter examines two types of complaints mechanisms: those provided by aid organisations relating to their projects and those provided by external independent authorities monitoring the response. A key issue in both countries is that few organisations have standard com-
**Getting People to Complain**

In Aceh and to a lesser extent in Sri Lanka, it is difficult to encourage people to complain about the aid they are receiving. Until this problem is addressed, no complaints mechanism will be fully successful.

In Aceh, there have been reports of local government officials telling communities that they have no right to complain about assistance — either to the government or I/NGOs.

A complaints mechanism must also work at the level of local government, educating officials that communities have the right to ask questions and also empowering the officials to receive and respond to those questions. While this might seem commonplace, the incident described below illustrates that some local government officials do not recognize their responsibilities in this area.

When pressed for reasons why they have not registered concerns, communities typically provide all sorts of excuses, even when desperately worried about, as in the example above, the lack of water. When this particular community was asked why they had not taken their complaint to the Department of Public Works individuals responded that “it is too far away,” “we don’t have the time to travel,” “it’s expensive,” “we don’t know where it is,” “they are all men and they won’t listen to us because we’re women” and finally, “we’re scared.”

**Complaining about Projects: Communities and Organisations**

Even if communities overcome their fears and register complaints or ask questions, they often report that they are unsatisfied with the response. The CDA Listening Report in Aceh found many cases in which community members who had followed up were disappointed with the organisation’s response. One man told researchers that he had gone to visit an assessment team’s office but found that “no one there had any time for me or interest.” Others discovered that telephone numbers had been disconnected and offices vacated because the organisation had already left Aceh.

“We heard the government would give us money for six months, but it stopped after four, and we don’t know why. No one here is getting money now. Some people went to picket one of the government offices but nothing happened. We know about the Human Rights Commission, but we’re afraid to use it.”

**IDP family, Galle**

“Aid organisations rely overwhelmingly on community meetings as a forum for expressions of dissatisfaction or reports of corruption concerns. While a community meeting might be an
excellent environment to resolve some arguments, it is not a suitable place to ask people to make corruption allegations against others in the community or against local government. It is also not a good forum for complaints, especially from women who may be unwilling to risk conflict with their communities or might have a problem that relates to something very private.

The World Bank’s KDP programme has a fully integrated complaints mechanism, which has had some notable successes. One interesting aspect of the KDP approach is that it helps communities pursue cases through existing legal structures rather than trying to set up its own system of sanctions or punishments. It is difficult to measure how much this approach has done to empower communities to expose and prevent bribery. But it is a useful example for other I/NGOs in Aceh — which have been accused of failing to sufficiently address corruption — insofar as it has developed a functioning mechanism, pursued corruption cases to successful conclusion, and given communities opportunities to report and address problems.10

The KDP system has also played an interesting role in conflict resolution. Comparing disputes within KDP projects to disputes within government projects or of other donors in Flores and East Java, a study found that those within KDP projects were less likely to escalate into violence. According to the study, “Where no complaints unit existed, where there was a complaints handling unit but no action on complaints, or where there was no feedback mechanism for the outcomes of complaints handling, then conflicts involving development programmes were more likely to escalate.”11

### Complaints Mechanisms: Response Wide

In principle, as in all major reconstruction efforts, there is a great need for a mechanism for complaints that fall outside those relating to a particular project or agency. This might include, for example, problems with government assistance, corruption cases that may require legal intervention, or disputes with aid

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**Case Study: The KDP Complaints System**

An effective complaints system is an integral part of all KDP projects as well as a useful tool for conflict prevention. KDP has a complaints unit, with points of contact at the regional level. Complaints can be submitted in person or anonymously by post, and communities are educated in using the system. The unit’s primary role is to handle cases that cannot be resolved at a local level; facilitators investigate cases and take action where necessary. In a few extreme cases when the community uncovered theft of funds or other misuse of money, KDP has supported the community in reporting cases to the police and pursuing them through the legal system, including facilitating legal support and putting pressure on district and national authorities to investigate. In some instances, this has led to prosecutions and prison sentences.

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organisations that have exhausted existing internal structures. Project or agency specific complaints mechanisms may not address the need, for example, for third party mediators or for government accountability for its aid.

In Sri Lanka, the government established a Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit within the Human Rights Commission (HRC), which addressed some of the concerns noted above.

As a government body, the HRC has considerable institutional advantages, making it much easier to create an effective system such as that instituted by the DRMU. Well before the tsunami, the HRC was an existing institution with a strong track record, high levels of respect from all sides (including beneficiaries), and a functioning system of district-based offices.

Nevertheless, the DRMU has faced criticism stemming largely from the fact that as a government institution, its effectiveness in investigating complaints about local government bodies is limited. Moreover, it has received far fewer complaints from beneficiaries in Tamil and conflict areas where its status as a government body could be a source of mistrust and fear.

In Aceh, the picture is more complex. There is no equivalent government body and the key question is which institution should assume responsibility for this work. BRR has established an anti-corruption mechanism, which is an excellent initiative, but awareness among beneficiaries is low. Moreover, as discussed above, Acehnese communities tend to be reluctant to complain, especially to a government institution.

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**Case Study: Sri Lanka’s Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit**

Shortly after the tsunami, the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission — already a long established and well-recognized institution — set up a Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit to handle complaints and investigate concerns about tsunami response. DRMU’s main focus is the complaints process, through which beneficiaries can ask questions about eligibility for assistance, report potential cases of corruption among local officials, or complain if they have been left off a beneficiary list or feel their housing situation has been wrongly assessed.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the DRMU implemented an extremely effective ongoing outreach campaign to explain its work. So far, the unit has received around 17,000 complaints. After a complaint is received, DRMU sends an acknowledgement of receipt. The complaint is then investigated, usually through local government structures, although a team will investigate independently if necessary. According to its figures, between 55 and 60 percent of cases have been successfully resolved.

A number of complaints, however, were about NGOs and, in particular, INGOs. In accountability terms, this is one of the most interesting aspects of the unit’s work. When a complaint is received about an INGO, the DRMU informs the complainant that the matter is being taken up. It then asks the organisation if it is aware of a problem or if it has investigated it.

DRMU also provides updates in a weekly meeting open to all I/NGOs, which can also bring up issues of concern. “When people complain about a certain INGO, we told them and quite often ended up mediating between the INGO and the community.” The preferred solution, of course, is for the INGO to resolve the problem itself. But, if not, the DRMU does not hesitate to make the charges public in the media. “We had a complaint that an INGO in Trincomalee was delaying implementation of housing projects. I spoke to the head of the organisation, who said that there was a problem and that they were dealing with it. But we continued to receive complaints so we wrote them an official letter and published it in the papers. The INGO said its local representative was inefficient. But their excuses were so lame. Other INGOS are doing a good job, so why can’t they? We know these things are hard, but we cannot accept excuses.”

In its media work, the DRMU is careful to be positive as well as negative, releasing statements praising organisations that quickly respond to problems. “We are happy to use the media. If people do well, we give them credit, and we praise them.”

Overall, respect for the DRMU’s work is almost universal, and I/NGOs have offered considerable support for its work. Oxfam, for example, funded local Human Rights Commission offices, providing them with additional staff. The DRMU has also found that NGOs are using it to register complaints — both officially and unofficially — about the government. In most case, it investigates unofficially and mediates. “We resolve a lot of things on a personal level.”
In the absence of a body such as the HRC, the BRR seems the obvious — if imperfect — choice. As a government body, it experiences some of the same low levels of trust as most formal institutions in Aceh. But it also oversees implementation of aid projects by all NGOs and can eject organisations from the province that are judged to be underperforming. However, its newer role as an implementer, especially in key areas such as housing, potentially compromises its ability to handle complaints and conduct investigations. A potential situation where it fails to declare its own projects “unsatisfactory” would erode the respect it enjoys from NGOs and its effectiveness as a mediation body.

As an alternative, international or local third-party anti-corruption organisations could play this role. But some of these organisations have reported a lack of response to inquiries unless they are backed by a body such as the UN. As the case study illustrates below, such third parties can play an important role in investigating corruption.

In an environment where there is no government complaints mechanism, anything managed by INGOs, who are often present for limited periods, might not be sustainable, so local

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**Case Study: SUAK in Meulaboh**

SUAK is a small anti-corruption organisation in Meulaboh, which encourages local communities to report corruption allegations and also investigates and attempts to resolve them. More than 100 allegations have been reported to SUAK since March 2005, of which they estimate around 70 percent are legitimate, with the remainder being personal grudges. It works closely with other local organisations, including Indonesian Corruption Watch, and is also in touch with the BRR’s anti-corruption unit.

