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CRISIS REPORTING
THE ROLE OF ASIAN AND EUROPEAN MEDIA
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Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

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ASEF Media Handbook on Crisis Reporting

The handbook is part of the ASEF Media Handbook series and is designed to provide journalists and media organisations as well as individuals and non-profits with a guide to the challenges of covering crises, suggestions on how to overcome them, and ideas on how to improve coverage of crises in the future.

Few journalists have experience covering crises or many who have reported crises have done so only sporadically during their careers.

This handbook is designed to convey the knowledge of how to best cover crises, how reporters can deal with issues that arise during crisis reporting, how immediate short-term coverage and longer-term coverage objectives and requirements differ.

About the Editor

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The contents of this handbook are from journalists for journalists. It contains practical suggestions for journalists covering any crisis. The handbook is an outcome of direct exchanges of professional knowledge and experiences shared by 38 seasoned journalists and media experts from reputable media organisations across Asia and Europe.

These exchanges took place during the 10th ASEF Journalists’ Colloquium on “Crisis Reporting: The Role of Asian and European Media” on 4-6 November 2015 in Luxembourg. ASEF in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Asia Media Programme, organised this event in conjunction with the 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (ASEM FMM12). Tageblatt, Luxembourg’s leading daily, was the media partner for this event, which was also supported by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and BBC Media Action.

The colloquium was designed to help Asian and European journalists learn from each other by exchanging regional experiences and knowledge about covering crises. Some of the discussion highlights of the event were based on journalists’ experiences from the field during disasters such as the Himalayan Quake in Nepal, the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan or the refugee crisis in Europe. Other sessions of the Colloquium focussed on important aspects that create huge impact in reporting a crisis. These include: role of social media, reporting for people directly affected by disasters, and long-term reporting of events.

ASEF has been organising such media projects over the years to build networks amongst media professionals across the two regions under the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) framework, discussing issues of common concern, and how they approach such issues in their own respective media in their home countries. These serve as good avenues to share ideas towards overcoming challenges, and consequently, improving how they work by listening to ideas that work.

We hope that this ASEF Media Handbook on Crisis Reporting will be useful to all practicing journalists as well as individuals and organisations dealing with the media during crises.
Introduction: the Challenges of Crisis Reporting

Reporting on crises creates significant challenges for international, national, local and community media and presents one of the most difficult operating environments in which journalists function.

Domestic news organisations in locations of crises often must deal with personnel, facilities, and equipment that have been affected by the crises before they can effectively report on events and issues surrounding the events. International journalists arriving to provide on-location reporting must cope with damaged infrastructures and inadequate services while trying to make sense of the crises and their effects on the local community.

Journalists covering crises must strive to understand what has happened and the scale and scope of the crises in an environment in which it is difficult to verify information, in which rumours and misinformation are widespread, and in which the public, authorities, and journalists are stressed and emotions elevated, and in which the safety of the journalists themselves may be at risk.

These challenges are compounded because there is no holistic training of journalists or news organisation preparation for crisis reporting and relatively few journalists have experience covering crises or have reported crises only sporadically during their careers. Every crisis is different so even experience in covering them may not fully prepare journalists for the next event they report upon.

This ASEF Media Handbook is primarily targeted at Asian and European media practitioners and organisations. It holds specific examples of crises from both regions and elaborates the discussion points highlighted by Asian and European journalists who participated in the 10th ASEF Journalists’ Colloquium on 4-6 November 2015 in Luxembourg.

Overall this handbook is intended to provide journalists and media organisations, as well as individuals, authorities, and aid organisations, with understanding of the challenges of covering crises, suggestions on how to overcome them, information that is needed at different stages of crises, and ideas on how to improve coverage of crises in the future. It is designed to convey the knowledge of best practices, how reporters can deal with issues that arise during the course of crisis reporting, and how immediate short-term and longer-term coverage objectives and requirements differ.

