

## ***MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS***

### **Description**

This chapter discusses the role of the media in humanitarian emergencies and its potential positive and negative impact. Even though opinions may differ on the quality of media, journalists are usually the first to report about humanitarian emergencies. It is important for humanitarian workers to understand how good media relations can benefit the relief response.

### **Learning Objectives**

- To increase the participants' understanding and awareness of global, national, and local media.
- To improve the participants' skills in media interview techniques.

### **Key Competencies**

- Increased awareness of the potential opportunities — and pitfalls — from the media.
- Improved skills in dealing with the media, in particular during negative or unexpected interviews.
- Greater understanding of the role of local media.

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## OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Table 14-1: Terms and Definitions

<b>Media Coverage</b>	Securing and reporting details about a situation or event by the media
<b>Mass Communication</b>	Directing information or a message to a large number of people.
<b>Mass Communication Medium</b>	A means of public communication, which includes television (TV), radio, film, newspapers, magazines, books, and the internet.
<b>Media</b>	Channels for sending information or messages to groups of people, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Broadcast</i>— television, radio, satellite, and terrestrial</li><li>• <i>Print</i>— newspapers, magazines, etc.</li><li>• <i>Wire services or news agencies</i>— sell stories to broadcast/print outlets</li><li>• <i>Electronic</i>— Internet-based news services</li></ul>
<b>Public</b>	A group of people sharing a common interest.
<b>Live Link</b>	An interview that is transmitted to listeners or viewers at the same time it is being recorded. (Only the experienced or very confident interviewees should agree to this type of interview.)
<b>Target Audience</b>	The persons or group whose attention a particular information or message is intended to attract.

### Objectives of Mass Media

In humanitarian emergencies, the media aims to achieve the following:

- To provide the public with updated information.
- To warn the public about imminent disasters so they can be prepared to cope.
- To assist in the humanitarian response effort.
- To seek and obtain external support for a humanitarian response when needed.
- To stop rumours and to reassure the public about why certain actions are being taken.
- To convey instructions or other information to the public about epidemics and disease control.

The media is the primary source of news for most of the general population. It is usually the first source of information about disasters — and a useful source — from which to learn about what happened, what is being done, and what is needed. Even though opinions may differ about the quality of media, relief workers should recognise the media as a valuable partner for sharing information as well as a powerful tool for communicating with the public. Good media coverage can help build public support for a relief operation as well as increase donors' interest. Therefore all journalists must be treated with respect and restraint.

The table below describes a positive outcome as a result of health officials and relief agencies working closely with the media during an actual emergency situation.

Table 14-2: An Example of Positive Use of the Media

<b>Positive Role of the Media</b>	
<p>In 1997-98, the media played a vital role in mobilising an international response to the Rift Valley Fever Outbreak in Kenya and Somalia by the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapidly drawing the attention of the authorities in the affected countries and the world at large to the existence of the epidemic.</li> <li>• Providing critical information about the dangers of slaughtering and eating meat from sick animals. This proved to be a fast and powerful tool for health education.</li> <li>• Reflecting facts in media reports. Throughout the outbreak, the MOH and WHO provided local and international media with timely and accurate information.</li> </ul>	

Providing timely and accurate information to the public in a responsible manner requires compromise from both the relief workers and the media. The following problems may arise between relief workers and the media during a humanitarian emergency:

- Relief workers may lack guidelines on how to deal with mass media representatives.
- The media does not understand relief worker’s jargon (e.g., 100 meters<sup>3</sup> of water, CMR of 2/10,000/day).
- There may be conflicting priorities or deadlines — the media is concerned with selling news, while relief workers are more concerned about providing immediate relief to the displaced population.
- Past negative experiences — relief workers may have been misquoted or their messages interpreted incorrectly. This may occur because media messages are often crafted to sell to the target audience.