Very few cases are ever dealt with through official channels. Rather, SUAK mediates between the community and INGOs and claims to resolve about 85 percent of the cases this way. It also frequently passes cases to the UN Office of the Recovery Coordinator (UNORC), with which it has a strong working relationship. Its relationship with other organisations, however, is problematic. “We have 10 cases relating to INGOs on our books at the moment,” says a representative. “But when we try to talk to them, only a few respond. They say we have no legal right to investigate. They act like they are allergic to us.” In response, rather than investigating the case themselves, SUAK usually passes the cases to UNORC. “If UNORC investigates, they will listen.”

SUAK is heavily critical of INGOs for lack of transparency. “They are not transparent at all,” says one representative. “They should make statements to the community about how much money they have per project, what their future plans are and their budget.”

It has also raised the profile of corruption as an issue and generated public discussion around it. The organisation has a weekly column in *Ceureumen* that publishes details of cases of proven corruption and advises people to contact SUAK with corruption allegations. It held a talk show on local radio last October, asking people to call in with questions about corruption and explaining how to register concerns. SUAK reports that the show was popular, with many people calling in to express their support.
NGOs such as SUAK have a very important role to play. Anti-corruption work is sensitive and the legal situation of organisations like SUAK is complex, but there is undoubtedly potential in its approach of working as an ad hoc mediator between communities and organisations. With the right technical support and funding, organisations such as SUAK could play a key role in running public information campaigns about corruption, people’s rights to accountability and transparency, and explaining how to report allegations. Certainly they could play an important supplementary role to the systems being put in place by BRR.

### General Recommendations on Improving Complaints Mechanisms

- More face-to-face meetings between communities and senior and/or international staff members are clearly needed, especially when the community liaison is a single person, as complaints may be against that person; moreover, liaisons may not always be passing on community concerns.
- Aceh needs a comprehensive and high-profile complaints system, which might be achieved through an expansion of BRR’s anti-corruption operation.
- Complaints boxes provide an opportunity for anonymous communication but must be regularly checked and acted on to be truly effective. They should also not be specific to a particular organisation.
- Any large-scale complaints mechanism needs an excellent outreach strategy to raise awareness and break down psychological barriers regarding complaining.
- Capacity building and training for local anti-corruption NGOs and other CBOs could help create a sustainable complaints and anti-corruption system that would endure beyond tsunami response.
- A policy of publishing, in the media, the names of individuals and organisations proven to have stolen or abused tsunami aid should be considered.

### Naming and Shaming

Finally, one other possible solution is DRMU’s practice of publicly naming those found guilty of corruption or fraud. This can be an effective deterrent, especially for contractors and other commercial organisations, and it might also be effective for government officials. Such a practice also helps demonstrate that a complaints system is effective and transparent. Applying this principle at a community level can also address problems of low-level corruption among village heads and camp coordinators who may seem too insignificant to investigate but pose real problems for communities that are not receiving their aid. Needless to say, safeguards are also necessary to avoid false or poorly substantiated accusations that might damage an organisation’s reputation unfairly.
For any recovery endeavour, educating people about their rights and entitlements is a key challenge. Designing outreach for policies such as a building code represents a fundamentally different challenge to that of handling communications with communities. It requires a multi-media approach, considerable funding, technical expertise, political commitment, and close coordination. In addition, the information often relates to a government policy, requiring authorities to have a high-level of commitment to outreach and specialist skills that, so far, have been lacking.  

Organising comprehensive outreach campaigns is a highly technical business akin to producing a major advertising campaign for a new product. This is made even more difficult by the operating environments in Aceh and Sri Lanka, which include loss of media infrastructure due to the tsunami, remote communities, multiple language needs, and, perhaps most problematic, lack of clarity on policies. Nonetheless, the mass media environments of both places present myriad opportunities for reaching communities, and the relevant commercial expertise (such as advertising companies) also exists in both.

Any campaign needs to ensure that groups typically marginalized from mass media, such as women, the illiterate, or those lacking education, are also included. A failure to have a mass media campaign can have serious consequences. In Aceh, for example, there is a lack of understanding about basic rights because comprehensive information campaigns on some important topics have been lacking. As a result, some communities do not know that all housing construction should be free and have fallen

“A clear lesson of the first year has been the need to communicate. Every affected family in every location of a transitional shelter and every family staying with friends and relatives should know what is their future, in terms of housing, employment opportunities, ongoing relief support, education for their children and healthcare, including further counselling where needed.”

Post Tsunami Recovery and Reconstruction: Progress, Challenges, Way Forward, GOSL and development partners, December 2005

prey to individuals or groups posing as INGOs that promise to build houses in return for small down payments. BRR produced a poster in response to this particular concern, but there has been no comprehensive campaign.

There is great potential for better mass information campaigns in both Aceh and Sri Lanka. What is needed is greater commitment to people’s right to know, greater technical capacity within aid organisations and government, and increased funding and interest from donors. With these elements in place, the potential to run highly effective mass communications operations will exist.

**What Makes a Good Mass Information Campaign?**

Mass information campaigns pose a key challenge: how to take a set of principles and policies, which are often abstract and highly technical, and convey them so people understand them and their policy impact. A good mass information campaign promotes key messages via a number of different media — newspapers, television and leaflets. In addition, the audience is not homogenous, and different materials and approaches may be needed for beneficiaries, local government officials and aid organisations.

Just getting the message out is rarely enough however. People need to be able to ask questions, know where to apply for assistance, know who can help them with the process, as well as where to go with complaints. A good mass information campaign will use journalists and interactive media such as radio, and establish mechanisms such as help lines. Through radio and television, people can actually hear the voice of the government explaining the policy or answering questions, which has immeasurable transparency benefits. And having clear information on who qualifies for assistance can prevent potential community conflict.

**Coordination and commitment**

Mass media campaigns have faced several very difficult practical problems, particularly regarding explaining key policies such as building codes. The first problem has been lack of centralized government capacity. Both BRR and RADA have rarely taken the first critical step of determining the key messages. The process of transforming highly technical documents such as building codes into simple summaries is a difficult task. When this does not happen, organisations begin formulating their own materials, with their own interpretations of the policy, which can result in confusion. The process of condensing the policy to a clear message can also induce the various stakeholders to come up with a standard interpretation of the policy, clarifying it within and across the government and aid organisations.

Organisations have rarely considered how to publicise documents like the building codes until they are finalised. However, it is necessary to begin planning outreach campaigns months before the actual policy is complete, devising the strategy, identifying information channels and institutions to be used, and slotting the actual messages in once they are available.

The obvious answer here, and the one employed by TAFREN last year (see case study), is to outsource the entire project to a professional advertising company or a media I/NGO. Professional marketing or advertising companies can manage the process of developing the message and producing the materials. They can also provide training to aid organisations on developing key messages and how to explain the policy and also help distribute materials.

**The role of international organisations**

The approach outlined above is taken from basic principles of marketing and advertising utilized in the private sector. Such thinking is, however, rarely applied to development work. It
is also rare to find local government officials with an understanding of how to package a message for a mass audience. In the tsunami context, governments lacked the funding, the in-house capability, and the experience to communicate these policies.

International organisations can play an important role in providing assistance. However, until recently, few international organisations recognized this need or understood how they could help.

**Know Your Audience**

The first step is to understand the media market. Attempting to design a campaign without a basic understanding of media consumption at best means the end result will be hit-and-miss, and at worst can doom it to failure. In the case of most tsunami response messages, the primary audience is beneficiaries, although there are often important secondary audiences — including local government officials or contractors — that should not be neglected. Reaching different audiences requires different approaches.

In Sri Lanka, the level of knowledge about media consumption patterns is far higher than in Aceh. But patterns of media use shift dramatically in disaster affected areas. Television networks — sets, transmitters, electricity supplies — are destroyed. Newspapers cannot be delivered if the roads are badly damaged or their printing facilities ruined. This kind of damage can take months or years to repair. Even when the damage to media infrastructure is limited, as in Sri Lanka, the ways in which those displaced by the tsunami accessed information clearly changed, requiring a quick assessment. In Aceh, a public information working group undertook research into information flow in tsunami affected areas. In Sri Lanka, an excellent and often important secondary audiences — including local government officials or contractors — that should not be neglected. Reaching different audiences requires different approaches.

**Case Study: Disaster Preparedness and Lack of Coordination**

In Aceh, several different organisations have disseminated materials explaining what to do in an earthquake. One set told people to run out of the house, another to hide under furniture, and a third to stand in a doorway. Each was produced independently of the other, unaware that other organisations were even working in this area. Some of the materials were good, but these organisations missed an opportunity to reinforce each other’s work and ensure against overlap. Moreover, they confused traumatized beneficiaries even further.

