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Corruption in emergencies: what role for media?

(Report from U4 working meeting 30 May, 2006)

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Corruption in Emergencies (CES)

In the wake of the South Asian tsunami in 2004, a number of initiatives have emerged to tackle the particular dangers of corruption in the context of war and natural disasters. U4 resources consolidate current thinking, address gaps through original research, and offer practical approaches and tools for reducing corruption risks in humanitarian aid.

Launched in November 2005, the CES focus area is developed by a team led by Dr. Arne Strand and Jessica Schultz at Chr. Michelsen Institue (CMI)

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CORRUPTION IN EMERGENCIES: WHAT ROLE FOR MEDIA?

Report from U4 working meeting 30 May, 2006

Prepared by Gemma Mortensen of International Media Support[1]

As part of a broader analysis of corruption in emergencies, the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre initiated a dialogue on the role(s) of the media. On 30 May 2006, a working meeting held at NORAD offices in Oslo brought together donors, NGOs and journalists, including media practitioners from Sri Lanka, Liberia and Nepal. The purpose was to draw on actual case studies to suggest ways in which humanitarian agencies and the media can mutually support responsible coverage of corruption in emergency aid. Recommendations to donors, humanitarian agencies, and both local and international media are presented at the end of this report.

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1 http://www.i-m-s.dk/

1. LESSONS FROM THE TSUNAMI

"On December 26, 2004, Sri Lanka faced the worst human disaster in its modern history. With limited resources, poorly trained and underpaid staff, the local media was thrust into covering the tragedy and keeping the country informed. Given the overwhelming circumstances, it did an admirable job: Local radio stations and TV networks dropped regular programming and switched to continuous coverage of the unfolding disaster. Two local journalists from Galle (116 km south of the capital Colombo) rode along the tsunami hit southern highway on a motorcycle to deliver a tape to the office of the state owned Independent Television Network. The tape contained the now world famous images shot by amateur cameraman Ajantha Samarawickrema when the waves rushed into the Galle main bus stand. …However, even during these early days, there were indications that the media was being blinded by its own enthusiasm and misplaced emphasis."

Amantha Perera, journalist for the Sunday Leader and the Inter-Press Service (See full presentation in Annex 3)

The tsunami disaster of 2004, because of its scale and profile, provided a unique lens through which to explore risks and opportunities in media coverage of corruption in emergency operations. Certainly, the huge budgets, pressures for rapid deployment, and systemic corruption in affected countries made corruption risk management a major challenge for humanitarian actors. With an expanded base of private donors, agencies were acutely aware of the potential for a public backlash if widespread corruption was uncovered.

Media coverage of the tsunami distorted agency behaviour in predictable ways (See Annex 2: Media impacts on corruption throughout the project cycle). Staged photo opportunities with NGO directors distributing food was just one example of how standard operations were altered to attract maximum media coverage. Similarly, participants noted that tendering procedures and risk assessments were cut short or even bypassed to ensure that a given NGO was seen acting first and fastest. The initial media pressure shifted attention away from other populations equally deserving of aid, such as conflict-affected people in the northern parts of Sri Lanka.

The international media, preoccupied with the fates of their own citizens affected by the tsunami, focused disproportionately at first on raw figures of deaths and survivals. The tendency to tell the tsunami story through foreign nationals, whether tourists or relief workers, narrowed the scope of coverage to preclude in-depth investigations of systemic corruption.

Foreign journalists converged on more accessible locations that offered basic amenities like housing. Concentrated coverage from these areas provided – according to Sri Lankan journalist Amantha Perera – a distorted picture of needs.

Furthermore, in Sri Lanka, the picture was complicated by vulnerability of local media to particular political agendas. After the tsunami, the local media became distracted by political scandals and lost sight of those whose lives had been destroyed. As the example below illustrates, most journalists failed to step back from elite concerns and address endemic failures in the recovery operation.

Sri Lanka: media amnesia

The Sri Lankan media reacted admirably in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami, transferring all programming to coverage of the unfolding disaster. Despite significant collateral damage, as well as infrastructure (70% of radio sets were lost), the local media made valiant attempts to reach people through the country. However, over the following weeks and months, journalists increasingly forgot about those whose lives had been destroyed by the Tsunami, concentrating instead on political intrigue and scandal. The Sri Lankan media reverted to type, preoccupied with politics, military activity and big business interests.

No newspaper, radio or TV station set up a special Tsunami investigation desk. Though the media carried stories about individual incidents of corruption, there was little effort made to unpick the scale of the problem. Transparency International, in an analysis of the post-Tsunami media coverage, concluded that 'the voiceless were not given a platform to express themselves at all." Thilak Jayaratne, Head of Research for TI, reflected that "the media was basically a tool of the power elite. It reflected the thinking of the power brokers and was not that concerned about the victims or the reconstruction effort."

A prime example was the minimal coverage given to the Government-imposed no-build buffer zone, a strip of one to two hundred meters along the coast. 55 000 out of the 100 000 houses destroyed were located in the zone. Many families were prevented from resettling on their original plot. Hotels were not subject to such restrictions, able to acquire prime land at the cost of those who originally lived there. Citizens often unaware of the terms of the policy or their entitlements succumbed to sub-market offers for land. Others were bribed to gain entry on land allocation lists. Elsewhere, sub-standards materials were used in the construction of housing and prices were inflated to maximise profits. People found themselves re-housed in premises that started to sink, and even blow away during the start of the monsoon, only months after they were built. The media failed to investigate the impact upon families and the extent of malpractice within the reconstruction effort. In May 2006, the Government changed its housing policy for the third time. This shift received no coverage in the media and, as a result, affected commu-

nities are still largely ignorant of the changes and how they affect them.

In June 2005, the Auditor General reported on bribe taking and malpractice. The media covered the report but failed to probe further. As a consequence, bribery, stock hoarding and large-scale corruption have gone unreported.

The tsunami case study exposed a critical need to realign media-agency relations in a way that is conducive to greater accountability of aid – both to beneficiaries and to the public in donor countries. Though discussion focused on the shortfalls in media coverage, there were cases where journalists did defend the interests of those affected by the tsunami and subsequent relief efforts. Those pieces provided a critical platform for affected communities to voice their concerns and assisted agencies and governments in responding appropriately.

Factors impeding media's traditional watchdog role, post-Tsunami

LOCAL MEDIA
- Political partisanship
- Obstacles in accessing information
- Failure to focus on beneficiary impact
- Lack of resources to conduct long investigations
- Low wages making journalists vulnerable to corruption themselves
- Lack of skills and expertise
- Fear of losing advertising revenue through critical reporting

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA
- Unfamiliarity with political and cultural context
- Ignorance of financial systems and potential for corruption
- Editorial imperative to link coverage of disaster with domestic story
- Brief visits and failure to access remoter areas
- Dependence on humanitarian agencies for stories

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2. WORKING WITH LOCAL MEDIA

Edetaen Ojo, Director of Media Rights Agenda in Nigeria, emphasised the link between a well-trained, effective local media and improved accountability to affected populations. Drawing on his experience in Liberia, Ojo showed how the local media is key in communicating information on entitlements and should be well placed to investigate situations in which assistance is diverted, or when sub-quality materials are used. However, given the poor state of local media in many countries in which corruption risks are acute, and local media's own vulnerability to corruption, Ojo focused on the need to support and develop local media as part of an emergency response or longer-term recovery and rehabilitation effort.

"The opaque nature of many humanitarian assistance programmes makes it extremely difficult for local media to access information about their operations and unveil corrupt practices, where they might exist. Although many relief agencies hold regular and frequent press briefings, these usually focus of on disseminating humanitarian information or public diplomacy. There is usually no mechanism for the local media to access other critical information while there is little tolerance within such agencies for probing questions."

In an emergency situation, whether due to natural disaster or conflict, the media faces numerous challenges to its traditional role as watchdog over power and vested interests. Local media infrastructure is often severely damaged in emergencies, preventing outlets from operating as normal. Staff and their families might be affected by the crisis. In areas where radio is relied on as the primary source of information, radio sets may be lost leaving communities without access to media. In addition, political and financial pressures can make it difficult for editors to criticise the powerful or resist financial rewards for painting people and programmes in a good light. Media coverage of the humanitarian response in Liberia illustrates some of these tensions.

The challenges for local media in Liberia

In August 2003, a transitional Government was established in Liberia. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) followed one month later. Over the next two years, amidst widespread charges of corruption, relief agencies and the transitional government failed to restore basic services to Liberia. In early 2005, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a team of auditors to conduct a comprehensive and systematic audit of the transitional government. Endemic corruption was confirmed.

Despite the prevalence of corruption and general awareness of the problem, the local media failed to cover it in any depth. Among the reasons cited by Edetaen Ojo (See full presentation in Annex 4) for this failure were:

Difficulties in accessing information in order to assess whether pledges had been honoured and how funds had been allocated

This was partially due to the lack of precise information within the UN coordinated system itself. In 2005, local media called for the draft Freedom of Information Act to be applied to international organisations as well as to Liberian Government institutions and agencies. Though the proposal was unrealistic and never gained ground, it indicated the serious frustration felt by the Liberian media.

An unwillingness of international actors to engage with the media

One example comes from the UN-supervised DDRR programme. In 2004, the UN announced that 66,000 combatants had been disarmed. However, UNMIL said it had destroyed only 20,000 weapons; a ratio of one weapon to every 3 combatants. At the inception of the programme, it was anticipated that an average of 3 weapons would be recovered from each combatant. The Liberian media were sceptical about the returns of the programme and attempted to probe the UN. They reported an irritated response and an intolerance of any attempts to scratch the surface.

Poor economic performance and dependence on advertising revenue

Some agencies and organisations were known to withhold advertising from media that had been critical. Certain media organisations became fearful of criticising transitional expenditure.

Reliance on humanitarian agencies for logistical support

Local media became too accepting of stories and information from relief agencies without subjecting it to critical analysis. Aid agencies, particularly the UN, were seen as good sources and not scrutinised.

Corruption within the media resulting from low pay and political affiliations

In Liberia, there were cases of journalists writing vanity pieces for money and, at worst, blackmailing those they had negative stories about to avoid publication.

Lack of capacity for investigative reporting

The conflict drove many of the more skilled reporters and editorial personnel out of the country. Following the conflict, low salaries prompted many in the media to search for more lucrative employment. Media organisations in post-conflict situations do not have the funds to support time-consuming and expensive investigations

Despite the weakness and bias of local media in some countries, participants agreed that the potential for supporting serious journalists to address corruption remains unrealised in most contexts. Kunda Dixit, from the Nepali Times, offered an inspiring example of the way unflinching local coverage of corruption can contribute to ending a long-running conflict (see Annex 5 for full presentation).

Corruption coverage in Nepal: paving the way for the Rhododendron Uprising

Nepal's recent history, a turbulent ride from autocratic rule, through a flawed democratic transition to the King's resumption of control and subsequent popular revolt, provides a case study in how local media's investigations can contribute to transparency.

During the four years in which the democratic process was subverted, investigative reports uncovered a systematic plunder of the national treasury by the King and the military. Through contacts with ministry officials, local media was able to use whistleblowers' testimonies to uncover systematic patterns of corruption.

Investigations showed how money from unspent development funds would be transferred to 'Miscellaneous' or 'Contingency' budget lines before being siphoned off for the King's personal use or unauthorised military expenditure. Money earmarked for building roads, repairing bridges and for health and education was shown to have financed a royal tour of Africa (Rs 60 million) and the purchase of two bullet-proof Jaguar limousines (Rs 55 million). In aggregate, successive royal governments made illicit transfers of Rs 50 billion. Media investigations also uncovered corrupt agreements between the King's son-in-law and investors in telecommunications, hydropower and other lucrative areas of investment.