The need for improved coverage has grown concurrently with the speed in global communication and the internationalisation of crises responses. Improvements in global telecommunications spread news of crises in seconds and minutes rather than the days and months it took in the past. This increases knowledge of crises even from far away and in remote locations. The human suffering makes us recognise our common humanity.
and the significance of such events. Consequently, responses to crises are now global with international governmental and non-governmental organisations and aid programs of governments worldwide prepared to respond to large-scale crises anywhere in the world.

These useful developments, however, produce a continual stream of information about natural disasters, hazardous materials catastrophes, and man-made crisis. New crises tend to crowd out continuing news coverage of earlier crises, which creates dangers that forgotten crises can lead to longer and significant humanitarian crises because recovery from immediate causes of crises may take years.

Large scale natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and cyclones, tend to gain immediate attention, but slow developing crises not linked to single, large precipitating events, such as epidemics, drought, or refugees seeking safety tend to develop without significant media attention until the point when they become full humanitarian crises. Armed conflicts present not only geopolitical and strategic issues, but also have substantial impact on the people in the region in which they occur, creating humanitarian crises involving refugees and insufficient access to food, water, and shelter.

Journalists and news media play many more roles in crises coverage than in other forms of reporting: informing about events, conveying the needs of those affected, helping mobilise responses, and evaluating the effectiveness of authorities and aid agencies in meeting the needs of the affected communities. Understanding what information is needed when and finding ways to provide it is central to effective journalism.

Crisis impacts are far-reaching and enduring, their causes are often complex, and their multifaceted responses involve a range of public and private initiatives that require time to conduct emergency operations, deploy personnel, assess damage, and implement aid and recovery programs. Journalists need to understand these issues and processes so they can better report on crises, their aftermaths, and effectively monitor performance of governmental and non-governmental responses to the events.

“It is hoped that this handbook will improve journalists’ understanding of crisis and provide ideas on how to better cover crises in the future.”
Crisis requires a different kind of journalism

Crises require journalists and news organisations to alter their normal operations and reporting behaviour.

The public needs basic information about what happened and what is going on, delivered in traditional ways at the onset of crises. Crisis coverage differs because the public also needs critical information telling them what they should be doing during the immediate event and they need information that helps them cope with the aftermath and recovery as time passes.

“When a crisis happens, people want to know what happened. They reach for their phones, the television and the radio. The desire for information is intense,” said Ms Lisa ROBINSON from BBC Media Action during the colloquium. “For people directly affected by the emergency, the desire for information is not just out of curiosity and concern – it is for survival.”

Journalists have a key role to play in telling the world about critical events, but they should also play a role in saving lives during those events.

Journalists need to provide information people need to cope with the situation and to provide a platform for them to express their needs, observations, and opinions to the relief providers working to help them.

Information that is valuable to people affected by a crisis includes information such as telling people to move away from things that can fall, to turn off gas appliances, and to move away from areas where dangers exist. It can be difficult for traditional journalists to make the switch from regular reporting to “News you can use”. This is based on experiences with BBC and local journalists in trying to deliver humanitarian programming during several emergencies.

“Give people a voice. It should not just be government officials and aid officials telling them what to do. People can also tell each other how to solve problems.”
The shift from just providing traditional news to providing lifeline information for those directly affected does not mean abandoning journalistic values and it should remain independent and objective. “Lifeline reporting”, a programme developed by BBC Media Action includes advice to people in temporary homes and shelters about hygiene, improving conditions, where to get help and aid supplies, and what families have to do to register for assistance.

Media are particularly important in major disasters with mass trauma because they can help improve connectedness, instil hope, foster calm and promote self-sufficiency among the survivors.

Journalists and news organisations need to prepare to provide practical information rapidly. One challenge of preparing for an emergency is that you never really know if you are prepared until a crisis happens.

To prepare properly for an emergency, journalists need to know their audience’s needs, have practical information available beforehand, find ways to give their audience a voice, get to know and understand emergency services and aid agencies beforehand, and make sure they have made preparations about how they will operate in emergencies and cope with disruptions in electrical power, telecommunications, and other services.
“Crises can come on suddenly, create devastating damage, and produce chaos that creates significant challenges for journalists,” Mr Guna Raj LUITEL from Nagarik National Daily in Nepal told colloquium participants.