**Case Study: “Where’s My House?”**

In June 2005, the Public Information Working group in Aceh realized that it was facing two major problems in developing public information and outreach campaigns. One was the fact that almost nothing was known about how information flowed to and within communities. The second was that most organisations had not placed communities’ lack of information high on their agendas.

The group, which consisted of PI officers from UN agencies, INGOs, and some local NGOs, conducted its own ad hoc survey. With the emphasis on painting a broad picture rather than methodologically precise data collection, the group designed a survey, which each group member agreed to conduct in communities where their organisations were working. The data was compiled, analyzed, and presented in a short report entitled “Where’s My House,” released in August 2005.

The survey covered 82 communities. It identified key concerns, such as problems communicating with women and the community desire for practical information as well as recommended some possible solutions. The paper also became an important advocacy tool for PI officers within their particular organisations and was instrumental in securing funding for outreach activities.

The study is being followed by a larger, more detailed and more methodologically rigorous research by the World Bank and UNDP, which is sampling 400 communities across Aceh, examining how patterns differ between tsunami affected and conflict affected areas, those affected by both, and unaffected populations.

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comprehensive assessment of media-use, commissioned by the UN, was already underway before the tsunami, but unfortunately could not be adapted to include and isolate information from affected areas.

**Coordination and Consistency of Message**

Coordinating a mass media public information campaign when different organisations are producing different materials is a difficult task. The problems of coordination with the tsunami response effort have been well-documented elsewhere, and suggest substantial obstacles to ensuring that consistent messaging on complex technical issues reaches key audiences.

The TimSos example demonstrates that a group of organisations can develop and implement a successful multi-media outreach campaign even in very sensitive circumstances. Those involved point to the exceptional circumstances of the post-tsunami period as the reason it worked. “It was key that, for everyone, outreach was high on the agenda,” says one group member. “Also, the majority of people in the group were outreach experts who had already been working in Aceh so understood the challenge. …We…all knew each other and were able to leave agency politics at the door and work together instead of competing. Our organisations devolved responsibility and let us get on with it, which also helped.”

In addition to these factors, the fact that the brief was clear and simple — explain the peace agreement — and the document to be promoted was very short with obvious key messages helped, as did the fact that the GAM and government representatives were proactive, engaged, and constructive.

**The Role of the Government**

In Aceh, the aspects of tsunami response most in need of major mass information campaigns are key government policies such as the housing code. The picture in Sri Lanka is more positive, where an overall commitment to communications from the government was demonstrated, for example, by the newspaper advertisements, posters, and other forms of outreach used to publicize the cash grants scheme. In Aceh, BRR publishes the successful Seumangat newsletter and has organized some successful initiatives such as weekly television shows and radio programmes, but nothing integrated, comprehensive, or regular.

In both Sri Lanka and Aceh — but particularly Aceh — outreach on policies has, to a large extent, been left to aid organisations. Although they have produced some excellent materials, their involvement is problematic for two reasons. First, it is not their responsibility to publicise policy on the government’s behalf. This is a problem in principle and for practical reasons (organisations can become identified with the policy). Second, although aid organisations can work together to produce materials for a coordinated campaign (such as the TimSos example above), the government must still take the lead and ensure that materials are officially sanctioned and do not contain ambiguities or inaccurate interpretations of policy.

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**Case Study: Tim Socialisasi Aceh Damai**

Immediately after Aceh’s peace deal, the government requested that a small group of international organisations design a comprehensive outreach campaign to explain the agreement and the next steps. Because of the sensitivities involved at that time, all materials had to be approved by representatives from GAM and the government, and a neutral logo was developed to symbolize that the leaflet and booklet had been formally sanctioned by both sides.

This approval process also worked as an insurance policy for the organisations involved as they could clearly demonstrate that all content and design had been approved by both sides. Working as TimSos, the group quickly developed and implemented a comprehensive, multi-media campaign, including publishing 200,000 copies of the peace agreement, producing posters, stickers, t-shirts, and Q&A leaflets, and creating storytelling tours around the peace messages. Civil society networks were also utilised to channel information to difficult-to-reach groups such as women.
Key Channels: Local Media

When designing an outreach campaign, existing channels of communication must be considered before creating new ones. This usually means looking first at the local media. An additional benefit of working through local media is that they often enjoy higher trust than the government, especially in conflict-affected areas.

There are two main ways of working with local media: by buying time and space on their networks, either for advertisements, sponsored talk shows, and so on, or by working directly with local journalists. In the case of the latter, there is considerable overlap with the public relations work carried out by most organisations, which, although not necessarily contradictory, should be understood as distinct. In both cases, a good working relationship with local media is essential.

Local media can play some obvious roles. Press launches are good, although care must be taken to make them interesting. “Media here feel they have a public service remit, but they also need a story,” says one senior local journalist in Sri Lanka. “A series of people making speeches and a press release is not a story. We need human interest stories, colour, a good photograph. This will ensure the launch gets coverage. The voices need to be people in the villages, not foreign talking heads from INGOs.” Transmitting information through a news story lends it the paper’s credibility, whereas an advertisement, especially with a government logo on it, may be less trusted. A combination of both, however, is most effective.

In the aftermath of a disaster, all key players should also be available to local media. During the Nias earthquake response of March 2005, for example, the head of the UN mission gave daily interviews to the Internews radio network, updating on the findings of the assessment teams, death tolls, and the relief effort. This kept organisations and their message of neutral, humanitarian support in the public eye and also promoted transparency and accountability. The tendency for international organisations to focus on international rather than local media, however, mitigates against this. Local media must not be marginalized and there must be a better understanding of their key role in the local context.

Sri Lanka’s mass media environment

The media environment in Sri Lanka is highly developed, with a wide range of commercial newspapers, television, and radio stations all producing a high volume of daily content. All outlets produce material in one of three languages — Tamil, Sinhalese, or English — and some produce mixed language programming. The most up-to-date information on media audiences in Sri Lanka is the UN-commissioned “Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Survey 2005,” which is the source for all figures cited here. Unfortunately, the survey does not contain any specific data on how patterns of media consumption have changed post-tsunami.

The reach of publications and stations follows the country’s ethnic divide — i.e. Tamil products dominate in the north and east and Sinhalese in the south. English newspapers are mostly read in the central and western provinces and have an overwhelmingly high-income audience.
In terms of print, the most popular papers, and consequently those most often used by aid organisations, are *Lankadeep* (Sinhala), the country’s best selling paper that also has the broadest readership in socio-economic terms) and *Divaina* (Sinhala), *Thinakkural* (Tamil), *Veerakesari* (Tamil), and the *Daily News* (English). Information should be published in several papers to ensure the information is available in all languages. This is well-recognized by all who use them as channels for information. But it is not as simple as picking any Tamil or any Sinhalese newspaper as there are notable differences between publications. Of the Tamil papers, for example, *Veerakesari* is far more popular in the tsunami affected east (read by 68 percent of respondents as opposed to 21 percent for *Thinakkural*) because it picks up a Muslim and ethnic Tamil readership. Overall, Tamil readers seem more inclined to read a Sinhalese paper rather than the other way around.

Newspaper audiences are primarily not those in the lowest socio-economic bracket and thus their potential as an information-distributing tool for tsunami victims is limited. Interestingly, the highest percentage of respondents who said they did not read daily papers (22 percent) was in the tsunami-affected south — the figure in the east was just 3 percent.

In Sri Lanka, as with newspapers, the broadcast media are mostly national stations, and there are no local television stations. The most popular station is state broadcaster *Rupavahini*, which also has the most consistent island-wide coverage. The second and third most popular channels are two privately owned stations, which are more popular among younger age groups.

The pattern with radio is similar. Most stations are national, and, as with television and newspapers, there are few local media networks. The most popular station is the commercial *Sirasa FM* (Sinhala), with an audience base that reaches across all socio-economic classes. The state-run *SLBC* (Sinhala) and the much less popular *Lakbanda* have large audiences and a wide geographical reach, although they are weighted toward older age groups. Once again the linguistic/geographical divide is clear, albeit less sharp than with newspapers.*Sirasa FM* was cited as a preferred station by just 2 percent of respondents in the Tamil-dominated north and 15 percent in the east, whereas *Shakthi* and *Suriyan*, two private Tamil networks, were picked by 71 percent and 63 percent, respectively. In the south, however, these stations were both mentioned by just 2 percent of respondents. English stations pick up a small audience, mostly in the younger age groups and not in tsunami affected areas.