During the period of royal rule, journalists feared that their investigations would not lead to action. Now they believe their contribution to the exposure of corruption registered with the Nepali people and helped ground feelings of grievance and mistreatment in objective facts.

Dixit argues:
"Corruption is news if it is out of the ordinary. But what do you do if it is endemic. We covered honesty, the exceptions, the really good guys. We chose stories that would have maximum impact – cases of money not reaching maternity hospitals – to show that corruption can be a matter of life or death."

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3. MEDIA-AGENCY RELATIONS: HOW TO BREAK THE IMPASSE?

Participants described the relationship between humanitarian agencies and the media as characterised by a 'healthy tension': the media proves useful to humanitarian agencies in drumming up public support and donations but criticism is feared. Agencies are wary of being implicated in stories that would damage their reputation both in the field of operation and at home. Humanitarian agencies are often perceived as overly secretive, unforthcoming and unnecessarily hostile to probing questions.

Maurice Herson, Senior Projects Manager in the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian response (ALNAP), provided an overview of the interaction between humanitarian agencies and the media, the impact of disproportionate media coverage and the extent to which media coverage can direct humanitarian assistance (see Annex 6 for full presentation)

"It's a story of black and white – we love the media and we hate and fear them. We use them when we can. Of course they also use us – they need stories and sales or viewers, and we can provide some of the voices and facts and views that make those stories. We speak a language that the international media can understand, literally and more metaphorically speaking. Behind all these oversimplified and provocative, not to say aggressive statements is a more complex reality."

Gunnar Anderson, Director of Care Norway, also highlighted the dangers of simplistic communication. NGOs' marketing machines create myths that they sell to the public portraying humanitarian assistance as a saintly endeavour, a depiction that does not account for the difficulties in operating in emergency situations and allow the public to understand the inevitable pitfalls that will be encountered. As Hans Skotte from Norwegian University of Science and Technology noted, "We've painted ourselves into a corner by not openly acknowledging the complexities, the difficulties, and the dilemmas people face in the field." Reflecting on his experience in Bosnia, Skotte critiqued the cosy relationship there between Norwegian journalists and aid workers: (see Annex 7 for full presentation)

"Emergencies, reporting on them, and international humanitarian response constitute a reciprocal troika. In practical terms emergencies do not exist, and trigger no action, where there is no-one to report on it. In this sense Bosnia was a true emergency. The Norwegian media, for instance, was in Bosnia primarily to report on the Norwegian achievements. Their key sources were field staff of Norwegian NGOs … This (agenda) allowed international agencies to embed incoming reporters, i.e. to accommodate, transport and strategically inform them on issues deemed important to, say, the Norwegian public. They were not, by the nature of their operations, their source of funding, and by their moral standing in the eyes of the public, interested in presenting

fraud and failed projects. But, honest, who would? And furthermore, what media institution would release resources for investigating some irregularities by actually digging in the fields in a far-away country?"

If media coverage normally focuses on feel-good portrayals of heroic humanitarian workers, the rare corruption story will inevitably be – or seem – more damaging by virtue of its very exceptionalism. Participants noted that the only way for agencies to truly tackle the threat of scandalous headlines is to communicate the complexities of aid operations in a more regular, and nuanced, manner. Encouraging responsible and balanced reporting on corruption can help manage public expectations in the long-run.

Principles for media when confronting corruption

- Go beyond the details to expose flaws in system
- Try to set the agenda for reform and follow up your stories
- Go after the biggest culprits but don't treat a story as a one-off when it's actually endemic to the system
- Avoid trivialisation and sensationalism: a sober and authoritative tone provides moral power
- Investigate basic services, health care and education, because that's where corruption hurts most. Avoid being distracted by political intrigue and being restricted to urban stories
- Be open to trans-boundary investigations, if foreign companies or organisations are involved, journalists from that country might collaborate

How can agencies promote responsible reporting? Participants suggested a three-pronged approach that includes: 1) increasing transparency of aid operations by publishing information about funding and expenditures in a timely, accessible manner; 2) informing about corruption problems proactively, and 3) providing direct assistance to local media in emergency contexts.

There are indications that some agencies are addressing corruption concerns more openly than ever before. Oxfam's recent announcement that it closed down a tsunami relief programme in Aceh because of corruption (see case study below) is a notable example of this trend. By explaining to the press why problems had occurred and setting out what action had been taken, Oxfam pre-empted criticism and was, to some extent, able to counter it.

Case Study: Oxfam Announces $ 22,000 Lost in Tsunami Programme

In early 2006, a new member of staff at Oxfam's Aceh programme reported irregularities in procurement. Following a seven week investigation, there was evidence of losses of $22,000. Recognising that this was a serious problem, not limited to Oxfam, Oxfam debated whether to make an announcement. The Country Program Manager, the Regional Director and the Director of Oxfam International concurred that due to the scale of the problem and its impact upon beneficiaries and programme effectiveness, Oxfam should speak out. The hope was that this would set an example of openness and accountability to the donors and the broader humanitarian community: better to confront the problem head on and open up space for greater debate on the issues.

So what was the reaction from other agencies, donors and the media?

Oxfam reported a good deal of positive feedback from other agencies in Aceh who were thankful that the issue had been made public. Similarly, Oxfam's donors were supportive and welcomed the attempt to tackle the problem in a transparent and accountable manner.

With regard to the media, Oxfam pointed to a general fear amongst humanitarian agencies that corruption stories would be hyped, building individual examples into something much bigger, perhaps a picture of endemic corruption and mismanagement. This threatened to have a dramatic impact on public support and fundraising. The question was how to break this cycle and the tendency to shy away from public confrontation.

Oxfam believed that had their announcement coincided with the one year anniversary of the Tsunami there would have been greater coverage and likelihood that it would have been more critical. In fact, the majority of the international media reported the incident in a factual, objective manner. The New York Times sought to explain the broader picture and take into account the challenges faced by humanitarian agencies. The NYT journalist is one of few journalists to have specialised knowledge of not-for-profits and humanitarian operations. The Sunday Times (UK), on the other hand, used a more sensational style of reporting but still focused on beneficiary impact.

The local media were less supportive, more sensational and less accurate in their reporting. This was thought to be partially due to the quality of the media and the challenges they faced in gaining access to information and conducting serious investigations.

Oxfam's approach is not, of course, risk-free. In some contexts, negative coverage of relief operations can have serious repercussions for staff security. In Rwanda and Burundi, death threats against aid workers accused of involvement in corruption scandals have been issued in the national press. Such cases illustrate the need to promote objective reporting by working consistently – not just when problems arise – with serious journalists identified in the local environment.

What assistance to the media is appropriate?

Donors have a range of options in their efforts to increase constructive media coverage of emergencies. The following needs assessment can help identify entry points for support.

Needs assessment for media support in emergencies

Infrastructure
- What media exists in the area of emergency (radio, TV, newspapers, internet access, others)?
- Is the media affected by the emergency and what immediate needs exists for restoring media infrastructure?

Audience
- Which media is most important for the affected population?
- What languages are important to use in media productions?
- Is illiteracy high/low and how can illiterate populations be reached?
- Do affected communities have access to the media they normally use? If not, is it necessary to provide them with radio receivers or other access to media?

Media content
- Is the local media providing an accurate and balanced picture of the emergency and its impact? Is the media reflecting the needs of the affected population and addressing the extent to which these needs have been met?
- What is the ownership structure of the media, and does this affect the editorial policies?
- Is the coverage having any negative affect on particular communities or distorting the reality of the relief effort?

Access to information
- Can journalists get easy access to information from national and local authorities and from international organisations operating in the emergency?
- Is there a need to address access to information for media?
- Should the provision of information from international organisations be increased?

- Is it relevant for international and/or national humanitarian organisations to develop joint information platforms? To what extent are journalists being offered information that goes beyond public relations briefings?

Restrictions for journalistic work
- Are the any restrictions for journalists to carry out their work, such as legal constraints, direct censorship, self-censorship, harassment, pressure or threats?

Capacities
- Are journalists well-prepared and suitably skilled to cover the emergency and the needs arising from it?
- If not, should specialised training be offered? In what areas?
- To what extent is the media politically and financially independent? What might prevent them from covering issues objectively and impartially?
- What is the potential penalties local media will face when confronting corruption and malpractice?

Safety
- Are journalists and other media workers among the population affected by the emergency and should special attention be given to this group?
- What threats exist to journalists' safety?
- Are any organisations monitoring freedom of speech?

Following an assessment, donors could consider the following models of assistance:

Media Fund

Establishing a central media fund, into which donors contribute funds, avoids reliance on the government to provide financial assistance to particular (favoured) media outlets. The media fund can be based on key principles – that funds are allocated to support free and independent media, perhaps with an emphasis on providing balanced and objective coverage of emergency operations – but individual donors do not direct funds to any specific organisations. Instead, a governing board oversees allocations.

In Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans, the SCOOP project (www.i-scoop.org) was established to support investigative reporting. Along with the funds provided, a network of journalists was set up to provide editorial and legal assistance to investigative journalists.

Resource Centre
Given the financial strain placed on many local media outlets, the provision of central facilities – communications, printing facilities and possibly studios – offers an infrastructural base that can be used by all local media without funding any outlets directly.

Training across the media
Specialised training, equipping journalists with in-depth knowledge of and access to emergency operations, can improve the quality and breadth of reportage and help build trust between agencies and local media.

Funded follow-up trips
Foreign Ministries have funded trips for their media to return to emergency situations.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs paid for survivors to return to Thailand and see the recovery operation. With a domestic hook, the Norwegian media followed and provided good coverage of how donations to rehabilitation on the Island of PiPi had never reached there. Instead, funds were diverted, often to individuals with Government connections, to rebuild big hotels.

Media Development Organisations
There are many organisations with expertise in the field of media support and development that have experience of needs assessments and integrating considerations of long-term sustainability into any assistance.

For additional information see the list of resources in Annex 1.

Recommendations to Donors:

In each emergency situation, take stock of the following questions and devise a media strategy accordingly:

- What are the risks in exposing or failing to expose incidents of corruption?
- What action can be taken to send a clear message that corruption will not be tolerated and will be investigated thoroughly?
- What measures can be taken to ensure that preparation and risk assessments are not rushed, exposing agencies to greater corruption risks?
- What action can be taken to publicly support agencies that have decided to confront cases of corruption?
- What can be done to provide information on the overall picture of corruption, alleviating the risk that one agency will bear disproportionate responsibility if they go public?

Develop a policy of supporting agencies confronting corruption
Agencies' willingness to confront corruption publicly will depend partly on their confidence that donors will support them. Donors should make it a clear policy to encourage a transparent approach towards corruption. When agencies do proactively address corruption, donors should back them through public statements where appropriate.

Ensure information concerning the aid intervention is public and accessible
Donors should establish access to information policies for implementing partners and themselves, so that media can more easily track allocations of funds, the areas of expenditure and the extent to which the needs of affected communities are met. Some of this, such as pledges made, amounts allocated, recipients of funds and the timetable of financial allocations should ideally be sourced from donors. Similarly, donors' own efforts to investigate the extent and causes of corruption should be made public. This will increase public confidence that the matter is taken seriously and addressed rigorously. It will provide the media with a basis for inquiry and help to set individual cases of corruption in context to prevent distortion of particular examples.

Provide resources for proactive communication
For implementing agencies to operate communications departments with responsibility for working creatively with international and local media, the costs of professionalism must be reflected in the budget.

Support specialised training on humanitarian aid
...for journalists operating in crisis-affected countries, including those based in donor countries for international media outlets.