Using the media’s experiences during the Himalayan earthquake and major aftershocks in April-May 2015, the participants of the colloquium discussed the difficulties of making sense of, and then covering, the 8.1 magnitude tremor that triggered landslides and avalanches and killed 9,000 people, injured about 25,000 people, and left hundreds of thousands of people homeless.

Like in many other natural disasters, during the Himalayan Quake, it was quite difficult to realise the scale of what happened. Remote and difficult terrain and widespread damage to transportation and communications infrastructures made gathering information difficult. What was clear was that there was a major damage with large numbers of casualties.

Most of the journalists began using social media to tell the public what was happening and when things became slightly normal then they began reporting stories about relief issues, people not getting help, mismanagement of aid operations, how people were finding ways to cope and the resiliency of the population.

Some of the most important lessons learned, was to understand the need to rapidly stabilise the news organisation and figure out how to communicate with the staff. **Strong coordination in the newsroom and between journalists is highly recommended so that duplication of information can be avoided and journalists can go to different locations.**

Reporters very rapidly need to figure out where they will work if there is damage to their facilities, what equipment they have available, and whether they can actually operate during the disaster. Newspapers, radio, TV, internet, and mobile phones all require electrical and telephone systems so reporters have to make sure they have what the need is or find an alternative way to get information to the public.

“**During any crisis, internal news room coordination is the key.**”
Gathering information from local government authorities during crises

- Obtaining information during crises is often complicated by chaotic conditions that make normal news gathering activities more challenging and difficult for even authorities to obtain a full picture of what is happening. Telephone and electrical services may be unavailable and roadways may be closed or clogged, reducing abilities to communicate. Journalists need to do the best possible job of gathering and verifying information in this environment and should make it clear to the audiences that the situation is fluid and they are providing the best information currently available and will be clarifying and improving it over time.

- Gathering crisis information requires contacting multiple authorities who have different types of information and can be relied upon in different ways. In the early stages of a crisis, when conditions are especially chaotic, top government officials are gathering information from these sources as well, and their information will often be vague and sometimes contradictory. This occurs because some officials will disclose little before it is verified and others are more willing to release information they have and to speculate about the crisis. As time progresses, however, official information becomes more reliable and provides a better picture of the situation.

Dealing with police, fire and military or security officials

- Agencies responsible for first responses to a crisis are best able to provide situation reports on the status of the crisis and to provide information on rescue and relief efforts underway. Such information typically comes from higher level officials or specially designated spokespersons. Lower level personnel can provide information about what they are doing or seeing at a particular location, but typically are not able to provide a broader picture.

- Emergency officials who are struggling to cope with and understand events immediately after a crisis begins usually provide sparse information that increases as time progresses. Because many media outlets may be involved, they may limit responses to individual information requests by providing it only through official statements or organised media briefings.
Talking to political officials

- Political officials, such as mayors, commissioners, and governors, are important sources of information. They are often not directly involved in the on-the-ground crisis response efforts, but are briefed by departmental and agency officials. They can sometimes provide a general situation report and information on rescue and relief efforts underway, but they should not be relied upon to have deep knowledge of what is happening.

- In the early stages of crisis their primary messages are that an effective response is underway and that citizens should remain calm. Leading political officials often wish to be seen as actively involved in responding to crisis as a means of bolstering their reputations, but they are also better known to the public than government employees and can deliver some information and advice more persuasively. Over time as the crisis moves to recovery and rehabilitation, political officials become more important sources of information because those efforts require political and legislative action and special funding.

Contacting hospitals and health authorities

- In the short-term, hospitals can provide information about the number of casualties they are treating and the types and severity of injuries, but typically will not release patient-specific information for privacy reasons.

- Hospitals and health authorities can provide information about health challenges the community is facing or experiencing in longer term recovery efforts, such as illnesses from contaminated water supplies and sanitation issues, illnesses from dust, mould, and dangerous substances, and injuries sustained while clearing and rebuilding. They can also provide advice on how individuals should cope with such challenges.