**Aceh’s mass media environment**

In Aceh, local networks predominate. Unlike Sri Lanka, the popularity of commercial broadcast companies completely outstrips that of state organisations. Only in television, with its lack of real local capacity, does nationally produced media dominate. In print and radio, local media are far more popular than anything produced in Jakarta.

In terms of print, there is just one local newspaper in the province — *Serambi* — which has been published for many years and was a key information source during the conflict. The tsunami killed many of its staff, washed away its office — including its printing press — and the paper lost its key distribution network with the destruction of the west coast road. As a result, printing operations were shifted to Lhokseumawe, several hours away from Aceh. These developments have caused severe problems for distribution in some of the worst affected areas of Aceh. *Serambi* currently publishes around 30,000 copies daily.

Aceh is, however, very well served in terms of radio. There are about 30 local radio stations, covering most of the province. But their capacity is often very low, and many are run and subsidized by individuals; these stations are known as “hobby radios” with largely unpaid staff and a strong emphasis on music. Some key exceptions include important stations in tsunami areas, including *Radio Dalka* in Meulaboh and *Nikoya* and *Prima* in Banda Aceh. Local stations are considerably more popular than the state broadcaster RRI and even key national commercial networks such as 68H.

Clearly, the most popular medium pre-tsunami was television. In an August 2005 study, 74 percent of respondents named it as their favourite form of media. But the complex infrastructure (electricity supply, television sets, and satellite receivers) was destroyed by the tsunami. The most popular stations are national broadcasters such as Metro and SCTV. The only local station is the Aceh branch of the national state broadcaster TVRI, and it was badly hit by the tsunami and only broadcasts for a couple of hours in the afternoon.

14 This is probably because Tamil-language radio stations can at least be accessed in Sinhalese areas and vice versa, whereas newspapers are much more localized. Publications like Udayan only register an audience in the north because that is where they are distributed. Figures for radio use are therefore based on preference rather than access.

Television is, however, making a comeback in Aceh. Although ownership is low, viewing tends to be communal. A television is often the first item purchased by IDPs when they have any spare cash. (IDP tents with antennae have been a common sight in some areas.) Some communities have bought communal televisions and placed them in the menasa or community meeting area. In other communities, televisions have been purchased by coffee shop or small restaurant owners to draw in customers.

Using Mass Media: Newspapers

Many aid organisations seem to regard an announcement in the local press as tantamount to a mass outreach campaign. A full outreach campaign, of course, consists of a great deal more than this, but this is not to say that local papers are not a key channel for information flow. Literacy rates in both Aceh and Sri Lanka are very high. Newspapers are widely read although they generally find the majority of their audience in higher socio-economic brackets, with almost all publications picking up an audience of less than 20 percent in the lower income bracket. Thus their target audience is the affluent, urban, educated elite and thus content, price, and distribution network are all geared to this audience, not the tsunami victims who are disproportionately poor and rural. This does mean, however, that newspapers are an extremely effective way to reach opinion-makers such as civil servants and politicians, a key target audience in themselves.

An exception to this is the tradition, in Aceh, of sharing newspapers in places like coffee shops, which allows those who cannot afford papers to read them daily. The biggest problem here, though, is that Acehnese cafes are almost exclusively male. In response, this has been partly countered by projects such as those run by UNFPA in Aceh and IOM in Sri Lanka that distribute newspapers directly to women. Another way in which newspapers reach bigger audiences is through local radio stations — reading them on air, which is common in Aceh. Of course, one of the key points to note here is that any paid space that is not editorial, such as an NGO advert, is not read on air.

Using Mass Media: Television

Television is clearly a powerful medium but also the hardest to use, particularly in Aceh. Because television stations in both areas are almost all controlled at the national level, commissioning programming specific to tsunami victims is not really possible. And yet visual

Case Study: Televisions as Livelihood Activities

“I lost my house and shop in the tsunami. I saved enough money from a Cash for Work project to reopen my shop, which is on the west coast road to Banda Aceh. During the day, my customers come from passing traffic, but, during the evening, people from other villages come for coffee. There are several other coffee shops and warungs (small restaurants) here, though, so to make sure people came to mine I borrowed some money from my sister and bought a TV and a satellite dish for five million Indonesian rupees ($500). The other shops have TVs, but I am the only one with satellite channels. In the evening I put on the news and maybe a movie. People want information, but they also want to be entertained. Sometimes we do karaoke. Before the TV, I was taking about 450,000-500,000 rupiah a day ($45-$50); now it is 600,000, and everyone comes to my warung in the evening. So it’s definitely been worth it.”

Small restaurant owner, Aceh Besar

“We are a local community radio and don’t have our own news service, so instead we simply read Serambi on air. We have a two hour programme called InfoMedia each morning dedicated to this. We don’t read out the whole paper — that would take too long — so we only include the essential selections, like the headlines, the main stories, the section they run dedicated to Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh — and of course the sports section, local and international. Sometimes we read letters if they are interesting but never editorials or advertisements. It’s easy and cheap, and is one of our most popular shows.”

Community Radio Manager, Aceh Besar, Aceh
media has a great impact, and it should not be discounted. (After the peace deal in Aceh, the images of decommissioning and destruction of GAM weapons on national television probably did a great deal to convince people the peace process was under way.) Television is particularly popular with children. The importance of television is growing as communities are investing more and more in television sets.

In terms of what people watch, the picture is varied. Broadly speaking, in Aceh news is the most popular type of viewing, but movies, music, and drama series also score highly, again illustrating that sources of entertainment are highly valued in IDP communities. In Sri Lanka, there are similar patterns of use. Few people own televisions and often watch communally. As in Aceh, a television set seems to be one of the first items purchased when families have disposable income. Greater efforts have been made to use television as an outreach medium in Sri Lanka than in Aceh.

Radio has considerable advantages as an outreach medium. It is cheap, much simpler technologically than television, and interactive. Anyone from doctors to anti-corruption campaigners to government officials can be put on air for Q&A sessions, also making it an invaluable transparency and accountability tool.

In Aceh, tsunami survivors have turned to radio — previously the least popular medium — in the absence of other sources of media, as much for entertainment as for information. When asked why he wanted radios, one community leader who came to the UNDP office to ask whether his community could be part of a radio distribution project simply said, “We need distractions to forget what happened to us.” The psychosocial function of access to media, and the importance of making any audio materials entertaining, should always be remembered in the design of outreach campaigns. Any good radio outreach campaign, including phone-ins, should be carefully designed to be a good listen as well as informative.

The above case study is a classic example of how local media can dramatically increase the
Radio and the Multiplier Effect: IOM in Meulaboh

Meulaboh on Aceh’s west coast was one of the areas worst hit by the tsunami. Over 20,000 people were killed, and half of the city either destroyed or badly affected, including the main local radio stations Faz and Dalka FM. In 2006, IOM began a project to refurbish and improve poskos (local medical centres). IOM faced the challenge of explaining the new, free medical services to educate people about the clinics, IOM started a weekly hour-long phone-in medical talk show on the local station, Faz, each devoted to a particular medical issue (such as bird flu or pregnancy) and featuring staff from the clinics to take questions. At first, staff were nervous about going on air so project staff provided the DJ with a written brief for the show to ensure that questions stayed on topic and also sat in the studio during the broadcast to reassure the doctor or nurse answering the questions. The hour-long show also included music to break up the monotony of spoken voice radio.

The clinics’ doctors report that the show has had a direct impact on the number of clients arriving. In March, when the clinics first opened, they recorded 450 patients. In April, the number went up to 575 and, in May, it reached 850. Doctors also say that clients cite the radio show as the reason they decided to come. “We had an 11 year old boy who was delirious with an extremely high temperature. He had cow dung on his face because his mother had already taken him to a traditional healer who had applied it as a remedy, obviously with no success. She only brought him to the clinic, she said, because her neighbour had heard the previous week’s show about dengue fever, and thought that might be what was making him sick. In fact, the final diagnosis was acute typhoid fever, but we were able to get him to hospital and he survived.” The clinic’s dental section reports that its attendance rates have doubled since the project began airing PSAs about dental care.

Tips for Using Radio as a Mass Outreach Tool

- Radio is cheap (in Aceh an hour of airtime costs just $100) and requires no special training.
- Radio is the easiest medium for interactive programming, and weekly Q&A shows are easy and popular.
- Being a regular guest on radio can hugely enhance the profile of individuals and thus the project they are affiliated with. Having regular radio clinics on issues like corruption or housing would greatly improve understanding of these issues.
- Radio is a very intimate medium. People often listen on their own while doing other things and feel that the presenter is talking to them. There is, thus, considerable potential for using radio as a trust-building medium between the public and local government.