Assist local media in crisis-affected countries
Recognition that local media coverage can contribute to, and improve, accountability and transparency justifies assistance to local media (see needs assessment above). Donors should assess the possibilities for integrating support to local media into their emergency response allocations.

Examples of support to local media in crisis-affected countries

Zambia
In response to concerns about the impact of biased funding, a media fund was established with its own governing body. Donors contributed to the general budget and funds were allocated by the board. Alternatively, organisations with an expertise in media development could be brought in to assess and deliver the necessary assistance.

Darfur, Sudan

In Darfur the local media is severely hampered by Government regulation and restrictions on access. The BBC World Service Trust established a project – primarily to bring needed information to the affected populations – which contained an element of training for local journalists. In this project, local journalists worked with more experienced producers in order to match local knowledge with professional expertise. The project provided long-term, continuous coverage of relief and recovery operations whilst building local expertise in this area as well.

Liberia

A media centre under the national press union has been strengthened in order to provide Liberian journalists with better access to internet information and communication, facilities for training and meetings, and working space. The centre thereby serves as a means for strengthening capacities of local journalists.

Recommendations to Humanitarian Agencies:

Humanitarian agencies are often responsible for distorting expectations of what can be delivered and how fast. The media might compound this impression but agencies bear some responsibility for correcting false expectations and providing a more realistic picture of the field of operations. In this regard, agencies could engage with the media in the following ways:

Resist using the media as a public relations device
...promoting the organisation at the expense of informing the public. As a matter of policy, agencies should acknowledge the validity of external scrutiny and investigation; providing that it is conducted in a fair and balanced manner.

Operate an access to information policy
...allowing journalists to trace expenditure and assess the quality and effectiveness of the relief effort. Work with other organisations to determine a consistent approach to information disclosure, particularly in cases involving corruption.

Build long-standing relationships
Draw on the experience of organisations that have employed media experts to liaise with journalists, build up long-standing relationships with both international and local media, and aim to deepen journalists' understanding of the complexities of emergency operations.

Recommendations to Local Media:

Relief agencies and donors can only be expected to engage with media that conducts investigations with balance and objectivity. Political partisanship will not be supported. To be in a position to expect cooperation from domestic and international organisations, local media should:

Follow situations over time
Realise the traditional media roles as watchdog and whistle-blower, providing a voice to victims and affected communities and ensuring that, where their needs are not met, questions are raised. Where possible, stories should not be a "one-off" but rather follow the situation of crisis-affected populations over time.

Investigate the causes
Maintain regular contact with relief organisations, make efforts to understand the difficulties faced during relief operations and convey these to the audience. Where necessary, probe areas of weakness and investigate the causes of corruption and malpractice.

Relate local knowledge
...to particular cases, providing insight and explanations of how corruption becomes possible and what measures can be taken to limit it.

Explore possibilities for assistance
In situations where skills or resources are inadequate, make these known to agencies and donors and explore possibilities for assistance.

Recommendations to International Media:

Promote expertise
...in the area of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief and reconstruction. Emergency situations are too complex to be understood by generalists. Specialisation enables journalists to set individual cases in context, investigate malpractice and common, systemic causes of corruption. Thorough knowledge on the part of the media will encourage cooperation from agencies and donors.

Advocate for access to information
...regarding relief activities from government bodies, agencies and donors as a basic right of affected citizens.

Provide solidarity
Where possible, assist in the support of local media and provide solidarity where local journalists are persecuted or harassed for their reporting on corruption.

Annex 1:   List of Resources

ARTICLE 19 (www.article19.org)
Named after Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ARTICLE 19 focuses on projects that oppose censorship by promoting freedom of expression standards and access to official information. Currently, it has partners in over 30 countries and concentrates particularly on strengthening local capacity to monitor and protest institutional and informal censorship. It has strong emphasis on developing standards that advance media freedom.

BBC World Service Trust (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust)
The WST provides media training, media monitoring assistance and has media development programmes running across the world. The Trust runs lifeline programming, partnering BBC journalists with local media to produce radio programmes for emergency situations. Lifeline programming has taken place in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Rwanda and Burundi.

Committee to Protect Journalists (www.cpj.org)
The Committee to Protect Journalists was founded 1981 by a group of U.S. foreign correspondents concerned at the treatment of foreign colleagues by authoritarian governments. It now seeks to promote press freedom worldwide by defending the right of journalists to report the news, by publicising abuses against the press and by acting on behalf of imprisoned and threatened journalists.

Freevoice (www.freevoice.nl)
Free Voice is a media organization in the Netherlands that strives for independent and multiform media, and balanced and reliable journalistic press freedom.

The organisation supports independent media organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East en North Africa. Free Voice focuses its activities on increasing the expertise of journalists and media managers; community radio; children's news programmes; and media credit funding

Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) (www.iwpr.net)
IWPR works with local journalism in areas of conflict. It provides training of reporters, encourages dialogue between journalists and tries to provide reliable information about conflict areas. It runs major programmes in Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Iraq. The Institute maintains offices in Almaty, Baku, Balgrade, Bishkek, The Hague, Kabul, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tashkent, Tbilisi and Dushanbe with representatives in Tirana, Vladikavdaz and Yetevan.

Index on Censorship (www.indexonline.org)
Index on Censorship is a magazine founded in 1972 by writers, journalists and artists inspired by the British poet Stephen Spender to defend the right of free expression. It documents free expression abuses and reports on censorship issues across the world. It also undertakes media development and training projects, most recently in Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

International Freedom of Expression Exchange (www.ifex.org)
IFEX is an international network currently comprised of 65 organisations, based in Toronto, Canada, and managed by Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. IFEX sponsors the Action Alert Network (AAN) in which member organisations report free expression abuses in their geographic region or area of expertise to the Clearing House which, in turn, circulates this information to other members and interested organizations all over the world. IFEX also has an outreach programme that tries to support new freedom of expression organizations in the developing world, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

International Media Support (IMS) (www.i-m-s.dk)
IMS was established in 2001 as an initiative of the Danish media community supported by the Danish Government. IMS undertakes rapid interventions to promote and strengthen press freedom and professional journalism and to improve the working conditions of local media practitioners. IMS has undertaken a large number of interventions in conflict areas, working with local partners and frequently with international NGOs.

Internews (www.internews.org)
Internews Network is a US based organisation that tries to improve information access by both fostering and assisting the development of independent media and by promoting open communications policies throughout the world. It is the funding member of Internews International which has members currently working in 47 countries spanning Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America.

International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) (www.irex.org)
IREX is a broad based international organisation, based in Washington DC and founded in 1968, that specialises in education, promoting independent media and internet development in the USA, Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and Asia. It's work ranges from professional training to legislative reform with focus upon developing the capacity of independent media to support civil society.

International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org)

The International Federation of Journalists is the world's largest organisation of journalists. It was established in its present form in 1952. The Federation represents around 500 000 members in more than 100 countries. The IFJ promotes international action to defend press freedom and social justice through strong, free and independent trade unions for journalists. It has recently co-established an International News Safety Fund (INSI) to provide humanitarian aid for journalists in need.

Reporters without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontieres) (www.rsf.org)

Reporters without Borders is a Paris based international organisation with branches in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. It issues press releases and public-awareness campaigns on behalf of journalists under attack and provides financial and other types of support to their families. It also campaigns against censorship. In January 2002, it creates the Damocles Network to provide victims of abuse with legal services and represent them before the national and international courts.

UNESCO Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace (www.unesco.org)

UNESCO has taken a lead role in the field of conflict and media within the UN family. UNESCO supports independent media in conflict and post-conflict situations to enable them to gather and disseminate non-partisan information. UNESCO's actions in this area includes the promotion of dialogue among media professionals in zones of conflict and the outside world and provision of advice to the authorities of countries in post-conflict situations in drafting new media legislation that enhances the development of freedom of expression. The organisation has hosted a number of conferences within this area in order to discuss and promote joint policies, including the 2004 Belgrade conference.

World Press Freedom Committee (www.wpfc.org)

The World Press Freedom Committee is a US based international umbrella representing approximately 45 organisations – ranging from print and broadcast media, through labour and management organisations, to journalists, editors, publishers and owners across the world. Its main activities are advocacy for freedom of expression, complemented by legal assistance grants to journalists and news media, and training programmes, seminars and publications of how-to journalistic manuals.

Annex 2: MEDIA IMPACTS ON CORRUPTION THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT CYCLE

Work by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (Ewins, P., Harvey, P., Savage, K. , Jacobs, A. (2006) Mapping the Risks of Corruption in Humanitarian Action – downloadable from www.u4.no) maps out corruption risks at different stages of a relief intervention. These stages include:

• Initial Assessment
• Fundraising
• Agreements to work with local organisations
• Procurement and Logistics
• Targeting and Registration
• Implementation and Distribution
• Reporting/Monitoring/Evaluation
• Finance/Human Resources/Administration

In the following tables, we build on the work of ODI to offer a preliminary overview of some of those risks, suggesting positive and negative impacts that the media might have.

Positive impacts

Project Cycle Phase	Corruption Risks	Possible Media Impact
Initial Assessment	• Inflation of needs to create surplus funds	In scrutinising assessments, the media should be able to: • contrast funds sought with actual needs • identify corruption risks according to past behaviour • discern motivations for distorting figures, by donors, and political groups
Fundraising	• Funds become misdirected, no longer allocated according to the principle of greatest need, but along partisan lines. • Bogus NGOs cash in on mobilisation of funds	In analysing how funds are raised and allocated, the media should be able to: • compare pledges to actual funds • trace allocations and see how they fit principles of humanitarian assistance • provide a watchdog role over unscrupulous operations
Contracting Local Organisations	• Local partners inflate costs and their own assessment of needs. • Corruption within local offices, using funds for personal gain or disbursing along political/familial lines	In reporting the delivery of assistance at grass-root level, the media should be able to discern: • whether beneficiaries receive their entitlements • whether needs are being met • whether funds exceed needs at local level The local media should provide an understanding of the local context and an awareness of possible pitfalls that agencies could encounter.
Procurement and Logistics	• Commodities are siphoned off for external distribution, stockpiled or looted. • Prices are inflated, bribery occurs, sub-standard goods are used	In tracing the delivery of relief assistance, the media is capable of: • Providing an analysis of the political and power nexus to explain how aid is being directed and manipulated • Exposing relationships between individuals and companies that benefit from corruption • Acting as a whistleblower when individual incidents are uncovered • Illustrating the harm done to affected communities when aid fails to reach them

Project Cycle Phase	Corruption Risks	Possible Media Impact
Targeting and Registration	• Bribes are sought for inclusion on registration lists for aid • Registration criteria are made complex to blur accountability • Affected communities, and their needs, are used as magnets for political attention and increased aid	When looking at affected communities' access to assistance, the media is able to: • Provide a voice for communities who are denied their entitlements • Provide needed information on entitlements and the criteria for registration • Contribute to a call for a transparent process • Perform a whistleblower duty when individuals are denied what they are entitled to or when they are used as pawns in a broader political struggle
Implementation and Distribution	• Assistance is diverted or stolen • Distribution is repeated, according to different local principles and power structures • Local taxation of relief goods	Through contact with beneficiaries, media can: • Follow aid past the point of distribution to see how distribution ends up • Stimulate public debate on end use of aid and its effectiveness
Reporting /Monitoring / Evaluation	• Reporting used to cover up fraud and hide surplus funds • Manipulation of evaluation of situation to attract further funding	In scrutinising reports, the media should be able to: • Expose inconsistencies between claims of assistance and the reality for beneficiaries • Discern motivations for distorting figures and identify who stands to benefit
Finance/HR/Admin	• Embezzlement, fraud and nepotistic appointments	• As above

The corruption risks identified by ODI and others show how the principles of humanitarian delivery are too often subordinated beneath political demands and allegiances. The media, especially at the international level, has the opportunity to contrast the rhetoric of governments, donors and humanitarian agencies with the reality of their programmes and delivery and ensure that the affected population benefits from and receives the total amount of aid pledged.

