

Media and the Warning Chain

The Role of Media in Disaster Preparedness

INTRODUCTION

In disaster risk management, mass media plays a crucial role in saving lives. In major disasters, the news promptly appears in mass media worldwide, and it brings attention and help for the survivors. This shows how influential media is. As media is a big part of people's life, as the main source of information, it is expected that the role of media is not limited only to spread news about disaster that has already happened, but also to improve people's knowledge about disaster preparedness, and to forward warnings in particular.

FORWARDING TSUNAMI WARNINGS

Local tsunamis are a rapid onset disaster that requires quick response in order to save lives. To ensure that warnings reach people at risk on time, InaTEWS developed a dissemination system that also includes TV and radio stations, as they are capable in spreading information immediately in a wide area. The Minister of Communication and Information (MENKOMINFO) issued the Regulation No. 20/2006 that direct the roles of TV and radio stations in forwarding disaster warnings, as a guidance to implement the Government Regulation No. 50/2005 (Art. 17) about the obligation of broadcasting institutions to widely disseminate warning information on possible disaster occurrences.

At the implementation level, National Agency for Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics (BMKG), as the National Tsunami Warning Provider, installed servers in several national TV and radio stations to provide a link with the National Tsunami Warning Centre (NTWC) and enabling them to receive and broadcast tsunami warning in their coverage areas. TV and radio stations are obliged to interrupt their programmes to announce disaster warning. On TV, a 30-second, high-pitched alarm sound shall assure the attention of the audience, while a warning message is displayed on TV screens, followed by a running text at the bottom of the screen.

In tsunami-prone districts, local broadcasting institutions are also expected to widely disseminate warning and guidance from the local authorities to the community upon the reception of a tsunami warning. Our experience showed that radio station are a reliable mean to disseminate warning, if they can handle power outage after an earthquake by operating an own power generator. In any case local authorities need to agree with local TV and radio stations on clear procedures for dissemination.

EXPERIENCE FROM PADANG AND BALI

Padang, 5 minutes after the quake on 30th September 2009, PUSDALOPS disseminated a "no tsunami threat" message to selected institutions and stakeholder via HT, but a wider coverage was only reached after 25-30 minutes, when *Radio Republik Indonesia* disseminated the message via FM radio. At that time, the streets were already jammed with people trying to evacuate. The information can reach the public faster, if PUSDALOPS would get direct access to FM frequencies. It requires solid technical solutions and procedures, as well as clear agreements and political decisions.



On January 28, 2010, an agreement on tsunami warning dissemination between the provincial PUSDALOPS and local TV and radio stations in Bali was signed. When a tsunami warning is received by PUSDALOPS, it will be disseminated along with evacuation guidance by local media. The next steps to be taken are the development of SOP and training for media staff.

EDUCATING FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

In addition to forward tsunami warning, media should also contribute to disaster preparedness by publishing and broadcasting information to improve public awareness. They can help make complex, scientific concepts understandable for people to avoid partial understandings and misperception.

CHALLENGES

Disseminating warning message to people is not as easy as it seems. There are several issues that need to be addressed in warning dissemination:

- Clear procedure

TV and radio stations need fixed procedure in place on how to immediately broadcast the warnings. Some media has the warning dissemination procedure ready. Led by LIPI, a template of SOP is now in the development process to be used and customized into each media's procedure.

- The content of the message/information to be disseminated to the public

The responsibility of BMKG is to send warning, but no call for evacuation. A warning without clear guidance does not trigger consistent reaction, so the message needs to convey answers to the "5W1H" questions: What happened and has to be done? Where did it happen? Who is concerned and involved? When did or will it happen? How did it happen? The development of the message content is ongoing.

- Clear understanding on how the system works

To understand InaTEWS, the person in charge for warning dissemination and reporting from the media needs to get solid information about the end-to-end system. The media also expects BMKG to appoint a contact person (and even a media centre) for rechecking and clarification when a warning is issued.

The discussion about the role of media in tsunami early warning was brought forward during IOWave09 preparations and was followed by several working meetings (supported mainly by BMKG, LIPI, UNESCO and INWent). To establish a solid link between media and InaTEWS, the ongoing discussion need to be continued.



TV and Radio Stations Connected to NTCW at BMKG

LEGAL BASE

- Government Regulation No. 50/ 2005 on broadcasting performance of private broadcasting institution
- Law No. 32/ 2002 on broadcasting
- Regulation of the Ministry of Communication and Information No. 20/ 2006 on tsunami or other disaster early warning system through broadcasting institution in Indonesia

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