Leaflets, Fliers, and Booklets

Given the high literacy rates in both countries, these can be an extremely effective means to provide details of rights, services, and policies to large groups of beneficiaries. Use of this model is much more widespread in Sri Lanka than Aceh. Concepts range from the very simple flier distributed by UNICEF in Trincomalee to the much more detailed booklets designed by CHA.

There is a common assumption among international organisations that printed materials must be professionally designed and printed at considerable cost, time, and efforts. But UNICEF’s flier was extremely cheap and simple: designed quickly in-house using commonly available software and printed on local paper. Some information, such as that concerning government policy, needs to appear authoritative and official and thus requires professional production techniques, but provision of basic information can be simply and effectively conveyed with little expertise.
Case Study: UNICEF Flyers

In Trincomalee, UNICEF developed a basic two-sided flier for conflict affected populations. The flier, which was very simple and produced in-house, was intended to explain that UNICEF was working with child soldiers and that anyone who wanted assistance for a child could come to them. It included basic information on UNICEF, with an address and map of their office location. According to UNICEF, the leaflet substantially raised awareness about its work in general and encouraged many beneficiaries — unconnected with child soldiers — came to the office for assistance. Communities in which UNICEF was working also felt reassured by the leaflet, which served as written confirmation that they could come to the office whenever they wanted.

Rumoh Impian Loen

This 100-page color booklet, produced by the Architecture Clinic (a collection of INGOs working in housing), the cement company HolCim, and UN Habitat, uses a cartoon story of a family in Aceh to explain housing policy and construction. The project is modelled on a similar booklet distributed in Mexico, also by HolCim. The story begins with the family before the tsunami and follows it through the process of trying to build a permanent house. En route, it covers everything from how a tsunami happens, how to test if a brick is good quality, what good foundations look like, and how the Architecture Clinic can help design and build a house.

It includes all building code key principles, and information is presented so it is relevant to those building a house or having one built for them. “The critical thing is to increase the knowledge of beneficiaries about good construction and decrease monopoly of INGOs,” says the head of the shelter working group in Aceh. “You don’t get perfect knowledge transfer, but communities can become repositories of knowledge.”

By putting technical information into a visual story, the booklet conveys significant amounts of detailed and specialized information in an entertaining and extremely accessible format. A total of 30,000 have been printed for distribution to communities and contractors.

The reaction from IDPs is very positive. As part of the research for this paper, copies of Rumoh Impian Loen were given to a focus group of tsunami victims. All comments were positive, and some had seen it already. Others wondered why it had not yet arrived to their communities and wanted to know where they could get it and whether it was free. The fact it was a comic led several to conclude that it was actually for children — “this is useful because it will help our children understand how to help their parents build a house” — but others saw that it was interesting for adults too. One respondent also thought it had a considerable self-help, motivating effect, explaining “This comic could raise spirit among tsunami victims living in temporary shelters and motivate them to learn more on how to build their dream house.”

Importance of distribution

Effective distribution of printed matter is an ongoing problem in both Aceh and Sri Lanka (see examples of Ceureumen and Seumangat in the next section). The CHA brochures in Sri Lanka were an excellent initiative that ran into this classic problem.

Both the importance and difficulties involved in distribution, especially over such a wide area as that affected by the tsunami, should not be underestimated. The distribution of Rumoh Impian Loen, for example, costs more than its production. Establishing independent distribution mechanisms for such materials requires money, considerable expertise, and resources. It is far more effective to work within existing distribution mechanisms, both within the aid effort and those that existed before, such as local government networks. Piggy-backing on local media by inserting materials into local newspapers is one option, although this means inheriting any existing problems with the newspaper’s own distribution system.

Another possibility is to use civil society networks and local government offices or include the leaflet in existing aid distribution mechanisms. One housing leaflet in Aceh, for example, was
distributed with WFP’s food aid. Such channels are useful because they have excellent networks that reach broad groups of beneficiaries.

**Use of Performance and Other Traditional Art Forms**

Tapping into local performers and traditional art forms, such as comedy or storytelling, can be an extremely effective method of packaging messages in a more memorable way than newspaper advertisements and PSAs. In Aceh, music concerts that celebrated the peace process drew thousands. The music was interspersed with speeches from people on both sides of the conflict, and the events were also an opportunity to distribute relevant material, such as copies of the peace agreement and leaflets on the role of the European peace monitoring mission.

While a concert might not be a good venue to explain housing policy, a stand-up comedy routine — also very popular in Aceh — could be very effective and also provide entertainment. Life for many IDPs is extremely dull, and performances are major events attended by the entire community and widely remembered.

**The Internet**

Using the internet for outreach and transparency/accountability mechanisms is becoming an increasingly important part of all aid efforts, not least in tsunami response. Given the speed with which internet infrastructure is growing, this medium will only become even more important.

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**Case Study: CHA Beneficiary Rights Booklets**

Last year, CHA produced booklets with the government to explain rights and entitlements regarding government aid. The booklet went point by point through the buffer zone policy (as then applied), housing compensation entitlements, and other key policies. It included details of how to make claims, what proof was needed (of land ownership etc), and gave contact details for offices and officials in all the districts. It was printed in three languages. While the booklet contained a substantial amount of very useful information, it was not effectively distributed. Every beneficiary shown the booklet commented on how interesting and useful it was but claimed to have never seen it. “This is great. I wish I’d had a copy last year,” was a standard response.

**Branding of Outreach Materials**

Whether outreach materials, especially if they are explaining government policy, should carry the logos of aid organisations or the flags of donor governments is a very difficult question. Obviously, those who have worked on a product want some kind of public recognition. In the case of outreach materials, however, branding can be misleading, counterproductive, and actually damaging. One leaflet on housing benefits and land entitlements produced by BRR, UNDP, and the World Bank carried the logos of all three organisations. Beneficiaries assumed that these organisations were also responsible for the policy described and thus any related problems. UNDP officers found themselves dealing with angry beneficiaries, arriving at their offices and demanding information.

**Tips for Using Leaflets, Fliers, and Booklets**

- It is not always necessary to employ a professional designer or printer when producing printed materials. Sometimes something low-tech and in-house is just as effective, not to mention cheaper and easier.
- Any information included in a leaflet, booklet, or flier should not go out of date or should be clearly date-marked. People tend to keep materials for a long time and will get confused if the information is no longer relevant. Updates on policy changes, for example, should be addressed with particular precision.
- Distribution mechanisms for printed materials need to be carefully thought out.
- If using a professional designer, someone with local knowledge can best create a product that speaks to local sensibilities.
- Materials should always be put through a focus group process before production.
over time. While websites are an extremely effective way of making vast quantities of information instantly accessible to a global audience, due to the sophisticated infrastructure requirements, including a computer and internet access, they are of limited use as a means to channel information to beneficiaries. Nonetheless, websites can be used, especially in Sri Lanka where the infrastructure is greater, to provide information to people such as local government officials and journalists. Until this infrastructure develops further, websites and email are not really useful for channelling information to beneficiaries.

Mobile Phones and Text Messaging

Mobile phones, on the other hand, have considerable potential as an outreach tool. People can use them to call help lines and ask questions, report complaints or corruption allegations, possibly even getting (as in the case of the TAFREN helpline presented below) instant answers. Text messaging is also a cheap, easy, and popular system that offers the unique opportunity to deliver information into the hands of a number of beneficiaries instantaneously.

The Indonesian government has begun using text messaging in nationwide public information campaigns, sending anti-drug messages to all Indonesian mobile phone numbers, for example. Local radio stations invite texts on everything from questions during medical phone-ins to song requests, all of which are getting substantial audience response.

With text messaging, a simple, short message can be sent to a list of phone numbers simultaneously. And while it is easy to compile a list of phone numbers of key people in beneficiary communities, collating and managing wider lists of numbers and making them available to aid organisations could be undertaken by a body such as the OCHA’s Humanitarian Information Centres.

This is a powerful medium that can be harnessed for otherwise very difficult tasks, such as providing information quickly that is available only at the last minute, such as times for aid deliveries or changes in a medical clinic’s arrival time in a certain area. The list of recipients can easily be tailored to include only those in a certain geographical area, enabling messages to be very precisely targeted. The launch of a new microfinance service, for example, could be announced to those in the catchment area, whereas something more general like a job centre open day, could be sent to everyone. Information can also be anonymously submitted via text messages, which may be helpful in certain circumstances. BRR’s anti-corruption unit, which runs a corruption reporting line, accepts text message submissions.