### Target Audiences of Mass Media

When dealing with the mass media, it is important to first define the **media** or channel through which the news organization or grouping communicates with the public, for example:

- **Broadcast** — television and radio through satellite or terrestrial
- **Print** — newspapers, magazines, etc.
- **Wire services or news agencies** — sell stories to broadcast or print outlets
- **Electronic** — Internet-based news services

It is also important to define the **target audience** for the media. For example, CNN (Cable News Network), which broadcasts 24 hours a day to a global audience, may have a totally different agenda from a local newspaper that is published once per week. However, because news moves so quickly today, a new story filed by a local reporter has the potential to be broadcast on CNN within minutes. The following table shows the range of target audience for different media groupings:

Table 14-3: Target Audiences for Various Media Types

<b>TARGET AUDIENCE</b>	<b>MEDIA</b>
<b>Global</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadcast (CNN International, BBC World)</li> <li>• Wire services (especially Reuters and Associated Press)</li> <li>• International publications (The Economist or Newsweek)</li> </ul>
<b>Regional</b>	Mainly print publications, such as AsiaWeek or Africa Confidential
<b>National</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadcast (nationwide television and radio stations)</li> <li>• Print (nationwide newspapers and other publications)</li> </ul>
<b>Local</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadcast (local television and radio stations)</li> <li>• Print (daily or weekly local newspapers)</li> </ul>

It is important to note that the groupings in the above table may sometimes change. This means a reporter for the local newspaper can (and probably will) also stand in as a reporter for a national newspaper or television station. Therefore, a recorded interview for local radio can rapidly reach CNN and a global audience.

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## BUILDING GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS

Relief organisations operating in the field should make every effort to build good relations with journalists (particularly with those regularly reporting on humanitarian issues). Good public relations will help ensure that more accurate information is reported about the plight of the disaster victims and the type of assistance that is needed. To further improve the media coverage, assessment teams should be prepared to share their findings about an emergency situation with journalists (within the regulations of their agency). However, a relief agency should avoid competing for media attention with other agencies where a public report may endanger or compromise staff security or the interview interferes with urgent relief activities.

Figure 14-1: Media and Public Affairs Practical Exercise I

**Practical Exercise I**

*Imagine that you are working at a refugee centre and have to take care of a large number of new arrivals. Some reporters, hearing of the changing situation, have arrived this afternoon. As you are caring for some of the refugees, you turn around to find a microphone being thrust under your nose.*

*What would you do?*

- a. Drop everything and address the reporter's questions, as this centre needs the publicity?*
- b. Or tell the reporter to go away as you have more important things to attend to?*
- c. Or tell the reporter you'll be with him or her in a few minutes after you finish what you are doing?*

*The correct response is c.*

*Remember that reporters are human. They also have a job to do. Help them to realise that you have to balance priorities. Be calm. Be open. You can either tell them politely and gently, "I'll be with you in (how many) minutes. This has to be my priority now," and return to the reporter later; or ask a more appropriate person to answer his or her questions. You can explain your limits and challenges, but try to understand theirs, too.*

The following are suggestions for building good relations and mutual trust with the media:

1. **Keep communication lines open with the media.**  
The media can be your greatest ally and promoter if you allow them to be. Think of reporters as customers and get to know them by asking them the following questions:
  - What types of stories interest them?
  - When is the best time to contact them?
  - In what medium and format do they prefer to receive information to be printed or broadcast?
  - Who are your competitors for the media's time and space?
2. **Never overestimate the media's knowledge of the subject.**  
Provide reporters and journalists with background material. Ask them if they have questions. Educate them one step at a time.
3. **Meet deadlines.**  
Try and work within the media's time frame. If a reporter or journalist says he or she needs information by a certain time, always be prompt. For the media, deadlines are often met in terms of minutes, not hours.

#### 4. **Train spokespersons for the relief operation.**

When a disaster attracts international media interest, relief workers may be alarmed by the number of times their work is interrupted by media reporters. To ensure the smooth conduct of relief, a trained spokesperson should be placed at the project level to provide information about the operation to the relief agency's headquarters and to ensure good media coverage. He or she needs to be trained to do the following:

- To portray an unbiased image of the disaster by describing not only the vulnerabilities and fears of the affected population, but also their capabilities and ambitions.
- To provide the correct amount of information and maintain confidentiality where necessary.
- To cooperate with the media as much as possible to increase public support, but not to allow the interests of external and internal audiences to overcome the primary goal of the relief operation.
- To always treat media reporters with respect while remaining in control.
- To know how and when to take the lead when dealing with the media, and not to simply stay in the "response mode."