Coordinating with specialised government agencies

- Specialised agencies such as building and planning offices, transportation departments, and utility providers play roles in damage assessments and can often provide information about the scale and scope of damage to buildings, roadways, and utilities. When recovery and reconstruction takes place they are critical sources for information about planning, budgets for reconstruction, and policies to prevent or reduce effects of future crises.
“To inform the public about the right aid available, journalists should always verify the information first.”
Social media can help journalists get information faster and from more sources during crises, but also forces journalists to spend time dealing with poor information distributed on social media networks.

“We now work in a real time live environment disrupted and influenced by the speed and emotion of social media,” Mr Phil CHETWYND from Agence France Presse (AFP) told the colloquium. Eyewitnesses nearly all have smartphones. Very dramatic events are often captured on camera and uploaded to social platforms. Every snippet of information including half truth, unverified rumour or outright falsehood – is published first on social platforms and verified later.

Social media rapidly reflects the immediate frustration, anger, and nationalistic emotions of the public in crises before it has had time to contemplate the meaning of events.

Managing the emotion generated by social networks is a significant challenge in a charged crisis situation. It is standard now to hear on radio or TV about an issue generating a lot of anger on social media. But there is also the danger of social media providing easy journalist shorthand which presents or substitutes more thoughtful journalism.
The colloquium discussions elaborated the work of AFP journalists and journalists from traditional media, bloggers and social media users during the events that killed 12 people and injured 11 others during the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.

**Verification of social media information** becomes a vital role for journalists because traditional media play important roles verifying information, knocking down rumours and false reports, and managing emotions of the public.

In a crisis, especially those involving immediate action by police and security forces, media must **balance the right to inform against the responsibility not to endanger people.**

Social media has become central to news coverage and journalists interview different eyewitnesses using social media rather than person-to-person during media events. This makes it more difficult to assess their veracity, understand their point of view, or consider the conditions in which they are talking to the journalist.

It may not always be better to go to the scene where large numbers of journalists are clamouring for access, but being at the scene helps you understand context and what people there are enduring.

When social media are used to interact with people at the scene, they are rarely asked about their safety.

Reporters should not exploit victims by making some emblematic of all victims which can lead to a media maelstrom surrounding them that produces loss of privacy and emotional distress.

Following the events in Paris, many social media sources felt abused by journalists and some received threats from Islamists and conspiracy theorists.

Traditional media are also now very active on social media during crises because it alerts media to developments, helps build contacts, and provides outlets for verified information and promoting news organisations’ news sites or live broadcasts. But there is a need to provide more information to the public online and through mobile media about what they should do to be safe or what they should be looking out for.

Lessons from the events included the need for reporters receiving clearer assignments about stories they should pursue, rather than just immediate reporting of what they observe where they are. As a result of the social media and journalism coverage of the Charlie Hebdo event, French journalists created new guidelines asking journalists to **consider the physical and emotional welfare of eyewitnesses with whom they interact online**, to make it clear where and how they plan to use content provided by eyewitnesses, and to ensure they are appropriately credited and compensated.

“**Social media is significant not just because of its speed, but because of its emotion.**”
• Journalists often use human interest stories to show the individual impact of crises and to convey the realities of crises by doing more than stating dry facts. These types of stories capture interest and help readers, viewers, and listeners relate more to the crises and they add context and perspective that is not found in other types of stories. They are also an important means for assessing the impact of crises on daily life.

• These personal stories are important because they can be touching when they result from rapport built with people and convey their issues with respect. They help illustrate issues that are being experienced at the individual level and help others understand impact of the crisis and the nature of response needed.

• Dealing with people caught up in a crisis requires respect and honesty. Persons interviewed or photographed should be told that journalists will be using their information and images in news reports. In many parts of the world people are less familiar with the work of journalists so you may need to explain your job and make sure they do not mistake you for aid personnel.

• Making the human interest focus too large a part of coverage can be problematic, if it displaces hard facts and information needed for the public to cope with the crisis. Human interest stories in crises are best when they do not exaggerate facts or emotions and use restrained adjectives.