Obviously, the effectiveness of text messaging depends on access to phones and network reliability. (In the early days of a disaster response, this is a problem since mobile networks are usually severely affected, sometimes for days.) There are no figures on the percentage of tsunami victims — in both Sri Lanka and Aceh — who own mobile telephones, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there are usually two to three phones in IDP camps, most often including one owned by the village leader. Women’s access, and whether this changes at different times of the day, is still a question, and more research needs to be done in this area.

Word of Mouth and Non-media Networks

Word of mouth is very important in any outreach campaign. Mass media will never reach everyone, and much information dissemination must take place at a grass-roots level, through the so-called multiplier effect where people pass information through casual conversation or community-based public announcement systems such as mosques. In both Aceh and Sri Lanka, beneficiaries cite friends, family, and community leaders as their primary non-media source of information. This is particularly true for women, who also often have reduced access to mass media outlets. These networks complement and enhance any mass media outreach work. In areas where religious affiliation is strong, there is potential in using systems like religious schools or leaders, which also gives the information the added authority of religious sanction. For example, UNICEF, in its nationwide polio vaccination campaign in Indonesia, harnessed the support of key religious figures to educate the public about the vaccine’s importance and to allay fears that it could cause illness.
Running Major Campaigns:
Outsourcing to the Private Sector

Faced with the challenge of designing mass media campaigns and the difficulties of coordinating different players in the production and distribution of materials, one solution is to outsource the entire process to a professional company. In the context of tsunami response, only TAFREN in Sri Lanka tried this option, with limited success due to lack of funding and a short timeframe.

The advantages of outsourcing such campaigns are many, not least that such companies have more expertise in understanding target audiences, media consumption and information flow to and within communities.

Running a Local Outreach Campaign

It is extremely difficult to organize a centralized outreach campaign across the vast geographical areas affected by the tsunami, and devolving to the districts is a simple and practical way to move forward. In Aceh, BRR is now taking such an approach. Sri Lanka’s HRC, as described shortly after it came into existence, TAFREN decided to outsource its outreach needs to a private company. After a formal tender process, Bates, a pan-Asian advertising company, was selected to manage all activities, including PR work (including running a media monitoring service with weekly breakdowns sent to all key stakeholders) and outreach needs. To do the latter, it ran regular newspaper advertisements with TAFREN progress reports, announcements of the Cash Grants Scheme, lists of selected beneficiaries for the Cash Grants Scheme, and vacancy advertisements.

Bates also designed, produced, and installed signs at all TAFREN housing sites, including information on how many people were receiving housing assistance at each site. These measures were important in improving government transparency in the relief effort, although they by no means went far enough.

TAFREN also asked Bates to run a beneficiary helpline. The call centre was advertised in the local media, mainly through small front-page advertisements in key newspapers and PSAs in local media. Bates trained a five-person team to answer standard questions via role play, Q&As, and direct training with TAFREN staff. The helpline received hundreds of calls in the summer of 2005, but it was forced to shut down quickly due to lack of financing.

It is difficult to evaluate the centre’s success because no beneficiary response evaluation work was done. Bates did, however, compile and analyse the calls it received and provided a weekly report to stakeholders. The overwhelming number of calls pertained to housing and livelihoods, usually basic questions on eligibility for assistance. What is most striking is that Bates reports that it could provide satisfactory answers to over three-quarters of the callers immediately, without the need for further investigation or referral.

This suggests that the fear commonly expressed by the government and I/NGOs that offering beneficiaries the chance to ask questions results in a slew of unanswerable queries may be groundless. It is difficult to know what would have happened if this helpline was given more time and better outreach, but the model certainly bears further investigation for possible application in Aceh or other emergency environments.

Case Study: TAFREN and Outsourcing Outreach

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below, has had good results in this regard, but there have also been a number of interesting local initiatives by aid organisations in Sri Lanka that have developed campaigns to help communities understand policy. In August 2005, OCHA ran a campaign in Galle to help beneficiaries understand their housing rights. Shifts in policy, such as changes in the buffer zone and difficulties in defining the level of damage to a house for compensation, led that office to design a campaign that would help beneficiaries understand and apply for assistance.

The Galle campaign had some other positive, unintended side effects. For example, the process of drafting the leaflet helped everyone involved — including the local government — clarify policies on transitional and permanent shelter, something over which there had been some confusion even among housing professionals.

In retrospect, though, it is clear that some mistakes were made. For example, the leaflet’s title was misleading, allowing most beneficiaries to assume that they would be given a guarantee of permanent shelter at the open house. Also, distributing the leaflets just a week before the event did not allow for delays in distribution, and some beneficiaries only found out about the event a day or two before it ended. (In response to this problem, the open house was extended.)

Overall, it is an impressive example of a coordinated and effective outreach campaign as well as an illustration of how much can be done in this area with very little funding. (OCHA estimates that the entire effort cost $500.) The fact that this local initiative appeared to be unusual, however, illustrates one of the key institutional problems in Aceh and Sri Lanka, which is the failure to apply successful models across regions. Despite the clear success of this model, it was not replicated elsewhere in Sri Lanka.

Running a Major Nationwide Campaign: Best Practice Model

Perhaps the most successful tsunami response outreach campaign to date was that organized by the Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit, set up
Case Study: Running a Nationwide Campaign

Shortly after the tsunami, the government of Sri Lanka established a Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit (DRMU) within the existing Human Rights Commission (HRC) to oversee the process of providing relief (both by aid organisations and the government itself) and to provide a mechanism for beneficiaries to ask questions about assistance, complain, and report cases of misuse or other problems.

The HRC faced a major challenge in educating the tsunami-affected population about its new role, explaining how it functioned, and how people could access its services. To achieve this, it designed a comprehensive multi-media campaign to educate people about the unit but also to address any concerns or fears they might have, such as reprisals from the local government.

The posters and leaflets used very simple language to explain the body and its services. It also had a press launch, which gathered a lot of coverage. “All the papers effectively promoted us for free, writing about who we were and how we worked,” says YKH De Silva, DRMU’s deputy chair. In addition to news coverage, newspaper advertisements included DRMU’s contact information and information on how to register complaints.

“We also used radio, running shows once every two weeks on a number of stations, half an hour long, where we explained what the government is giving, how you apply for housing, whatever they wanted to know. And people could call in and ask questions. We made sure the posters were put in the village officer’s office, a location everyone knew about and visited so everyone could see what they were entitled to, how it is being done, what loan schemes were available and so on.”

The most important phase of the outreach campaign, however, came a couple of months later, when teams of DRMU representatives held discussions in each tsunami-affected community. Using donor funding, DRMU began a training of trainers programme, based in universities (selected because educational institutions are regarded as impartial and non-political). The trainers trained senior lecturers, who in turn trained undergraduates, who actually went into the field. Once trained, they systematically visited every IDP location and held well-publicised discussions, explaining the DRMU, how to use and access it and answering questions.

The project was expensive (it cost around $450,000) because it relied on face to face communications, which meant that facilitators had to be trained and sent out to all of the communities affected by the disaster. For the same reasons, it took two months to put in place. But, according to De Silva, it was the key to the success of DRMU’s outreach work. “Face to face communication is very expensive, but very effective,” he says. “We told them: you have a right to things like housing and healthcare. This has to be done by the government, this is their duty. And we told them where to go, where to find us and how to complain.”

The HRC has maintained a high profile by working closely with journalists and the media, including making public statements when a particular organisation is consistently failing its beneficiaries (see next chapter). Such coverage helps build and maintain HRC’s image as a dynamic and proactive organisation that is actively working on behalf of beneficiary rights and is not afraid to criticize publicly on behalf of tsunami victims.

When designing an outreach campaign, existing channels of communication must be considered before creating new ones.

As part of Sri Lanka’s Human Rights Commission, it is probably not a coincidence that the deputy chair of this body is a former marketing consultant.

Although the HRC had the considerable advantage of being well known and trusted, the challenge of explaining its new role was considerable, and the results impressive. All beneficiaries interviewed for this report had heard about the DRMU and the HRC and knew that they could go there with questions about entitlements, where to write, and to whom. Some had used the system and had received answers. And although the answer they received was often negative, the recipient generally understood why they were not entitled the particular benefits. One man reported that many of his friends had received additional assistance by complaining to the HRC. Impressively, in such a politicised environment, all beneficiaries interviewed for this study believed that the HRC was an independent body and did not question its authority.