#### 5. **Useful tips when dealing with a photographer include:**

- Give photographers ideas on what would make a photograph visually interesting, but let them use their own final judgement. They are the experts.
- Preserve the dignity of disaster victims. Before taking photographs, get approval from the community leaders after explaining to them what is involved and how the pictures will be used. After using a video camera, ask the operator to show the video to those people who were filmed.
- Allow photographers to get close enough to the subject and to compose the photograph appropriately.

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## **KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE**

*The best communicators are those who know what they want to say and say it clearly. It is very important to use words that will motivate people to act. Just as we spend time searching for a gift to suit a friend's tastes, we need to tailor our messages to suit the audience we want to reach.*

While it is essential for relief workers to cooperate with the media, it is even more important to be prepared for the interviews. The following questions may help to define the target audience and the best way to communicate with them:

- **Audience:** Who is the message intended for?
- **Objective:** What is the aim of sending the message?
- **Approach:** What is the most effective way to give the message?
- **Medium:** How and when should the message be conveyed?
- **Impact:** What is the desired result from sending the message?

The very first step in communication is deciding whose attention needs to be attracted. The following steps may help define the target audience:

1. **Think about the external audience.**

Be specific. Identify the members of the public, the local and international humanitarian organisations, the donors and media (television, radio, and print) who need to know or may be interested in your message.

2. **Remember the internal audience.**

It is just as important for colleagues to be aware of their agency's view about the humanitarian emergency as it is for the public and press. Sharing information with colleagues prior to releasing it to the press can help to generate ideas about its implications and resolve challenges. It also presents a united and organised front to the public and media and builds teamwork and morale.

3. **There are many ways for relief agencies to become “visible” to the target audience through the media.**

- By relief workers getting to know the people in the community and organising and sponsoring community support groups, first aid activities, etc.
- By being a consistent source of information and support on issues such as cholera prevention, disaster preparedness and response, etc.
- By having background material constantly available. Remember to use photographs, graphic displays and local art whenever possible. This will help to reach all community groups no matter what language they use.
- Always featuring stories for the media about people around you in action, especially the volunteers and the people who have been helped.

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## **INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES**

It is important to follow certain “protocols” when one is getting interviewed in order to ensure a positive impact on the target audience and to avoid creating conflict within the relief agency. The following techniques may be helpful for improving your interview skills:

1. Inform your direct supervisor if you have been asked for an interview or have been interviewed.
2. Be prepared! A relief worker who is not prepared can do more harm than good during an interview.
  - Find out who will be doing the interview, whether it will be broadcast or printed and when it will be made public. Also, find out where, when, and why the interview is taking place.
  - Negotiate with the interviewer about how the interview will be carried out (e.g., duration, what issues will be discussed, limit to questioning, etc.) before it begins.
  - Do your homework — collect all necessary facts and figures and prepare a set of notes in point form.

Below is a list of questions that are frequently asked by the media and the public:

1. **What happened and what is the damage?**
2. **When did it happen?**
3. **Why did it happen?**
4. **How did it happen?**
5. **Who was affected?**
6. **Is there an underlying factor?**
7. **What has been done about the situation?**
8. **Who is taking responsibility?**
9. **What else is required?**

