



Encyclopedia of

SOCIAL MOVEMENT MEDIA

John D. H. Downing
EDITOR

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COMMUNITY RADIO AND NATURAL DISASTERS (INDONESIA)

Indonesia's location on the Pacific Ring of Fire, sandwiched between three continent plates in a tropical region, creates the potential for earthquakes, eruptions, tsunamis, floods, landslides, and droughts. In disasters, information is crucial. In many cases in Indonesia, community radio's role is clear in its responses to the challenges faced by those coping with disaster.

Mass media under Suharto, concentrated in big cities and dominated by the state and major firms, had failed to serve many localities. In the post-Suharto period, media democratization campaigns began in the legislature. During the Megawati administration (2001–2003), under civil society

pressure, Broadcasting Law 32/2002 was enacted, which, for the first time in Indonesian history, legally acknowledged the existence of community broadcasting. Previously, community radio was illegal and operated clandestinely.

Additionally, the regional autonomy movement post-Suharto, where villages became a focus for the democratic movement, contributed to the establishment of community radio. Activists used community radio to empower villagers, to foster a strong civil society to counteract the power of local government and enable participation in the development process. At of 2009, thousands of community stations had been set up. (The total would only be known once the registration process had been completed.)

Community Radio and Civic Action in Natural Disaster Management

The post-tsunami experience in Aceh in 2004 illustrated the vital role of community radio in the affected areas. Aceh, the westernmost Indonesian province, was worst affected. Along hundreds of kilometers of coastline in this province, 180,000 people were killed and houses and buildings flattened, leaving more than 500,000 homeless.

The 2004 tsunami also killed many journalists, destroyed media infrastructures and telephones, and washed away parts of roads. Several days afterward, Aceh still had zero media communication. Half of the 30 radio stations were damaged, including Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI), the state-owned radio. RRI lost all 26 staffers. The tsunami isolated already devastated areas because of communication infrastructure damage. The Acehnese had no means to communicate with one another and with people in other regions. As a consequence, the first news about this disaster was reported at 8:30 a.m., hours after the tsunami, by Detik.com, an online Jakarta website. Television broadcasters had problems reaching the region and, as a result, could only report the event by noon.

Radio was the only viable communication medium. Thanks to their social network, several community radio volunteers from other regions in Indonesia worked on community radio projects to help the Acehnese establish community radio. The

post-tsunami projects in Aceh provided a first experience for the volunteers in handling disaster response.

Community radio in Aceh began by helping people in the emergency. More recently, it developed as a tool for recovery and reconstruction. Community radio covered local issues and content in order to heal the public's trauma, as well as to entertain and educate community members in the recovery and reconstruction phases.

A good example was the use of *nazam* (traditional Aceh poems), often aired on a number of stations. These poems consisted of religious messages, aimed at helping survivors recover from their grief. *Nazam* were also used to express people's feelings, for example, their hope for a peaceful situation in Aceh. Samudera FM, a community radio operated by refugees from the tsunami-affected areas in North Aceh, broadcast religious programs to heal the trauma of Acehnese who had been affected by conflict and the tsunami. Community members came to the studio voluntarily to entertain each other in order to try to recover from their grief.

Another community station, SeHa FM Community Radio—SeHa abbreviates *seunang hatee* (happy feeling)—was managed by young refugee camp dwellers and aired field reports on the situations, problems, and opinions of survivors living there. Suara Meulaboh community radio conducted vox populi interviews with local inhabitants. Samudera FM community radio reported and discussed the conditions and problems faced by people living in camps and barracks. This helped build close relations between the community and their radio because it helped them voice their aspirations. Community radio also functioned as entertainment media by airing song requests. In this way, they helped heal their community and their own selves.

Community Radio in West Sumatra: Spontaneous Action

Based on experiences of natural disasters in other regions in Indonesia, community radio volunteers were better prepared to respond to the emergency caused by a 5.8 earthquake in West Sumatra on March 6, 2007. The earthquake killed 66, injured hundreds, destroyed about

10,000 homes and buildings, and displaced more than 6,500 people.