Nevertheless, once again this is a case of the initiative for an outreach campaign coming largely from one person within an organisation who also had public outreach expertise. Mr. De Silva’s background in marketing and his understanding of the value of face-to-face outreach and how to build a multi-media campaign were likely significant factors in this project’s success.
• In Sri Lanka, research into tsunami victims’ access to mass media and how best to reach them — especially in conflict-affected areas — is needed.

• The level of expertise, time, and money required to design a good outreach campaign needs to be recognized. It is a full-time job, which requires skills and expertise. Both BRR and RADA need to be realistic about what is involved and committed to hiring the relevant technical expertise and providing sufficient funding.

• As a general matter, airtime required for outreach work should be paid for. Airtime is a commodity, and in disaster areas, commercial media’s advertising market has often been destroyed. Local stations, especially those affected by the disaster, should not be expected to donate free airtime. Funding them is a way of providing assistance as well as developing outreach.

• There is considerably more potential for use of local radio, especially in Aceh.

• There is also a great deal of untapped potential for using television, especially using DVDs, exploiting the growing network of televisions in Aceh and either distributing or touring with DVD players. This could be especially effective with cartoons or other materials designed for children. The viewing of short films or PSAs along with an appropriate movie is also an excellent starting point for a discussion.

• Investigate possibilities for including materials such as brochures and leaflets in existing aid distribution mechanisms.

• Investigate the use of traditional art forms such as story-telling, poetry, and stand-up comedy.

• Where possible and appropriate, efforts should be made to ensure that all outreach materials and programmes are engaging and entertaining, such as talkshows that play records between questions and leaflets that use pictures and graphics.

• Careful consideration needs to be given to the question of branding. Normally, organisation and donors demand logos, but, in the context of outreach projects, branding can be inappropriate and counterproductive.

• Outreach material should focus on practicalities and explain how a policy or service relates to beneficiaries’ needs.

• All outreach materials should include contact numbers or directions to a person or location where the beneficiary can go for further information.

• There is considerable and almost completely unexplored potential in text messages as an outreach tool that merits immediate further investigation.

General Recommendations for Improving Mass Media Campaigns
This section examines the need for projects that directly address obstacles to effective information flow to communities, especially due to the disaster’s impact on physical infrastructure. Such projects are concerned with the medium rather than the message, ensuring that people can listen to the radio or watch television. Some are concerned with rebuilding damaged media infrastructure, others with supplementing it. The focus here is mostly on Aceh as damage to the media was worse there.

Projects addressing information gaps are divided into two main phases. The first concerns disaster response. As with so much in disaster situations, normal channels of information flow become severely disrupted just at the time when demand for information becomes acute. The priority here is getting local media running again as quickly as possible: replacing radio transmitters, helping people get newspapers, and so on. Such measures will provide the channels through which key messages can be distributed to traumatized and desperate populations, such as locations of medical services, basic first aid advice, what to do if there is another earthquake, and even lists of survivors. In Banda Aceh, the Red Cross ran a programme called *Saya Hidup* (I am alive), which consisted of presenters reading lists of people who had registered with the Red Cross as survivors, giving details of where to go to be reunited with a friend or family member.

Media also has a huge psychosocial value. In a remote location or disaster area, the radio can become a lifeline, and a link to the outside world. Hearing the familiar voices of presenters or simply just being able to play music and watch a movie and forget what happened can do a great deal to raise spirits and morale.

In the mid- to long-term, there is an opportunity to improve and rebuild local media (such as training of journalists or rebuilding radio stations) and to add supplementary channels where necessary (IDP newsletters, mobile cinemas, and internet access) to give all beneficiaries access to at least one source of information about the response. This work is, of course, also fundamental to the success of any mass information campaigns. There is no point designing PSAs if no one can listen to the radio.

The best approach in both contexts is to focus on ways of re-establishing and improving previously existing media channels rather than building new ones. Such media are familiar to people, and radio stations and papers have years of understanding of their audience. Trying to bring in new publications or inappropriate high-tech infrastructure is expensive, time-consuming, and requires starting from scratch. Additional interventions such as newsletters or mobile cinemas should only be added when clear gaps in existing media have been identified.

Bridging the Information Gap

*TAFREN board explaining housing project in Colombo, Sri Lanka.*
Improving Access to Radio

Radio networks are typically more durable in emergencies than other media such as television and newspapers. As a result, radio tends to become a key medium even if it was not popular before the disaster. In Aceh, initial efforts concentrated on getting basic facilities up and running and reliable information on air. The Internews model had many strengths. First, it tapped into available local capacity by hiring journalists temporarily out of work because of the disaster. Using Acehnese reporters also helped Internews ensure the programme was pitched accurately at its audience. Second, it ensured that local radio stations, which could produce their own material, had reliable, well-produced programming for broadcast.

Third, the programming was a much-valued vehicle for aid organisations to publicize information about their services and was used as such by everyone from the BRR to the World Bank. For international organisations, which often found working directly with local stations difficult, PA provided an easy and cost-free opportunity to get on air. Finally, Internews provided funding for internships for journalists to come from outside Banda Aceh and spend time on the team and receive training.

The project did have some drawbacks. Due to the distribution mechanism, the programme goes to all stations. There is no way of using it for targeted work in particular districts, which means that all content must be relevant for the majority of affected people. It therefore has little application for advertising local services. In addition, again because of the distribution mechanism, the programme is pre-recorded, meaning that phone-ins or hosted live discussions cannot be used.

The radio distribution project was held up because of issues with procurement, finding a distributor, and carrying out the assessment. As a result, they were not distributed until well over a year after the tsunami. An earlier distribution could have had a much greater impact. In the event of another disaster in Aceh, high ownership levels of durable radio sets not reliant on electricity could prove a considerable asset. This is especially relevant given the experiences in Nias and Simeulue during the response to the March 28 earthquake, when populations fled to mountainous areas and were inaccessible to aid organisations for many weeks.

Case Study: Peuneugah Aceh

Internews was one of the first organisations to attempt to get accurate information about the relief effort to affected populations using the radio network, which was badly damaged in the disaster. Entire stations were wiped out, others were in inaccessible areas, and many lost staff. The first step was to find a way of producing audio material, given that many stations could not generate their own material, and then getting it out to local stations for broadcast.

To solve the first problem, Internews built an emergency studio and hired a team of Acehnese journalists to produce a daily two-hour emergency radio programme called Peuneugah Aceh. To solve the second, they turned to satellite and First Voice International, the non-profit arm of the satellite broadcasting company Worldspace. The daily programmes were uploaded on a Worldspace satellite server in Australia and beamed back to Aceh.

Internews also supplied 36 partner local stations in Aceh with a Worldspace receiver so they could receive the satellite feed and a solar panel to ensure a power supply given the problems with electricity in many areas. Worldspace receivers were also delivered to some IDP areas with less success. Even though people were trained in their use, most IDPs found them too complicated and difficult to operate.
Regarding future emergencies, a surge capacity of radios held and administered either by OCHA or a media INGO like Internews would be a very good idea. This would mean that the lengthy procurement processes and field testing of appropriate models could be carried out beforehand, and radios could be available at an early stage. The experience in Aceh bears out lessons learned from other areas — that radios designed to be durable, which can survive in tents, possibly getting wet or damaged, are best. Given the problems with electricity and the expense and environmental concerns associated with battery use, wind-up or solar powered radios are preferable. Radio should have FM capability and preferably be shortwave, as many international radio services (such as BBC World Service and Deutsche Welle) still use this medium. Moreover, radios should be able to access FM frequencies up to and including 108 FM, as these are the frequencies commonly allocated to community radio.

Even with Peunegah Aceh on air and radios distributed, more effort could have been made to help Aceh’s local radio stations get back on air. Support has been provided by Internews and the national network 68H, mostly in the form of training and equipment. But 18 months after the tsunami, many stations are still broadcasting from damaged houses because they lack resources to rebuild their studios. Support has been ad hoc as some organisations have worked very successfully with individual stations (UNESCO, for example, reconstructed Radio Nikoya in Banda Aceh), but there has not been a comprehensive damage assessment of local media infrastructure, much less a programme to address this issue. Case studies indicate the vital importance of prioritizing rebuilding of stations from an early stage.

Newsletters

As previously noted, newspaper access in both Aceh and Sri Lanka is problematic. One possible solution is to undertake free distribution.

The main difficulty with the IOM model is that it only distributes to the communities where it is working rather than running the project as a wider public service. UNFPA’s solution of using a newspaper company to distribute also has drawbacks, as monitoring and quality control are difficult.