Local media should be in a position to warn of possible pitfalls and, with prior knowledge of political and familial affiliations, know where to look for signs of corruption. With links and cultural and linguistic ties to the affected population, they should be able to spot discord between relief efforts and the lives of victims of disasters. The reality, of course, is that much media coverage does not have this impact. Few journalists are able, willing or editorially permitted to conduct sustained, meticulous investigations.

Negative impacts

The media can have a negative impact on corruption risks, exacerbating problems rather than reducing risk. Possible negative effects are outlined below:

Project Cycle Phase	Corruption Risks	Possible Media Impact
Initial Assessment	• Inflation of needs to create surplus funds	• Inflated figures sell stories, media coverage contributes to a distorted picture of need • Lack of scrutiny leads media to accept assessments at face value • Local media acts as function of political allegiances, contributing to misdirection of assistance

Project Cycle Phase	Corruption Risks	Possible Media Impact
Fundraising	• Funds become misdirected, no longer allocated according to the principle of greatest need, but along partisan lines • Bogus NGOs cash in on mobilisation of funds	• Media coverage focuses on particular areas, often those that are most easily accessible, drawing disproportionate attention to particular communities • Perpetuates simplistic assumption that all help is good help • Poor understanding of the principles of humanitarian assistance necessary to analyse whether they are being practiced or not
Contracting Local Organisations	• Local partners inflate costs and their own assessment of needs • Corruption within local offices, using funds for personal gain or disbursing along political/familial lines	• Superficial contact with affected communities resulting in a cursory interest in their predicament • Limited knowledge about aid entitlements preventing detection of diversions and barred access • Obstacles to access to information, which lead the media to reflect an inaccurate picture • International media not interested in local situation unless there is an international hook for the story
Procurement and Logistics	• Commodities are siphoned off for external distribution, stockpiled or looted • Prices are inflated, bribery occurs, sub-standard goods are used	• Local media insufficiently independent; acts as communications arm of a political faction • Local media too weak to investigate corruption, especially if it involves the military • Lack of transparency barring media from the truth • Lack of interest in the bigger picture, once the story of disaster has broken, little editorial incentive for in-depth investigation as to the result of aid allocations
Targeting and Registration	• Bribes are sought for inclusion on registration lists for aid • Registration criteria are made complex to blur accountability • Affected communities, and their needs, are used as magnets for political attention and increased aid	• Media follows top line stories and does not represent the beneficiaries • Local media bows to political pressure and allegiances
Implementation and Distribution	• Assistance is diverted or stolen • Distribution is repeated, according to different local principles and power structures • Local taxation of relief goods	• As above
Reporting / Monitoring / Evaluation	• Reporting used to cover up fraud and hide surplus funds • Manipulation of evaluation of situation to attract further funding	• Official reports are taken as fact • Insufficient knowledge about the situation of beneficiaries to contrast claims with reality • Inadequate knowledge of political context in which manipulation can take place
Finance/HR/Admin	• Embezzlement, fraud and nepotistic appointments	• International media not interested in low-level corruption • Local media protecting same powerful elite

Annex 2.b. INTRODUCTION

Jesper Højberg, Executive Director. International Media
Support

This meeting is meant to be an open engagement between media professionals and key humanitarian actors. It is a working session where two key professional groups - present in most emergencies – will initiate a discussion on *how to minimize the risk of corruption.*

Most of us around this table recognize that an uneasy relationship exists between *humanitarian actors and journalists* both locally and internationally. This has in many instances resulted in less transparency and particularly minimal downward accountability among many aid providers.

Now – some would argue that this is an outdated point of view. Before coming here I had a conversation with a little handful of Danish aid agencies. Danish Red Cross told me for instance that the old attitude was – *don't talk to a journalist since too much media coverage most likely would "alienate public support"*.

Red Cross argued that time has changed. There is now a need to get the information out. A move from a completely closed door to a relatively open door has taken place. The partly open door is illustrated in the following guiding principle given to me by another Danish Agency: *always tell the truth but do not necessarily tell the full truth.*

I was also informed that the humanitarian agencies were not in the business of revealing corruption. They would rather *handle corruption.*

Contrary to this principle of actively handling corruption your Danish colleagues confessed that some degree of corruption in parts of the world was an accepted practice – or corruption is at least handled behind closed door since, as they said; *"you will gain more from keeping silent. It will allow you to maintain good working relations with local authorities".*

They gave examples of "smaller cases" of local corruption from Africa handled in this way. In contrast a case of corruption inside ICRC in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, made the agency chose to actively report the case in the media. So, publicity around cases of corruption varies.

My question to you would be: Is this really the case? Does this not create an ethical dilemma? Are agencies still resisting making information available on cases of corruption? Do the principles of neutrality and confidentiality of the aid agencies constitute a legitimate right/obligation not to reveal certain sensitive information? As one Danish Agency claimed: "We leave it to Amnesty International to do the dirty work. We gain more from not necessarily telling the full truth" (in Dafur for instance).

On the other hand, when aid agencies *do not want to talk to journalists is that then because journalists and media institutions nationally and internationally generally are unreliable, partisan and even in some cases unprofessional?*

We are here to discuss how media can be part of countering corruption in emergencies and catalyse informed public debate.

Is it according to you correct that the main role of media is to scrutinize and reveal corruption and that aid agencies should handle corruption? Is this a healthy division of labour which should be maintained?

Through the discussions it is our hope that key dilemmas (also ethical dilemmas) will be identified. The background document has provided you with some of the crucial issues as we see it. It is of course our hope that this workshop will leave room for further findings and recommendations.

Apart from providing input to a the U4 website on media and corruption the workshop could also be the first step in creating a forum for further discussions of corruption challenges.

Is it possible and even feasible to work towards greater openness on the corruption challenges that you faze as representatives of donors, aid agencies and media institutions?

As a very practical question and possible outcome of the workshop: Is there anything that U4 can do to provide space for this debate?

The ODI/U4 report "Mapping the Risks of Corruption in Humanitarian Action" illustrates how different phases of the project cycle are vulnerable to particular corruption threats. The paper prepared for this workshop suggests *positive and negative* impacts that the media might have on these threats.

Positive impact
If we look at the *positive impact* it is apparent that threats at all phases of the project cycle requires the media to play its traditional role as watchdog and whistleblower through independent thorough and investigative journalism.

Media is there to contrast what Governments, donors and aid agencies promise to deliver with the reality of their programmes. The focus of the media must be the affected population and whether they benefit from the "total aid pledged" or not.

The media must be part of ensuring *downward accountability* as pointed out by the director of Danish Refugee Council: "Agencies are often very sceptical about media scrutinizing aid operations. However, journalists must write for the beneficiaries. Since, often the beneficiaries do not get half of what they are promised. Often information goes out of the

emergency areas to the donors but only limited information goes back towards the beneficiaries".

The main point is here that, as Nicholas Stockton has argued; "humanitarian aid will continue to be weak and inefficient if agencies are not allowing the affected people to be the judges of the quality. But they need to be heard and they need to be informed".

When local media is there and when it can operate in a professional manner it has a role to play in holding the agencies accountable and look for signs of corruption.

But, agencies themselves also work with accountability and transparency by setting up *complaints and feedback mechanisms*. It is not left to the media to ensure this. The principle argument behind the feedback mechanism of Danish Refugee Council in the Caucasus is "that if beneficiaries do not understand what aid they are entitled to then likelihood of corruption is greatly increased".

Negative impact
On a possible *negative impact* the international and local media do not always have the ability, even the willingness and the editorial permission to conduct investigations.

In some cases the media even become the victim of corruption within its own ranks. Media in emergency areas in many instances lack the necessary professionalism and often are polarized, partisan and politically biased. Strange affiliations will make local media report in completely unpredictable ways and often the agencies – like was the case for Danish Red Cross in Afghanistan – must be carefully guided before working with any local media.

But, as we have seen lack of transparency and openness of the aid agencies also makes it difficult for the media to access the necessary information to carry out investigations.

Moreover, international media are often only interested as long as stories are newsworthy and agencies fear that media coverage will "push away public support".

Most of us will despite the difficulties acknowledge that the media must play a critical watchdog role. We will during the workshop look at cases where the media has exercised pressure and where it has failed to do address corruption.

Understanding the reality of media in conflict and emergencies
We will, however, also today seek to enhance our understanding of the particular reality of international and local media operations. It must be an integral part of the first assessment of aid agencies to understand the local media environment. Also if humanitarian agencies want to communicate effectively they need to understand the local media environment.

One question could be: are humanitarian operations in their efforts to recruit local media professionals by embedding the media within their institutions adding to the destabilisation of the independent media environment?

If the answer to this question is yes, the media in many instances will not be in a position to act as a whistleblower.

Liberia presents itself as a case where the presence of many international aid players (each with their own media/information and PR agenda) can or has resulted in the weakening of the development of the media in its own right.

Every agency takes the journalists for a ride in their "land cruisers" to show them the "good stories". More precisely formulated by a press officer of one of the Danish agencies; "*if we have a good story and and bad story we obviously drive the journalist to see the good story*".

As Edet Ojo points out in his presentation in session 2 – recruitment policies of the agencies and conflict of interest issues restrict the development of a strong and independent media scene.

Related to this it is important to note that in emergencies (and conflicts) media is always both *affected* by the emergency and *affecting* the emergency. The media is therefore not simply there readily available for the aid and international community.

In some instances (like Aceh) media institutions were severely *affected by the tsunami*. Radio stations disappeared with the wave as they disappeared with the earth quake in Pakistan. The rebuilding of basic media infrastructure became an equally important task for the aid community.

In other instances (like Sri Lanka) *the media was and is genuinely part of the conflict* and therefore not - as Amantha will bear witness to - providing unbiased reporting to the beneficiaries.

In Sri Lanka there was obvious political bias in national coverage of the disaster in rebel-controlled areas. This speaks to the difficulties of putting aside political angles to the reportage of disasters in conflict-affected areas.

However, on a positive note in Aceh, 26 December made many decision makers realize the crucial role that locally responsive media can play during a disaster. Community-based media has a strength in covering the problems faced by the local population in the aftermath of the disaster. Radio stations began educating local people about the risks of future tsunamis. The authorities have accepted that new community radio stations are now set up across the country also to be used as a radio network to trigger simultaneous disaster alerts.

Now, my point is that by recognizing the role media plays in creating a stable democratic and peaceful future close

attention needs to be paid to the development of a strong media environment. The role of the media must therefore be addressed at the earliest stage of intervention. It must be recognized as being part of rebuilding a stable society. It has been argued that support for the media in severe emergencies can itself be characterised as humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian agencies and donors must be mindful of this.

The international community and humanitarian aid agencies obviously have a legitimate right to communicate progress in disaster relief efforts. Providing accurate and timely information on this is a perfectly valid aim of the aid community and fostering co-operation between local media and representatives from the aid community is an important part of this.

We must, however, be very clear in distinguishing between so-called "public diplomacy" and steps necessary to create a media environment that can support democracy and good governance.

Although a good deal of healthy tension must exist between aid agencies and the media we hope that the workshop could be a first step in building partnerships between the two – particularly on the issue of fighting corruption.

Danish Refugee Council work in North Caucasus provides a good case-example of how media is an integrated part of the operations. Not only does the agency actively use the media as a tool it also invites journalists to "look over their shoulders".

But the issue is not simply how media report on agency activities – in a vigorous way. Seen from a local media perspective the most important concern is that aid agencies also share responsibility for developing the local media environment.