Although there had been no emergency-response training, community radio volunteers in West Sumatra had learned that knowledge was crucial during the emergency-response period. Two hours after the earthquake, communication infrastructures were collapsing. The only information came from RRI. Because RRI was located in Padang, the provincial capital, most of the information was dominated by Padang's crisis. As a result, there was a lack of information for victims and medical teams in remote areas.

The earthquake disrupted wide areas, most of them rural, cutting off roads and isolating some areas. The condition of victims worsened, as most affected areas were in mountainous regions not easily reached by land transportation. Some areas, due to topography, could not be covered by radio from Padang or other cities. Those areas were known as blank-spot areas. As a result, inhabitants were isolated from aid distribution. They urgently needed a form of communication to describe their plight.

Community radio volunteers in West Sumatra realized radio could help the victims. They decided to go to these areas to establish emergency radio. Four community radio stations in Solok (Radila FM Community Radio and Semarak Community Radio) and Padang Pariaman (Suandri FM Community Radio and Bahana FM Community Radio) operated as emergency stations immediately after the earthquake.

Community radio allowed local people and government and aid agencies to be informed of the situation and to coordinate help and distribution logistics. Community radio volunteers collected data about the need for milk, bandages, mineral water, baby food, instant noodles, and tents. Then they broadcast these needs widely to connect supply and demand.

Soon after the earthquake, rumors began to circulate about an impending tsunami and another earthquake. To reduce their impact, community radio informed survivors of the real situation from the Indonesian Meteorological and Geophysical Agency and provided timely information about aftershocks.

In Panningahan, West Sumatra, a local inhabitant said that community radio had helped calm

people after the earthquake because it gave clear information about the situation. In this village, community radio also helped victims to release their stress. Locals joined in the radio programs to entertain each other. They sent greetings to their friends and families by radio, which covered areas surrounding Singkarak Lake. They could update people on their situation and encourage each other to recover from their grief and the destruction.

To support their activities, the Community Radio Network of West Sumatra applied two strategies. First, they dropped volunteers in the affected areas to set up emergency radio. Because their station budgets had no available funds, volunteers had to use their own money. They came from various community stations surrounding the affected areas. They alternated in working for 3 to 4 days at a time.

Second, they used their networks to obtain support from people outside the disaster locations. They got support from the Community Radio Network of Indonesia, the Combine Resource Institution, and the Indonesian Press and Broadcasting Society. The capacity to work together played an important role in community action, as communities drew upon their own resources to solve problems.

Emergency community radio played its role only for a limited time during the emergency-response period, about 3 months after the disaster. After that, the emergency community radio officially ceased operation. Recently, however, community radio was revived by locals to broadcast other programs.

Mario Antonius Birowo

See also Community Media (Venezuela); Community Radio (Sri Lanka); Community Radio in Pau da Lima (Brasil); Community Radio Movement (India); Participatory Media; Peace Media (Colombia)

Further Readings

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COMMUNITY RADIO AND PODCASTING (UNITED STATES)

Podcasting is a term for a collection of tools and techniques that facilitate the publishing of audio files online. In simple terms, every time podcast publishers make an audio file available on the Internet, they also update a special kind of text file, called an RSS file, to note the existence of the audio file and its location. Listeners can choose to “subscribe” to a podcast using specialized client-end software. That software periodically checks for updates to the RSS files of the podcasts to which the listener has subscribed and, when it notes an update, can download the relevant audio file without further intervention by the listener. Many content management systems, in particular those designed for weblog production, include this podcast publishing function, as do sites such as YouTube. At the client end, there are a variety of applications that facilitate podcast subscription and downloading.

Podcasting differs from webcasting in that the content produced is portable and available on demand. Clients can transfer downloaded files to other devices and listen when and where they choose. In addition, through the choices available regarding which feeds to subscribe to, or which files to play or skip, listeners have highly granular control over their audio diet akin to control over individual music tracks, rather unlike broadcast radio.

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John D. H. Downing
EDITOR

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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E-mail: order@sagepub.com

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Contributors

Wale Adebaniwi
University of California, Davis

Stephan Adolphs
University of Lucerne

Angela J. Aguayo
Southern Illinois University

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İzmir University of
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