3. During the interview, remember you are giving an interview to deliver your message to the public, not simply to answer the reporter's questions. Therefore, keep the following points in mind:
  - Be brief and to the point. Then there is a greater chance that your own words will be used. Identify the key points (not more than three) that you wish to communicate. Begin with a statement on the basic facts — the first comment is often the most remembered.
  - Tell the truth without exaggerating and do not be afraid to say, "*I don't know.*" If it is a fact you can get information about, offer to do so but make sure you get it to the reporter in time. A missed deadline is a missed opportunity. If it is a question in an area outside your field (e.g., about national or organisational policy), refer the reporter to the people who are best suited to answer that question.
  - Do not discuss unverified, sensitive or confidential information. There is no such thing as "off the record." If you have information that you do not want reported, do not disclose it. If a situation is unclear, say so.
  - Be polite, helpful, clear, and specific. Courtesy and cooperation help establish your credibility.
  - Answer the questions skillfully and remember that you have your own agenda for the interview. Seize the opportunity to discuss the additional points you want the public to know about your organisation.
  - Any news deserves comment. Never say, "*No comment.*" If possible, refer any questions that may cause some friction to your supervisor. Prepare a comment in advance for questions that may potentially cause a dispute.
  - Though reporters are trained to ask questions in a probing manner, this does not mean that they are trying to "trick" you. Stay calm and do not be defensive. Listen carefully to questions before answering. Think first before answering a question.
  - Clarify a false statement or accusation. Say, "*I believe you are misinformed, and this is why...*" Then explain. Do not repeat offensive words or statements that a reporter used in a question, even to correct or deny. A reporter's question will never be quoted in the story but your answer will.
  - Ask the reporter specific questions to help you understand what information he or she is looking for, how much detail is needed, and how your material is going to be used. Usually, a couple of questions from you can help you give the reporter what is wanted. This is a courtesy they appreciate.
  - Stop talking when you have said all that needs to be said. Smile and thank the reporter.

4. In summary, when communicating with the media, follow the suggestions in the table below.

*Table 14-4: Suggestions for Communicating with the Media*

1. Listen. Slant your responses to reflect the news.
2. Decide on the two or three points you want to make, and be sure these points are reflected in the responses you give.
3. Be clear, concise and accurate.
4. Remember that most people will only remember a few points from all that is said, so make the first words count.
5. Mention the role of your organisation at least three times.
6. Make a quick summary of important events. Stress the most important aspects of the story or message first and end with the least important.
7. Make what is said more personal through human-interest events or quotations. Talk about people in action, not statistics.
8. Do not lecture the reader, listener, or viewer. Use simple terms and avoid language that may sound arrogant or that is insensitive, bureaucratic, or patronising.
9. Ask questions. Initiate discussion.
10. Avoid self-promotion or expressing personal opinion.
11. Consider other people's (or agencies') concerns and be aware of their feelings.
12. Sum up the key points at the end, and always remember to say "*Thank you.*"
13. Follow up when you promise to get an answer to a question.
14. Monitor what is reported, and clarify any incorrect information.



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## THE MEDIA IN ACTION

Figure 14-2: Media and Public Affairs Practical Exercise II

### Practical Exercise II

*An English-speaking TV crew has arrived unexpectedly at your location, complete with satellite link, and is asking for a spokesperson to do an immediate three minute live link on “The current health situation of the refugee/local population.”*

- *Each participant should write down, briefly, the two points he or she wants to make and hand the paper to the facilitator before the interview.*
- *The facilitator will then conduct three-minute interviews with each of the participants.*
- *If a camera and VCR are available, a review and analysis should take place after all the interviews.*
- *If this equipment is not available, the review and analysis should take place with the group after each interview.*

Apart from exposing participants to a “live” interview situation, the aim of the above exercise is to see how each interview subject negotiates the interview before it begins and how well the points discussed in previous sections are followed.

The final review and analysis should focus on the following:

- The interview subject’s attitude before and during the interview.
- The ability to provide clear, authoritative, and brief responses.
- The ability to appear relaxed rather than defensive.
- The overall impact of the interview.

In order to learn and improve their interview skills, participants should be assessed at the end of their interviews. The following table lists a few questions that can be used to assess the performance of the interview subject:

Table 14-5: Evaluating the Interview

1. Were the questions understood?
2. Did the key points get across?
3. Where the responses clear and concise?
4. Was the interviewee knowledgeable and friendly?
5. Was the interviewee well prepared?
6. Was any erroneous information given that needs to be corrected immediately?
7. Was the language simple?

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