Dedicated newsletters to IDPs have also been started in Aceh and Sri Lanka. In Aceh, there are two province-wide newsletters for IDPs. In addition, Aceh has also seen the establishment of newsletters for particular target audiences, such as Wanita Sehat (Healthy

Case Study: Free Newspaper Distribution

Projects to distribute copies of free newspapers have been implemented in Aceh and Sri Lanka, but the approaches differ. In Sri Lanka, IOM hands out free newspapers to the seven communities where it works. Some people in the communities are illiterate, IOM reports, but communities often organize public readings.

Free newspaper distribution in Aceh has been handled by UNFPA on very different principles. Serambi is distributed once a week to a target audience of the most seriously affected communities as a common service rather than only to UNFPA beneficiaries. A total of 9,000 copies are distributed to barracks and camps across affected areas, with the actual distribution handled by Serambi with UNFPA funding. This project is, therefore, not UNFPA branded. An anecdotal assessment of the project for this study found that, while successful, communities reported problems with the distributors, with copies dumped in barracks or given to the community leaders, not enough papers distributed for the entire community, and so on.
Case Study: IDP Newsletters

Ceureumen, which means “mirror” in Acehnese, was launched in August 2005 by the World Bank in response to concerns that little information was reaching IDPs. Based on field research, including focus group discussions with IDPs, Ceureumen was developed as an eight-page tabloid published fortnightly and inserted in Serambi. (A few thousand extra copies are distributed separately through World Bank community networks.)

The core team consists of five Acehnese journalists and a network of stringers. The team considered publishing in Acehnese but abandoned the idea after it became clear that people preferred to read in Indonesian. In addition to publishing Ceureumen on Saturdays to take advantage of UNFPA’s distribution of free papers to IDPs, it was also decided to alternate publication dates with Seumangat, the BRR newsletter published fortnightly on Saturdays.

The paper is formatted like a mini-newspaper. The cover has a story that links to the central spread, plus a poem (poetry is very popular in Aceh). Page two is dedicated to stories related to corruption with a letters section. People can send questions via letters or email, and correspondents also collect them in the field. In the interest of transparency, the journalists’ email addresses are included. The team also use the letters to analyse the level of penetration across the province and started a very popular regular crossword competition largely for this purpose. Ceureumen has also tried to bridge the gap between IDPs and the confusing culture of the myriad I/NGOs working in Aceh by running columns such as “Know your NGO,” which featured a different organisation each week.

Although the format has remained the same, the content has changed. According to Amy Sim, the project manager, language was a major issue. Journalists wrote in formal Indonesian that their papers, such as Serambi, demanded, which also meant they were using English acronyms and phrases such as Cash for Work. This alienated their readers. Language is now more colloquial, and any English phrases must be followed by an explanation in brackets. “We also realized that we need to keep stories short to hold attention spans whereas most formal publications carry very large amounts of text. There is no tradition here of breaking text up with subheads so we have had to teach them to do that, and we use a lot more pictures.”

Locally based newsletters

According to a UNDP assessment regarding Seuramoe, feedback from beneficiaries has been extremely positive. The newsletter’s most popular section is that providing updates on ongoing projects, particularly with reference to housing projects. Most respondents said they wanted more information on livelihoods and employment opportunities and would welcome a more frequent newsletter with more pages. An independent, ad hoc investigation carried out for this report found also that there were problems with distribution (currently carried
The town of Calang and the surrounding district of Aceh Jaya were particularly badly hit. Calang suffered a 90 percent mortality rate and was totally destroyed. The television infrastructure was destroyed, there was no local radio station even before the tsunami, and road damage meant that Serambi did not reach Calang.

In response, UNDP worked with the local government to establish a newsletter for Aceh Jaya. The concept was to concentrate on producing something so simple and low tech that the entire production process — from story writing through to final printing — could be done in one room with standard office equipment such as printers and photocopiers.

The model outlined above uses low-tech equipment to produce something simple but effective to meet a very localized need for a very small amount of money (the project costs $30,000 a year). Given IDPs’ overwhelming desire for information, a product that is specific to a single district has a lot of appeal. IDPs in the Banda Aceh-based focus group run for this research who saw Seuramoe for the first time were intrigued and said they would like something similar, even though they have far greater access to a much wider range of media than people in Aceh Jaya. The biggest problem at present is the lack of a comprehensive distribution mechanism. As a model, it also depends on local government commitment. Without a proactive partner in Aceh Jaya’s district head, implementation would not have been possible.

Newsletters like Seuramoe could also have considerable potential in Sri Lanka, especially in areas like Trincomalee where there are isolated groups of IDPs and no local media services such as local radio stations. Such newsletters can also provide an invaluable outlet for agencies to explain policies and advertise services and allow people to ask questions.

Other long-term ideas

A number of other, longer-term projects addressing gaps in information flow are also ongoing in Aceh. The World Bank runs a community radio project that has been successful where it has established itself, but has struggled with the lack of interest in radio as a medium, and the classic problem of sustainability, in addition to many complex technical issues with obtaining licenses and limited legal broadcasting ranges. The focus to date has been on areas with the infrastructure to manage stations, mainly Aceh Besar, with the unintended side effect that stations have been set up in areas that already have decent access to media rather than places badly in need of attention such as Aceh Jaya. Ten stations have opened in Aceh Besar, with five scheduled to open in Pidie and five more in Nias. While community radio has interesting potential as a tool for transparency and accountability, the small number of stations and limited frequency range makes its role as an information distribution tool correspondingly limited. Aid organisations that are fortunate to be working in an area with a community radio station should certainly be encouraged to exploit the service it provides, but the reality in the context of tsunami work is that by the time a substantial number of community radio stations are on air, many tsunami response programmes will be in their final phases.

There has also been long-standing discussion in Aceh about a mobile cinema, which would have been an interesting and popular addition to the available media channels given the Acehnese preference for visual media. This idea stalled because of expense and lack of funding commitments. Had this idea been taken up and implemented at an earlier stage, it could certainly have contributed to getting information to affected communities in an entertaining way.
General Recommendations for Improving Media Infrastructure

• One lesson learned for application in future disasters is that an evaluation of the damage to media infrastructure should take place as early as possible. In Aceh, work on this still needs to be done as many local radio stations are still operating from tents or personal houses and need assistance building new studios.

• Organisations such as Internews and OCHA should have some emergency equipment, such as transmitters and generators, on standby so that key facilities such as local radio can get back on air as soon as possible. They should also have a stockpile of emergency wind-up radios for distribution.

• Placing community televisions as a standard piece of infrastructure in transitional shelter camps is an idea that deserves further investigation.

• In Aceh, dedicated newsletters with information about the response effort, including financial details of government work and complaints columns have proved very successful. This model could be expanded further, and has potential for application in Sri Lanka.

• Highly localized information efforts, such as district-wide newsletters or community radio, can be extremely effective, especially in places that otherwise struggle to be served by conventional media networks. In Sri Lanka, where the media sector is much stronger but almost entirely national in scope, the potential benefits of running highly localized publications in areas such as Trincomalee is worth investigating.

• In Aceh, the concept of a mobile cinema could still be useful, particularly if its scope is extended to conflict areas and post-conflict work. This is probably the only way to justify the cost and time it would take to set up.
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Sri Lanka


**Glossary and Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMM</td>
<td>Aceh Monitoring Mission. EU and Asian mission charged with overseeing the implementation of the peace deal in Aceh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balai</td>
<td>A large, low, platform usually in the centre of the village, generally used for community meetings, Aceh (see Menasa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrack</td>
<td>A form of government built transitional shelter in Aceh, unpopular due to the use of the same model in the conflict as part of forced relocation of communities and built largely without reference to SPHERE standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRR</td>
<td>Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Government Agent (local government official, Sri Lanka)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAM</td>
<td>Free Aceh Movement, pro-independence rebel movement in Aceh, joint signatory of the peace deal</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoI</td>
<td>Government of Indonesia</td>
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<td>GOSL</td>
<td>Government of Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>KDP</td>
<td>Kecamatan Development Programme, nationwide community based small grants programme run by the World Bank in Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kebupatan</td>
<td>Provincial district (Aceh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kecamatan</td>
<td>Subdistrict (Aceh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kepala Desa</td>
<td>Village chief (Aceh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRC</td>
<td>Human Rights Commission, Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menasa</td>
<td>Local community mosque (Aceh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pak</td>
<td>Indonesian male honorific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Public Service Announcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>RADA</td>
<td>Reconstruction and Development Agency, Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFREN</td>
<td>Task force for the Reconstruction of the Nation, previous incarnation of RADA, Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN-ORC</td>
<td>UN Office of the Recovery Coordinator, Aceh</td>
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