Annex 3. LONG-TERM DISASTER MANAGEMENT, CORRUPTION AND THE MEDIA - THE SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE

Amantha Perera, Journalist for the Sunday Leader - Sri Lanka

On December 26, 2004, Sri Lanka faced the worst human disaster in its modern history. With limited resources, poorly trained and underpaid staff, the local media was thrust into covering the tragedy and keeping country informed. Given the overwhelming circumstances, it did an admirable job: Local radio stations and TV networks dropped regular programming and switched to continuous coverage of the unfolding disaster.

Two local journalists from Galle (116 km south of the capital Colombo) rode along the tsunami hit southern highway on a motorcycle to deliver a tape to the office of the state-owned Independent Television Network. The tape contained the now world famous images shot by amateur cameraman Ajantha Samarawickrema when the waves rushed into the Galle main bus stand.[2]

On December 27, as result of hearing media reports, villagers in Melsiripura, in the heart of the country, spontaneously collected rations.[3] It was the media's overall coverage that prompted the massive response from the citizens of Sri Lanka at a time when the country's President was overseas and the disaster management process showed early signs of failure.

However, even during these early days, there were indications that the media was being blinded by its own enthusiasm and misplaced emphasis. Instead of keeping attention on the hundreds of thousands of destitute people (The UN estimates that 950,000 Sri Lankans were affected), local television stations turned their cameras on efforts taking place in their own studio complexes to gather relief supplies. In the press too, the story of the victims was overshadowed by issues such as LTTE deaths in the tsunami, political scandals in Colombo, the Interim Self Governing Authority with the Tamil Tigers and the pullout of the National Liberation Front from the government, the murder of Foreign Minister Lakshamn Kadirgamar in August 2005 and the elections.

There is no argument that all these stories deserved to be reported but given the enormity of the destruction, this should not have displaced continuous coverage of the tsunami. No newspaper, TV station or radio station in Sri Lanka set up a tsunami investigations desk. The Sri Lankan media's response displayed little in-depth analysis. Only the Sri Lankan branch of Transparency International carried out a study to analyze media coverage and the findings were damning:

"The voiceless were not given a platform to express themselves at all. The main function of the majority media texts analyzed was to conceal the fact that the state of public opinion at any given time is made up of a system of forces, of tensions, and the serious inadequacy of the Sri Lankan way of journalism toward representing the state of public opinion," [4]

Two months after the tragedy, one story encapsulated how the majority of the media, both international and local, dealt with the tsunami and the infant rehabilitation effort: The famous Baby 81 story broken by the Associated Press. It was a sensational story of how a baby, having miraculously survived the tsunami, was being claimed by nine mothers. It was the perfect sunshine story after the gloom. Unfortunately, there was no story, at least not in the manner it was reported. The New York Times called the baby Sri Lanka's "most celebrated tsunami orphan". But there was only one family that claimed the child and, due to the media hoopla, the parents had to go to court and only got custody after a DNA test.

"The person who did the first report could be excused for having being misled, but how about the front line reporters from international organizations who went to the hospital to check the story out. Were they taken for a ride, or simply did not want to kill a good story though over verification? One thing is clear, it will be difficult to find the parents of the Baby 81 story," [5]

These lessons were not learnt and the trend continued. Thilak Jayaratne, head of research at Transparency International, described it as shutting out the voiceless from the most widely accessed public forum: "The media was basically a tool of the power elite. It reflected the thinking of the power brokers and was not that concerned about the victims or the reconstruction effort."

Corruption and long term reconstruction

In May 2005, international donors pledged $ 3.5 billion to Sri Lanka's reconstruction effort. The media jumped on the figures but there was little in-depth probing into the development plans and their implementation.

By this time, there was evidence to suggest that corruption was taking place. The government announced a 100 to 200 meter no-build buffer zone along the coast. This deprived many households of the right to chose where they wanted to live. They were at the mercy of the government who allocated new land sites. While houses were barred, hotels faced no restrictions inside the zone. This led to ill-informed civilians being forced to sell off land in prime tourist spots for

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2 Author's personal interviews with Samarawickrema

3 Author's personal travel and interviews

4 Post tsunami Media Coverage, The Sri Lankan Experience

5 Sri Lanka Press Institute, 'Some Lessons in Disaster Coverage for Sri Lankan Professional Journalists', June 2005

sub market rates.[6] Others were at the mercy of government agents and officials when trying to gain entry onto lists for land allocation. Those with political patronage succeeded in getting houses for family members.[7] There were also indications that bribes were being solicited in the handing over of boats and fisheries equipment.[8] Most of these stories were underreported or, at worst, not reported at all.

In June 2005, the Auditor General released an interim report on the tsunami's aftermath, highlighting instances of bribe taking and other malpractices. The media covered the report but did little else, there were no probes or follow-up.

Within the massive reconstruction effort, there were signs that contractors were reducing costs of material and labour to make maximum profits. In Siribopura, 10 km from Hambantota, workers building nearly 1000 houses said cheap labour was used and that construction material was over priced in the books. Again in Hambantota, when the buffer zone was reduced in December 2005, the total number of needed houses shot up from 1057 to 3107. Logically, when the zone is reduced the number of units should also reduce as was the case with the national figures and most of the other districts. Officials at the main government reconstruction agency TAFREN were reluctant to divulge details and no media outlet probed the story.

One of the biggest stories to break in 2005 was a tsunami related scandal. The Sunday Leader, a weekend English newspaper, reported that the then Prime Minister and Presidential candidate Mahinda Rajapakse had diverted donations earmarked for tsunami reconstruction to an account controlled by his office. The report said this was a violation of regulations issued by President Chandrika Kumaratunga stating that all tsunami related funds should be deposited in the President's Fund. The sums quoted were between Rs 75 to 100 billion. Despite the obvious connection to the reconstruction effort (Rajapakse hails from the tsunami hit Hambantota district) the reporting followed the lines of the political scandal. After the election in November 05, the story dropped off the radar.

Overall, the Sri Lankan media has shown a lack of interest in pursuing the tsunami reconstruction story. That attitude has meant that corruption-related issues - from government agents seeking bribes to hand over food rations, to hoarding of rations and supplies to large scale corruption - have gone unreported. This lack of coverage has meant that there is very little public discourse on the reconstruction effort. The implementation is taking place without dialogue and the beneficiaries are increasingly feeling frustrated.

The outcome of lack of coverage

The ultimate victims of poor coverage are the beneficiaries. In Sri Lanka, due to the lack of scrutiny by the media, policies with far reaching repercussions were hastily implemented and then pulled back once the results became clear. The buffer zone provides a good example. The media paid little attention to the buffer zone fiasco during the 12 months it took to rescind it. Unfortunately, 55,000 of the 100,000 houses destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the tsunami were located inside this zone. Between 25 to 30% of those affected by the tsunami lived below the poverty line: "The tsunami disaster has increased the vulnerability of a large proportion of the very people whose income was to be uplifted under the Government's poverty reduction programme."[9] Sixteen months after the tragedy, no one really knows how many have become poorer and how many have become richer since the tsunami. And no one appears to be interested in finding out.

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About the Author

Amantha Perera is a journalist and a lecturer on journalism. He contributes regularly to The Sunday Leader and the Inter Press Service. He lectures at the Sri Lankan College of Journalism (SLCJ) and has been trainer on courses conducted by the UNDP, World Bank and BBC. He is currently involved in training regional journalists from tsunami hit areas in the island under a programme jointly conducted by the UNDP and SLCJ.

Annex 4. CHALLENGES FACED BY LOCAL MEDIA IN COVERING CORRUPTION DURING EMERGENCIES: LIBERIA AS A CASE STUDY

Edetaen Ojo – Director, Media Rights Agenda

Introduction

This paper focuses on the role of the media generally and the challenges the media in Liberia confronted in its attempts to cover corruption during the post-conflict transition period, from 2003 to 2005. Although the paper uses Liberia as a case study, many of the manifestations in Liberia will also be applicable in varying degrees in other emergency situations in Africa.

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6 Author's interviews with victims at Polhena beach, Matara, October 2005

7 Author's interviews Peraliya, Galle

8 Author's interviews Sainathimaruthu, Marudamunai and Karathivu

9 Millennium Development Goal Country Report, May 2005, Government of Sri Lanka and UNDP.

Background

Following a military coup in 1980, Liberia was plagued for two and a half decades by political, economic and social crises, with intermittent periods of civil unrest and violent conflicts. These were characterized by widespread killings, including among the civilian populations, forced disappearances, torture, rape and sexual assault against women and children, arbitrary detention, forced recruitment and widespread use of child soldiers, etc.

After a peace agreement signed in 1995, former warlord and rebel leader, Charles Taylor, led the National Patriotic Party (NPP) to win the presidential and parliamentary elections held in July 1997. This resulted in a three-year period of relative calm. But hostilities resumed in 2001, culminating in a violent uprising throughout the country, particularly between June and August 2003. The fighting between rebel forces and government troops during this period in which thousand of people died, is frequently described by Liberians as the three "World Wars", with World War I taking place around June 4, World War II around June 25, and World War III around July 18, 2003.

An internationally supervised peace process was brokered leading to a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Accra, Ghana, between the government and rebel groups on August 18, 2003. This resulted in a power-sharing arrangement under a transitional government headed by Mr. Gyude Bryant as Chairman.

In September 2003, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) by Resolution 1509 with a mandate to deploy 15,000 troops and 1,100 international civilian police officers. Mr. Jacques Paul Klein was named Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Coordinator of the UN Mission in Liberia (SRSG).

In the face of the failure by relief agencies and the transitional government to restore basic social services in Liberia such safe water, electricity and a healthcare system, there have been widespread charges of corruption in the management of donor assistance to Liberia, leading in early 2005 to a decision by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) send a team of auditors to Liberia to conduct a comprehensive and systematic audit of the transitional government.

However, despite such widespread charges and recrimination among government officials and some international actors of massive corruption, the local media was not able to effectively cover the issue of corruption in the management of donor assistance to Liberia for a number of reasons. These include:

Lack of Access to Information about Activities of Humanitarian Agencies

The opaque nature of many humanitarian assistance programmes makes it extremely difficult for local media to access information about their operations and unveil corrupt practices, where they might exist. Although many relief agencies hold regular and frequent press briefings, these usually focus of on disseminating humanitarian information or public diplomacy. There is usually no mechanism for the local media to access other critical information while there is little tolerance within such agencies for probing questions.

In Liberia, for instance, in February 2004, the United Nations, the World Bank and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) published a joint "Joint Needs Assessment", which was designed to focus on the highest priority requirements during Liberia's transition "from relief to recovery", including the conduct of local and national elections in October 2005.

The Needs Assessment covered 13 priority sectors grouped into nine clusters, namely Security; Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR); Reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Returnees and Refugees; Governance and Rule of Law; Elections; Basic Services, including Health and Nutrition, Education, and Community Water and Sanitation; Productive Capacity and Livelihoods; Infrastructure, including Power, Transport, Communications, and Urban Water and Sanitation; and Economic Policy and Development Strategy. Priority Attention was also given to seven cross-cutting themes, namely Gender, HIV/AIDS, Environment, Human Rights, Shelter, Forestry and Media.

The Needs Assessment estimated that the sum of US$243 million would be required in 2004 for the provision of priority needs with a further $244.7 million required during 2005, making a total of $487.7 million for the two years. The allocation of these sums to the different sectors and for specific activities was detailed in a "Results-Focused Transition Framework" (RFTF).

At the Liberia Reconstruction Conference held in New York in February 2004, donors pledged a total of US$520 million in aid for reconstruction of Liberia.