• Human interest stories can also become unduly intrusive if they focus on death and grief or dehumanise the individuals involved in some way. It is easy to cross the line in crisis situations so strong editorial control, good judgement, and support from editors and the news organisations are needed to protect against even inadvertent exploitation or coverage that strips subjects of human dignity.

• Care needs to be exercised in pursuing human interest stories when covering moments of death and coping with serious injury. Journalists need to be careful of public backlash against perceived violations of privacy or impropriety such as rummaging through rubble and personal effects of victims.
Domestic crises present challenges for journalists because they involve one’s own community and create unique emotional and operational challenges for journalists and news organisations.

“*The public becomes impatient for information, so the journalists must balance the public needs for best available information with needs for accuracy and reducing rumors,*” said Ms Lorelei MASON from Television New Zealand. While doing so, emotions of fear and panic are normal and journalists are not immune to these reactions while trying to carry out their jobs. “*They are also worried about their children, family members, friends, and colleagues,*” Mason said.

**Crises that produce significant damage also create unique operating challenges** for domestic news media. Such disasters create immediate operational problems for news coverage. Sometimes a crisis can damage newsrooms. There is no power, phone lines are down, mobile communication is down, and the internet is not working. Such situations force journalists to assess whether they can work in their facilities, how to contact staff members, and how to re-establish news operations at a point when the public badly needs information.

After the big quake in New Zealand (in 2010 and 2011) Television New Zealand had to begin gathering information and broadcasting from a mobile van in a car park with portable power. Later it brought in tents, portable cabins, and other equipment to improve capabilities and conditions. The experience taught important lessons about the need to have a full disaster operating plan ahead of time.

People need to know who gets what equipment and supplies and where to find it. They need to keep phones and computers charged and ready and a contact system needs to be arranged.

**Media organisations need a full disaster plan** that includes arrangement for backup newsrooms and ensure it has the ability to go live from news gathering trucks, run entire broadcast from them, and that other equipment, shelter, beds, food, and supplies will also be available.

“*Newsrooms be ready with a disaster reporting plan!*”
• During a crisis, domestic and international aid organisations, foreign governments and intergovernmental organisations provide support and assistance to affected individuals and communities.

• They can be useful for providing information about the scale and scope of the crisis, providing practical advice to the public based on their experience dealing with previous crises, sharing information about the aid that the public can expect from and where to obtain it.

• The most important agencies in a crisis depend upon their size and ability of the local community and national government to respond. In large crises requiring significant logistical support, for example, smaller nations may be helped by larger nations by providing aircraft, creating and operating supply depots, and organising distribution. In other cases the national government or national relief societies may be able to handle the challenges alone.

• Aid agencies have grown increasingly important to crisis responses in recent decades because many governments are outsourcing much of the aid activities they previously undertook themselves to these civil society organisations. Agencies involved in short-term assistance tend to focus on issues such as search and rescue operations, emergency medical services, and provision of emergency shelter, food, water, and clothing. Agencies focused on intermediate and longer-term assistance are usually concerned with issues such as continuing provision of food and water, interim housing, reconstruction, education and training, and livelihood restoration.

• During major crises, organisations such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) may play significant roles, also organisations such as CARE, Save the Children, Plan USA, World Vision, Oxfam, Doctors without Borders, International Medical Corp and others associated with religious organisations worldwide can be involved.

• Competition among private aid organisations for donations and resources can lead to subtle manipulation of media, so it is important to seek out the most credible groups for information and coverage and to be wary of public relations efforts by the groups. Journalists need to be especially careful about statements on how much money the groups need to provide aid and how many people they are reaching with their efforts. Like all good journalism, efforts should be made to verify that information.

• The participants noted that aid agencies of all kind become part of the crisis story and that journalists need to be assessing their effectiveness in providing aid that people actually need and whether they are actually doing what they say they are doing.
Chemical, radiological and biological crises present special coverage issues for journalists, and force them to report differently because of the special safety issues involved.

"Effective reporting of large-scale accidents involving hazardous materials requires preparation and special safety measures," Mr Toshimitsu SAWAI of Kyodo News told the colloquium.