However, throughout the relevant period, no allocation was made to some of the sectors and the proposed activities were not implemented. The explanation for this is that no contributions were received from donors for these sectors or activities. In addition to this, it was claimed that the contributions received from donors were far less than the pledges made.

But local media did not have access to information about what contributions were made by donors towards the pledges they made at the New York conference in February 2004. It was therefore impossible for the local media to

monitor receipts and track expenditure or effectively cover any corruption in the process.

Even the RFTF Implementation and Monitoring Committee (RIMCO), which was the body charged with monitoring the implementation of the RFTF did not have adequate information to give a true and complete picture of the situation. In a report it issued in September 2004 on the progress of the implementation, RIMCO said: "The report is based mainly on information captured through RFTF Activity Tracking Sheets (RATS), devised to report on progress against the RFTF benchmarks. It does not attempt to report on the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) or UN Security Council Resolution 1509, which have their own processes and institutional frameworks. The second source of information is the Informal Tracking Sheet, which tracks pledges and contributions to the RFTF from all sources. Information gathered from the tracking sheet is meant to follow on sources and analyse the status of pledges for the RFTF. *It is important to stress that these figures are informal and do not represent actual disbursement or delivery figures. Furthermore, the sheet does not indicate the contributions for ongoing programmes of partners, including most UN Agencies and INGOs*[10]." (Emphasis supplied).

The report goes on to say that: "Authoritative and precise information on the quantum of actual contributions, disbursements and delivery by sources, by timing and by RFTF clusters must be made available. This information is essential to inform decision making by all partners working within RFTF structures. The scope of activities covered through the Informal Tracking Sheet must also be increased. To succeed, efforts will need to have the support and cooperation of donors. This is an important part of the two-way mutual accountability under the RFTF."

In the absence of precise information within the system itself, it would be extremely ambitious to expect the media to monitor and report on the process accurately. Local media practitioners frequently expressed their frustration at not being able to access information about contributions made by donors, when they were made and for what purposes. This obviously resulted in their inability to effectively monitor the process and track any corrupt practice.

In response to this gap, at a consultative meeting held in Monrovia in December 2005 to discuss, among others, a draft Freedom of Information Act for Liberia, media practitioners present insisted that in addition to applying the proposed act to Liberian government institutions and agencies, it should also be applicable to international organizations and institutions operating in Liberia.

Although such a proposal is potentially problematic and unrealistic, it is imperative that there should be a mechanism through which journalists can access information about what pledges have been redeemed, how much has been received, to what aspects of the reconstruction programme they were being applied, what has actually been spent and by what institution or agency.

One area that generated considerable interest in the post-conflict situation was the UN-supervised Demilitarization, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR) programme. One year after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Mr. Jacques Klein, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General and Coordinator of the UN Operations in Liberia, claimed that over 66,000 combatants had been disarmed under an arrangement in which US$300 was paid to every former combatant that was disarmed. Curiously though, even by its own account, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) said it had collected and destroyed only 20,000 weapons. At the end of the DDRR programme, UNMIL claimed to have demobilized 103,000 former combatants[11], almost twice the 53,000 combatants which was projected in February 2004 as the target number to be demobilized throughout the exercise.

These claims have been viewed with suspicion and skepticism as it is difficult to understand the ratio of one weapon to more than three combatants, especially given that at the inception of programme, it had been projected that an average of three weapons would be recovered from each combatant.

With a substantial portion of donor assistance reported to have gone into the DDRR process, there were grumblings about the disappointing returns.

But the local media had no access to the information with which to interrogate this situation. The tendency among many assistance agencies and international organizations is that the media should play a public relations role for them by acknowledging and publicizing the "good work" they are doing. There is therefore a lack of tolerance for inquisitive, probing local journalists and any attempt to question their work provokes anger.

An instance of resentment of any implied criticism of the operations of international agencies is evident in a report by an IRIN correspondent who interviewed Mr. Klein about the corruption in the DDRR in July 2004. IRIN reports that when asked about the issue of anomalies in the DDRR process, "Klein flatly rejected the notion that non-combatants were abusing the DDRR system in order to grab the cash handout. 'That's not true, that's absolutely false!' *he said angrily*[12]." (Emphasis supplied).

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10 See "Results-Focused Transition Framework (RFTF) Progress Review Report", September 2004, issued by the RIMCO (RFTF Implementation and Monitoring Committee) Support Office in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs in Monrovia, Liberia.

11 Press Briefing by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) January 19, 2005.

12 See "LIBERIA: Where are the weapons? Is disarmament really working?", IRIN report of July 28, 2004.

Transparent systems and processes as well as a regime of access to information are essential for the elimination of corrupt practices in any institution or process. Development organizations and relief agencies much therefore institute effective mechanisms to ensure this while also demonstrating a willingness to subject themselves to scrutiny and to account to the public their serve for their actions, where this is required or necessary.

Media Dependency and Conflict of Interests

In an environment of low economic activity in the post-conflict period in Liberia, UN agencies and relief organizations were the main sources of advertising revenue for newspapers and other media organizations. Some of these agencies and organizations have been known to withhold advertising from newspapers which had written offensive articles about them and to blacklist them from their other activities. One example of this is UNMIL which blacklisted the "Vanguard" newspaper and stopped giving it advertising as a result of an article published by the newspaper.

In the fierce competition for the little advertising available to the media in Liberia, many media organizations were very careful not to get into the black books of international organizations which were seen as the main source of advertising revenue for the media.

Besides the issue of advertising revenue, in many cases, poorly resourced journalists and media organizations depend on relief agencies for transportation, accommodation and other logistical assistance, especially when they operate in counties outside the capital city, Monrovia. Many relief agencies have four wheel drive vehicles to navigate difficult terrains to many places outside Monrovia or can afford to hire helicopters for their operations in such places which would reduce a two-day journey to an hour or so. No media organization in Liberia could on its own afford either of these modes of transportation.

In addition, relief agencies end up showing journalists around and pointing out the "real issues" to them. Since the journalists are heavily dependent on aid workers for logistical and other support as well as information sources, they frequently pass on information obtained from relief agencies uncritically.

This practice appears to be quite widespread. According to Mark Turner, who has served as Financial Times correspondent in Nairobi, Kenya, "the aid agencies offer ideas, research and experts on the ground, logistical help and so forth. In return, aid agencies want us to highlight their cause so they get funding."[13]

Obviously, this relationship undermines independent reporting in many cases with the result that the activities and operations of development organizations and relief agencies

are not given the same level of scrutiny which is given to governments or corporations.

Anthony Morland who covered the volcano eruptions in Goma for the AFP, offers addition argument why this is so, observing that "traditionally, aid agencies, especially the UN, are good sources; that is, their information is frequently passed on without checking because if the information proves to be false, the journalist is covered."[14]

But while this may be so, the media loses its watchdog role if it uncritically accepts whatever information comes from aid agencies because they have a certain profile or image. It also exposes itself to manipulative tendencies.

Turner captured this aptly when he said: "If the UN aid agency is declaring a disaster, it goes out on TV, then radio, and sometimes as a newspaper journalist, you will come under pressure to write it even if you don't believe it, and take it from me, people make things up and exaggerate numbers all the time. You can even get weird bidding processes with different groups giving ever higher estimates as to numbers of dead etc., all of which make the story more sellable."[15]

An even more worrisome example of the corrupt manipulation of the media by relief organizations which capitalize on the uncritical coverage of aid agencies by the media, is provided by Dr Paul Moorcraft, a former war correspondent and editor of Defence Review, when he observed that "some aid agencies use that, as in the case with the redemption of slaves in Sudan; a Norwegian aid agency staged a huge set-up. They rounded up some Sudanese children in a field, recruited some Arab looking men to pose as slave traders, documented the whole thing as a slave trade in order to get money for the redemption of these supposed slaves, and half an hour later, those 'slaves' were back at work in the fields as free people."[16]

While it is true that there is frequently a convergence of interests between the media and relief agencies, it is quite obvious that the degree of collaboration which exists between journalists and aid workers would undoubtedly be considered unacceptable if it involved commercial organizations or national governments, rather than relief agencies.

The media must retain a healthy level of skepticism in their relationship with relief agencies for them to be effective in their watchdog role.

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13 E-mail interview with Mark Turner on Tuesday, March 19, 2002. (mturner@africaonline.co.ke)

14 E-mail interview with Anthony Morland of AFP on Monday, March 18, 2002. (anthonymorland@usa.net).

15 E-mail interview with Mark Turner on Tuesday, March 19, 2002. (mturner@africaonline.co.ke)

16 Telephone interview with Dr Paul Moorcraft, former war correspondent, author, former instructor at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst and at the UK Joint Staff College, and editor of Defence Review, on Monday, March 25, 2002. (Telephone: +44 20 7717 1017).

Corruption in the Media

The media in Liberia was devastated by years of conflict, which severely incapacitated it in many ways. The conflict weakened the national economy generally, resulting in a very poor market for media products. This, coupled with little resources coming from advertising, meant that media organizations are hardly able to sustain their operations. The income of journalists and editors, which is somewhere between US$20 and US$30 per month, puts them effectively below the poverty line. This is in addition to the fact that many newspapers are not even able to pay these salaries regularly.

Thus, with many journalists working without pay or for very poor pay, there are widespread reports of corruption in the media. Scores of journalists depend on monies they get from various individuals and interests groups to survive. These monies are usually given to them either to publish flattering stories about their benefactors, which may not reflect the reality, or to suppress negative stories about the giver, including story on corruption.

The result is that even if journalists and media institutions are able to uncover information about corruption, they will frequently suppress such information if induced. There have, in fact, been many reports of cases where media professionals have moved from simply waiting to be induced to actively extorting money from those about whom they have negative reports or information, in exchange for suppressing such information.

According to Professor Lamini Waritay, Special Advisor on Communications to the former Chairman of the NTGL, Mr. Gyude Bryant during the transitional arrangement, "Many Liberians, among those who subscribe to press freedom, have complained about what they call 'blackmail' on the part of reporters/editors who would threaten such individuals with bad publicity if they do not meet the financial requests of the journalists. The usual tactic is to have a newspaper carry a little teaser making reference to some wrongdoing involving the intended victim – with an implied warning at the end of the piece to the effect that 'investigation continues'. The idea is to stampede the victim into rushing to the journalist/newspaper and greasing the palms to avoid 'further investigation'"[17].

Lack of Capacity for Investigative Reporting

In Liberia, there is a glaring lack of skilled personnel and adequate resources to carry out investigative reporting, particularly to unearth corruption among both providers of humanitarian assistance as well as government. The media lost its best reporters and most skilled editorial personnel during the conflict in part because of the state of insecurity which led many media practitioners to flee the country, but also because many practitioners realised that their incomes from media work could simply not sustain them and sought more lucrative employment opportunities.

During the period of conflict under the regime of former President Charles Taylor and the most recent transition period in Liberia (between August 2003 and January 2006), when most of the humanitarian assistance was being delivered in the country, there were between 300 and 400 journalists operating in the country. The vast majority of them were poorly trained or not trained at all and lacked the requisite journalistic skills to conduct investigative journalism.

In addition to the lack of skills for investigative journalism, the poorly resourced media organizations were simply unable to invest in investigative stories either about the activities of the transitional government or the humanitarian agencies.

An example of this lack of capacity in the local media that bears mentioning here is a story reported by "The Guardian" of London on the corruption that characterized the activities of humanitarian agencies in the Mano River Union, comprising Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

In the story titled "Aid workers in food for child sex scandal" and published on February 27, 2002 in "The Guardian" of London reported that humanitarian workers for more than 40 agencies in the region were involved in extensive sexual exploitation of refugee children, offering food rations and other humanitarian services in return for sexual favours.

The story is based on an internal report detailing testimonies taken from girls under 18 years by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children in refugee camps in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in which they named more than 40 UN agencies and non-governmental organizations as well as about 70 individuals as using humanitarian aid and services such as shelter, education, medicine and food for sexual exploitation.

If local media organizations in the affected countries had covered the activities of relief organizations and aid agencies more closely and effectively, they could have broken the stories.

About the Author
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17 Paper delivered at a "Symposium on Developing the Media in Post-Conflict Liberia: Challenges in the Run-up to Elections", held on March 4 and 5, 2005, and organized by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in collaboration with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL).

Annex 5. CORRUPTION IN WAR AND PEACE – HOW THE MEDIA CAN HELP IN DAMAGE CONTROL

Kunda Dixit, Editor, Nepali Times[18]

Even in peacetime:
- Governments are slow, inefficient and corrupt
- Checks and balances aren't adequate
- Public apathy and fatalism exists
- Sensational coverage spreads cynicism

So, where do we start?
- When corruption is endemic, cover honesty.
- Chose the story that will have maximum impact.
- Corruption is often a life-or-death issue: help save lives.
- The media's role is to restore faith in the system.

How?
- Go beyond the details to expose flaws in the system
- Be an agenda-setter for reform
- Name and shame the guilty
- Offer solutions
- Follow-up

How not to do it:
- Sensationalism
- Trivialisation
- Entrapment
- Crying wolf
- Defamation
- Treating story as one-off
- Petty corruption not real story anymore

What to investigate?
- Corruption in basic services education, health
- Natural resource exploitation
- Courts and law enforcement
- Rent-seeking in government
- Cronyism, party funding, patronage
- Development projects, contracts
- The military

Investigating graft
- Paper trail
- Deep throat
- Detective work
- Undercover techniques
- Cross-checking
- Beware motivated leaks
- Legal safeguards
- Prepare for repercussions

What works?
- Relentless reporting on issues of vital public interest
- Defiance of media curbs
- Evidence of wrongdoing at the highest levels
- Someone to take the ball and run (courts, parliament, law enforcement)
- Sober, authoritative tone
- Timing is everything

Difficult stories
- Structural malfunctions
- Semi-legal perks and malfeasance
- Complicated stories on collective decision-making
- Corruption that doesn't impact directly on constituencies
- Secretive, centralised regimes
- Corporate crimes
- The underworld

Challenges
- Commercialised media, trivialised content
- "Entertainment overload"
- Gatekeeper apathy for investigative reports
- Selling complicated stories of wrongdoing to a public with short attention spans
- "So what else is new?"

Annex 6. THE MEDIA AND RESPONSES TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Maurice Herson, Senior Projects Manager - ALNAP

Do the media have a positive role in exposing or 'covering' corruption? Of course! What I want to do is set that in a broader context of the role of the media in the case of disasters, and how it fits with what humanitarian action is about.

I am coming from outside the media so I want to reflect back how things look from outside. In my sector this is a constant challenge to us - to get the view of others, specifically those we seek to help, in doing our work. Not what we can we provide, not what we think we need to provide, but what they think they want us to provide, or just to do.
It's a story of black and white - we love the media and we hate and fear them. We use them when we can. Of course they also use us - they need stories and sales or viewers, and we can provide some of the voices and facts and views that make those stories. We speak a language that the international media can understand, literally and more metaphorically speaking.

Behind all these oversimplified and provocative, not to say aggressive, statements is a more complex reality. I am taking this from the point of view not just of corruption, but of the wider role of the media in humanitarian crises, because I do not think that you can easily or justifiably take the positive

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18 www.nepalitimes.com

role of the media as potential exposers of something wrong without setting that in the more complete context of the other aspects of the role of the media in that same situation or context.

For example, there is the wholly disproportionate coverage of the tsunami by the global and the European media. Not just the amount of attention given to the whole phenomenon as compared to the attention given to the next 10 largest emergencies combined (an Alertnet study (March 2005) "finds that the …tsunami got more media attention in the first six weeks after it struck than all of the world's top 10 'forgotten' emergencies combined have received in a year." The research also shows that 40% of the coverage in our media was of the tourists who were 1% of those affected. Now on the one hand this is justifiable through the interest of the potential readers and viewers, but it does give those who are dependent on the media a very unbalanced picture. Does the fact of having promoted that unbalanced picture reduce the credibility of a later emphasis on the 'sexy' but virtuous story of misuse of funds? I would say so.

What's the interest of the donor in media exposure of corruption or other wrongdoing? The institutional or governmental donor - for whom I cannot speak representatively, of course - might welcome being made aware of something that they would not otherwise know about easily. On the other hand they might sympathise with an organisation that they have funded, if it feels that it is being badly treated on the grounds that its achievements are being neglected for the sake of a sensationalised titbit - I'm aware that I'm expressing emotions here, by the way, not objective realities.

Or the donor might take the view that there is a political risk to them if they are seen to have put money into untrustworthy hands. Donors tend to have procedures in place in their contracts with those they fund that include normal accountability processes, such as demanding progress reports and evaluations and so on. This is normal, if not always helpful, practice. So they may feel that the politics of public scrutiny are muddying the waters of accountability.

For the individual donor, the member of the public who either donates money themselves or is aware of their taxes being given to support a humanitarian response, what I think they really want to know is that their money is being well spent, and spent as they intended it to be spent. Maybe the next best thing is to know that those who misspend it are not doing so with impunity - although public exposure of course does not guarantee that there will not be impunity anyway.

In the case of the December 26th tsunami, the normal ratios of public and private funding were overturned and agencies received a larger proportion of their funding from private donations than from institutions, although some governments then felt obliged to pledge matching amounts. I can only speculate what, if any, difference those in the media feel that this makes to their perceived duty to report on what has subsequently happened in the tsunami-affected countries; maybe this is one of the things that we can explore in the discussion that will follow.

Unfortunately some humanitarian agencies, like some governments, produce unbalanced or misleading information about themselves, their work and their achievements; some people say that for many years agencies have been spinning feel-good PR to the media and the public. There is a very complex relationship between fundraising, public education, accountability to one's donors and accountability to disaster-affected people.

Ten years ago there was a very large multi-donor evaluation of all the circumstances around the Rwandan genocide, the JEEAR, including the responses to it. It took the media to task for its bad reporting that, it said, probably contributed to the international indifference and thus to the crime itself. It also said that the influence of the media on both aid agency and political decision-makers was to encourage them to make ad hoc decisions that were not always in line with sound operating principles. There's a recent story from the relative remoteness of West Aceh that resonates with this, where the relatively few agencies who were working there without the presence of lights and cameras are said to be working together under more effective coordination of the UN than elsewhere.

Anyway, the JEEAR's messages to the media were :

1. there is a pressing need for a study of media coverage and its influence on the operation of a particular humanitarian aid operation, and
2. efforts to raise awareness among media personnel about the workings of the humanitarian aid system would benefit everyone. I would add that it is the media's duty to be somewhat knowledgeable in order to be able to fulfill its public role properly.

The follow-up to the JEEAR published a year or so ago notes that the same actions are still needed.

It is a fact that most media staff do not have the time to become specialists, and it was certainly the case that many of the reporters who went to the tsunami-affected areas had never been anywhere like it before, and had never covered a major disaster before. They are but an extreme example maybe. But in this reality, how therefore can they be expected to understand the difficulties, achievements and failings of the humanitarian enterprise. If they did, of course, it would be a much more fertile environment for transparency and consideration of lessons than mere exposure of corruption.

I'm absolutely not suggesting that if you understood better you'd be able to say : "Well, that's the nature of their operating reality so that's OK then". Not at all. There are two points: the first is about the distorting effect of the media on the humanitarian response, and the second is about the variety of failings that are possible, indeed that do occur.

I have already mentioned that media presence can make for bad decisions by the actors in a situation. It's also true that the media need quick results, need to be able to report something before they move on. If the story's not about rapid success, it almost always has to be about slow failure. This is not helpful to thoughtful and considered response to emergency needs.

There is a corrupting effect, on the response, of the agencies' need to meet media deadlines. Systematic needs assessments are stripped out - it has even been said that it was the media who did the assessments in some of the areas struck by the tsunami. The result is that agencies become accountable to the press rather than to governments, to the programme or to beneficiaries. Yet the media also display significant ignorance, for example warning of the health risks from dead bodies, when in fact these are minimal unless the people died of infectious disease.

I want to be more subtle than just to talk about failure or corruption. I want to talk about the failings of the humanitarian enterprise. There is on the one hand sheer inability to do something, or to do it right; and there is doing something badly, bad performance. In either of these there may be an element of corruption, but they are much more common realities than that, and they require us, as humanitarian agencies, to learn from them and do better in future.

Unsurprisingly these complexities are echoed in many discussions between different departments inside agencies about what they should say publicly about themselves and their work. Ideally - and let's reach for the ideal - communications and learning should not be going in different directions. Personally I'm not always happy with the outcome of such discussions, but I have the prejudice of a programme person that priority should go to public education and beneficiary accountability. But who am I to argue with a PR professional about 'messages'?!

Yes, there is some corruption that takes place in and around humanitarian operations, but aid agencies - at least the big and professional ones; the 'gotta-do-something-about-that' newcomers are generally different - also tend to have audit and management systems that are designed to and generally do control that. There are failures too.

Now I don't want to excuse anything here, but let's be realistic. A major aid operation generally means scaling up from a very small operation, or even from nothing, to a huge operation in a matter of days, taking on hundreds of new staff, very large capital expenditure etc. And this often takes place in situations where (a) systems in general are down - I doubt the banks were working in Aceh for a few weeks after the tsunami, correct me if I'm wrong, and (b) where what we call corruption is rife. Indonesia is number 140 in Transparency International's list, India 92, Sri Lanka 81, and so on. Try working in Democratic Republic of Congo and being assured of being squeaky clean.

But of course corruption, scandal and failure are sexy. I don't want to make any special pleading that aid agencies should be exempt from public and transparent criticism, but it should be justified and it should be proportionate, in my view. I've just imported into this text a bit of our jargon - proportionality. And it reminds me that it's strange that both the media and aid workers both feel that in some way we occupy the high moral ground, although it's not actually the same bit of it.

Going back to the conclusions of the JEEAR, what I'd say is that it would be most helpful if the corruption stories did not appear to stick out in contrast with the stories that are there at the start of an emergency, the 'the aid agencies are here so it will all be alright' stories. What would be good is if there was a nuanced picture of the scandal and wickedness and of our successes and the real problems - problems that, incidentally, are remarkably consistent across locations and time, so are easily accessible to the media, for example in ALNAP's annual Review of Humanitarian Action.
I think that this would have two good effects. The first is that it would be likely to take the edge off the fear that exists inside agencies of the media. The second is that it would put the emphasis back where it should be, which is not so much on agency performance as on the situation of disaster-affected people.

I want to come back to this point one last time: there is a general push, although one that is still far short of where it needs to get, on what we call downwards or, as I prefer, forwards accountability, that is to disaster-affected people. It involves consultation with and participation of those people in the responses to their emergency, informing them and finding ways for them to make complaints in safety, and so on. Now I believe strongly that we need to do all of that better. And I also believe that if we do, the risk of corruption will be less. Therefore - to try and get agendas to match somewhat, and if the media's interest is really in trying to make the greatest impact on corruption - it is in everyone's interest to have the focus on the beneficiary rather than the agency, to seek their story rather than the scandal.

Transparency International would say this of course, but they say that transparency is the key to combating corruption, and that is certainly built into the assumptions about the way things in my country are meant to work and the role of the media in it. Certainly in the context of an aid operation, transparency with the people who are meant to benefit is likely to result in less possibility for corruption both with the agencies and with the government. As it is, agencies too often pay more attention to avoiding brand damage than to what beneficiaries may need.