Sawai was chief of the nuclear energy news for the news agency at the time of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station disaster in 2011. He detailed how he and his colleagues were forced to deal with enormous obstacles and challenges in providing critical news to residents in areas near the plant, to the public in Japan as well as to the entire world.

The crisis presented journalistic challenges because it involved both a natural and manmade disaster, involved a strategic facility close to the public and the safety challenges in reporting the events.

It was difficult to assess invisible danger and respond, so special measures were needed. That problem was compounded because the information sources were not fully transparent in providing accurate information because they were trying to keep local residents from panicking.

Despite those challenges, the news agency was able to respond effectively because it had previously prepared a manual with procedures and rules for covering nuclear accidents. The plan included immediate establishment of one centralised nuclear news headquarter in the event of accident and policies that put journalists in the field under the authority of a nuclear safety manager responsible for ensuring safety guidelines. The policies required special approval for staff to visit the site and exclusion zone, mandated that journalists and photographers in the field carry dosimeters and iodine tablets, established monitoring of exposure limits, and directed staff when to evacuate and take shelter.

"Special safety measures are needed for reporting crises with hazardous materials."
Journalists going to a crisis location need to carry things that will be needed for survival.

- Ensuring journalists have what they need when there is disruption of electricity, telecommunications, and transportation and damage to hotels and restaurants and other services is the responsibility of each individual journalist and their news organisation. Every journalist needs to be prepared to survive in the conditions that exist or they cannot effectively do their job and may become a drain on the resources of public and private aid organisations.

- In addition to notepads, laptops, mobile phones, and camera gear used for traditional reporting, journalists going to crisis location need to think like they are going camping and provide all the things that will be needed for survival: tents, sleeping bags, food, water purification supplies, torch, batteries, and protective clothing. Because of electrical and telecommunications disruptions it may be necessary to have a satellite phone, walkie-talkies and carry cash.

- If violence is involved in the crisis, a helmet and bulletproof vest may be necessary, as well as safety training and adherence to safety procedures.

- Depending on the location and extent of the crisis establishing local contacts, a fixer, or teaming up with other news organisations to undertake coverage may be necessary.

Meeting needs for self-sufficiency during crises

As a result of the manual and previous training, Kyodo News was able to provide intensive, informed coverage without risking the lives of the staff. It also meant that the news agency was better informed about the causes and challenges of the crisis and better able to help the public understand and respond appropriately.

The most important lessons learned from covering the disaster are:

- Reporters and photographers must not act on their own judgment when hazards such as radiation exist.
- News organisations have to take steps to protect reporters and photographers.
- Staff must have knowledge about the hazards and safety procedures.

“Journalists going to a crisis location need to carry things that will be needed for survival.”
Long-term crisis coverage is necessary

“Crisis reporting should not stop once the immediate emergency is passed,” Ms Belinda GOLDSMITH from the Thomson Reuters Foundation told the colloquium.

Over time life normalises and basic services are restored, but there is a need for continuing news and information about what plans the authorities and aid agencies have for recovery and rebuilding and journalists need to publicly evaluate the response to the crisis so future responses can be improved.

In the long term, coverage will shift to the rebuilding efforts, needs that are not yet addressed, and what can be done to prevent or mitigate disasters in the future.

There is also a need to focus on people and their daily lives, their housing situations, what is happening to their livelihoods in terms of jobs and the economy, and issues that may promote instability and migration.

Often there is a myth that people are equally affected by crises. Actually the poor, children, elderly, and women are the most affected. It is important for the disparities and related issues to be covered.

Ultimately media need to ensure accountability of public expenditures made during and following a crisis. NGOs are increasingly replacing government activity in recovery with government paying them to do it. This requires scrutiny of not only the government expenditures but how well the NGOs are doing in restoring housing, public services, and other needs.

It is easy for international media to ignore the need for coverage of long-term crisis response and recovery because they become distracted by new crises elsewhere. The international nature of crisis response today, however, requires that kind of coverage of major disasters.