If there were clear complaint mechanisms locally and internationally, then the media role in exposing corruption would be far less important. This is a failing in the international humanitarian system for now. If the media really want to fight corruption, as opposed to getting a good story, then media exposure should be the last resort and the last threat

in the chain of anti-corruption measures. And I would urge the media to not only fill the gap, but to do it in such a way as to reinforce the development of positive changes in our system rather than to be oppositional.

There is not an actual conspiracy between aid agencies and the media over fundraising, but it is nevertheless true that without media coverage it is both harder to get public funds and also harder to get government donor funds, which are too much driven by political pressures, which include both geopolitical factors and local public pressure. The way that governments were driven to put up matching funds for the tsunami is an obvious case in point. As is their generalised failure to fund so-called neglected emergencies. You could say that there is an element of political corruption in making unfulfilled promises to allocate funds and then not to do it. Aid agencies would welcome the media following up on government pledges of aid.

To return to fundraising, however, the media do need to think about taking responsibility for their fundraising effect - sometimes formalised as in the UK Disasters Emergency Committee, the Dutch SHO, etc. If they are instrumental in getting public and government funds for humanitarian responses, they need to have a more informed approach to what happens next. The media need instant stories; disaster-affected people need thoughtful and long-term responses. It is about more than catching out corruption, it is also about the quality and effectiveness of aid and its financing.

Annex 7. COMPLEXITY AND CORRUPTION

Hans Skotte (NTNU)

- Irregularities in the world's most corrupt business in times of emergency
- Housing reconstruction and embedded reporting in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s

(What I'll be presenting rests on evidence from international agencies' work, by no means Norwegians only. Bear this in mind.)

> *Transparency International's 2002 Bribe Payers Index reported that construction/public works are perceived to have the highest level of bribery of any sector, higher than both the arms industry and the oil and gas sector*

According to Transparency International, the construction industry is the world's most corrupt business sector. This is because they deal with one-off projects, often of massive scale involving loads of money, many people, rest upon numerous complex contractual relationships in a traditionally closed system of tendering and negotiations that by nature of the projects depend on discretional decisions. Add to this the social, and political – and financial - complexities of a war-affected society where international reconstruction

funds by the millions and in cash - are brought into the re-construction scene in bags.

This is what the Bosnian reconstruction scene was like when the security situation allowed foreign agencies to start housing re/construction in the early 1990s. I have followed the Bosnian housing re/construction process from 1995 onwards and will share with you one case where corruption most certainly was one of the ingredients, not to 'out' the organization or people involved, but to highlight the structural and practical challenges in conducting business in such a complex context – and how the reporting back either within the agency or through the press - never knew or wanted to know.

[Slides of empty houses examples of type of half-finished houses /
Composite picture of Breze houses / Workmanship pictures]

Admittedly, this is small fry, yet illustrative of questionable (fraudulent?) reconstruction practices. These houses were completed in order to shelter 246 IDPs. Not one single IDP ever lived there. Projects for 207.000 DEM in five houses were left standing till the war was over when the owners could reclaim the whole building. Why was that, and what was done about it? What was structural – and what was merely the result of inappropriate behaviour of individuals?
The following issues, I feel, explain the discovered phenomena.

1. 'Strictly Cash'
Bosnia's early re/construction was paid for in cash. All foreign agencies brought their funds into the country in cash. Aside from the enormous sums brought in as remittances from the many hundreds of thousand Bosnian refugees. The financial infrastructure – or lack of it – created a cash culture where the response to payment often was "What sum should I write on the racun, sir?" (Just imagine how transactions go in present day Iraq?)

2. Acting within an unknown, volatile, complex, and violent environment
The incoming agents generally didn't have a clue. They had to learn the ropes from locals they came to trust, yet even they did not know what was happening. The response to the break-up of the societal web, or the social contracts, left many with no other choice but to first and foremost fend for their own interests. The incoming expats were left on the outside, first of all by the very nature of the mission (think of Italians coming to the North of Norway in 1945!!!), but just as important, by not speaking the local language. Yet at the same time, they were the people with the money.

In my housing case the final decisions were made by the expat head of office, which enabled the agency to act independent of local haggling. Yet "they probably did not understand the situation", as one staff of an INGO told me.

3. The power of language

For most Bosnians it was a social and economical quantum leap to attain employment with a foreign organization. ("I never knew I had such a big family…."). The agencies depended on local staff to have their projects realized, but also to enable the expats to communicate locally. Their role as go-betweens and language gatekeepers made them into central powerbrokers in the early days of housing reconstruction.

In my case it was about negotiating with prospective house owners, issuing bills of quantities, handling stores and negotiating prices with the local suppliers. This gave the local staff of the international agencies an unprecedented power to act to their own personal benefit. My empty houses evidently filled the pockets of (some) local staff. DEM 500 for choosing a small house owner, DEM 4000 for a big one. And then the inflated requisitions for building materials. Enough to build two houses, reportedly, etc, etc. Yet generally, brown envelopes frequently seemed to find their way past the foreign officers into the hands of local staff. "A prevalent practice", according to CIA's Fact Sheet on Bosnia at the time.

4. Accountability, Accountancy and cost comparisons

Each agency had their own organization-wide accountancy system, but normally these were too 'wide' to allow cost comparisons on construction work even between field offices within the same organization. Cross-agency comparisons were therefore more of a strategic game than they were incentives toward cost conscious construction methods or preventative measures against corruption. Besides, the quality of work was not at all codified in spite of the fact that building standards fall, sometimes dramatically, in circumstances like these (as if laws of physics also had collapsed along with the social codexes).

10 years after their entered Bosnia and after having built more that 100 000 houses, not even the large international organizations were able to make anything but rudimentary cost comparisons. When one field office in one of the large organizations quit tendering, but started to ask for bids within a fixed price range, the construction cost were reduced by about 30%.

5. Embedded Reporting

Emergencies, reporting on them, and international humanitarian response constitute an reciprocal troika. In practical terms emergencies do not exist, and trigger no action, where there is no-one to report on it. In this sense Bosnia was a true emergency. The Norwegian media, for instance, was in Bosnia primarily to report on the Norwegian achievements. Their key sources were field staff of Norwegian NGOs.

> **"Norwegian journalists are oriented towards Norwegian heroes. To write about a Norwegian hero in the field is always popular. Many of the aid organisations have taken advantage of this. The organisations sell kind-heartedness, and the journalists write about the kind deeds which take place."**
>
> Original: "Norske journalister er orientert mot norske helter. Å skrive om en norsk helt i felt er alltid populært. Mange av bistandsorganisasjonene har klart å spille på dette. Organisasjonene selger godhet, og journalistene skriver om det gode som gjøres".
>
> *Øyvind Johnsen, former foreign news editor of Dagsavisen, in Verdensmagasinet X, nr 2/2006*

[presentation of two newspaper reports]

This allowed international agencies to embed incoming reporters, i.e. to accommodate, transport and strategically inform them on issues deemed important to, say, the Norwegian public. They were not, by the nature of their operations, their source of funding, and by their moral standing in the eyes of the public, interested in presenting fraud and failed projects. But, honest, who would? And furthermore, what media institution would release resources for investigating some irregularities by actually digging in the fields in a far-away country. Besides, as Øyvind Johnsen says:

> "The large humanitarian organisations are holy cows in Norwegian press, they mostly avoid critical focus. [...] [They] are such strong brands that they are nearly untouchable."
>
> Original: *"De store humanitære organisasjonene er hellige kuer i norsk presse, de går stort sett fri for kritisk søkelys. […] [De] har så sterke brands at de er nesten urørlige."*
>
> *Øyvind Johnsen, former foreign news editor of Dagsavisen, in Verdensmagasinet X, nr 2/2006*

6. Agency reporting

Many of the Final Reports submitted to the donor reads like the initial project proposal, but with actual time lines and audited accounts. Surprisingly little comes up on outcomes. Not even outputs might be fully correct. Given the financial relationship to donors it is imperative not to show failure. And given the donor's dependency on the NGOs both for strategy development and implementation - within the Scandinavian context at least, such reporting has been accepted – although Norad has now signalled change.

In my case nothing was formally reported back on the fact that the housing projects aimed at sheltering 246 IDPs remained empty. On the contrary, in the final report back to HQ the project was referred to as being successfully com-

pleted – information that most probably was conveyed to the donor. All this in spite of the fact was not the agencies' fault the no one moved in. The agency had been advised by the local authorities on location, yet once realized they were left empty due to fear of "tilting the ethnic balance". Holding back this sort of information for fear of what the donor or the domestic press might make of it – shows how the 'patronage system' for funding INGOs and their untouchable role in public opinion shields both the donor and the public for vital information required to understand – and accept - the complex realities the humanitarian organizations face in the field. This shielding of realities also protects those out there who play the game for their personal gain.

At a conference in Stockholm in Dec. 2005 the World Bank's Indonesia director, Mike Baird, concluded that the most central lesson learnt in post-tsunami Ache, was the importance of "information management", referring to the deep uncertainty and confusion people experienced in the field. The Swedish minister for Development Cooperation, Carin Jämtin, brought on a similar conclusion when referring to the domestic scene. We've painted ourselves into a corner by not openly acknowledging the complexities, the difficulties and the dilemmas people face in the field.

Annex 9. AGENDA - WORKING MEETING

Corruption in Emergencies: What Role(s) for Media?

Organized by

U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre and NORAD
Facilitation by International Media Support

30 May 2006

The meeting will be held at NORAD Headquarters

Entrance: Ruseløkkveien 26, Oslo (4th floor, room 4-136)

Contact: Jessica Schultz (jessica.schultz@cmi.no)

Objectives of the Meeting

- To establish a common understanding of opportunities and risks related to media coverage of corruption in humanitarian crises among donors, humanitarian agencies, and journalists
- To unpack lessons learnt from previous emergencies
- To identify entry points for better collaboration in anti-corruption efforts

FACILITATORS JESPER HØJBERG AND GEMMA MORTENSEN (IMS)

8h30 – 9h00	**Arrivals and coffee**	
9h00 — 9h30	**Introduction and meeting objectives**	
9h30— 11h00	**1. Lessons from the Tsunami Experience** • Information management challenges in emergency contexts • Media influence on specific aspects of the humanitarian response • Impact of media coverage on accountability to affected populations as well as on donors	Presenters: Maurice Herson (Oversees Development Institute) Amantha Perera (Sunday Leader)

11h00 — 11h15	*Coffee Break*	
11h15— 12h15	**2. Working with local media** • Opportunities and risks • Local media perspectives on agencies • Case studies • Non-print media as a tool for corruption control **2**	Presenters: Edetaen Ojo (Media Rights Agenda) Kunda Dixit (Nepal Times)
12h15 — 13h00	*Lunch (NORAD cafeteria)*	
13h00 — 14h45	**3. Media-agency relations** • Challenges of communicating in a crisis: agency perspectives • Scandal-seekers or watchdogs? Negotiating the role of media in emergency situations • Ways forward	Presenters: Hans Skotte (NTNU) Gunnar Andersen (CARE)

Annex 10. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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U4 is a web-based resource centre for donor practitioners who wish to effectively address corruption challenges in their work. We offer focused research products, online and in-country training, a helpdesk service and a rich array of online resources. Our aim is to facilitate coordination among donor agencies and promote context-appropriate programming choices.

The centre is operated by the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI – www.cmi.no), in association with Transparency International. CMI is a private social science research foundation working on issues of development and human rights, located in Bergen, Norway.

U4 Partner Agencies: DFID (UK), Norad (Norway), Sida (Sweden), Gtz (Germany), Cida (Canada), and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

www.U4.no