“Crisis reporting goes beyond immediate event reporting.”
Providing information appropriate for the stage of crises

Information needs of the public change over time during crises so how news organisations report events and issues need to adapt to meet those evolving needs. News media must balance different needs for information at varying times of crises and the roles of journalists change from immediate reporting to helping the public cope with crises, to contextualising/explaining causes of crises, and monitoring response, recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Stage 1 Coverage: The onset of crises

- The initial stage of coverage occurs when the crisis begins or becomes apparent. In this stage journalists need to provide basic facts about what is happening and risks the public face. This is basic who, what, when, where, why and how coverage and should be done in a way to diffuse panic with clear information.

- The primary questions that journalists should be trying to answer in this stage are what is the severity of the crisis, where are the most affected areas, what are the levels of casualties, and what should the public be doing.

- The coverage should clarify what is known, provide information on how to protect oneself and property and provide information about where it is safe to go and not go.

- It is especially important in the chaotic initial stage of coverage to ensure that eyewitnesses relied upon are properly vetted, that multiple sources of verification are sought for information, and that information conveyed is documented so it can be double checked.

- As the hours pass and responses begin to be implemented, information on what aid is coming, what the public can expect aid efforts to do for them, locations where help can be obtained, and contact information for seeking aid and information on families should be conveyed.

- This type of information should be obtained and conveyed through contacts with authorities, the work of journalists in the field, and experts brought to the newsroom.
Stage 2 Coverage: Reporting the response and help available

- The focus of news and information provision needs to shift as time progresses from the immediate event and keeping the public safe to what authorities are doing, where the public can go for help, and making initial evaluations of how authorities are responding to the crisis, where needs are not being met, and new issues that are appearing and need attention. This often occurs late in the first day or second day of coverage.

- These involve information on who is responsible for and coordinating the response, who has been engaged in response, what resources have been deployed.

- In natural disasters, basic information about what brought about the crisis is vital. In made-made crises, reporting often turns to assertions of responsibility, claims of responsibility, and providing a better explanation of the how and why. The intent of this type of coverage is to help improve the response and help the public try to understand what is happening.

Stage 3 Coverage: Why did this happen and how good is the response?

- The third stage of coverage tends to focus on deeper contextualisation of events and the response to them.

- This often includes reports on the science of earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, or whatever precipitated the crisis or the politics/geopolitics of conflicts that may be involved. Experts selected and information provided should be carefully chosen to ensure they are reputable and that the explanations provided are generally accepted.

- In this stage greater scrutiny is given to the response of officials and aid agencies to determine whether it is adequate and meeting the needs of the entire public. This is typically done by combining media observations, interviews with the public, and interviews with emergency aid experts both at the location and elsewhere to determine whether responses are reasonably organised, typical for the type of crises, and appropriate for the scope and scale of the events. Where official information is disputed, it cannot be ignored, but the government information and response should be scrutinised through interviews with experts.
Stage 4 Coverage: Coping with short-term aftermath

- This stage typically occurs 3-7 days after the onset of a crisis and involves issues consequent to the precipitating event. Journalists should be prepared to deal with this stage and not be surprised by its arrival. In cases of natural disaster where authorities are not able to provide adequate basic shelter, food, and water to all of those affected, looting of stores tends to break out by the third day as people become desperate to take care of themselves and their families.

- Risks of water borne diseases appear in days 4 and 5 because people may be or have been forced to consume unsafe water. This may lead to outbreaks of a large number of diseases, including dysentery, cholera, and typhus. Coverage of how to avoid and to treat these ailments become crucial.

- In an ongoing crisis, public weariness and stress tend to reach critical points in the 4th and 5th days of living in shelters and struggling to survive. A great deal of community support is needed to help the public cope with the anger, frustration, and psychological pain. Informational coverage involving psychologists, counsellors, and clergy and providing information about where and how to obtain emotional support is useful.

- Ongoing crises also create conditions for opportunistic crimes and human trafficking to appear so journalists should be looking for evidence of these issues to bring them to the attention of the public and authorities and provide information how to protect against them.

Stage 5 Coverage: Reporting long-term recovery

- This stage occurs after the immediate crises are over and involves non-emergency responses that help the communities involved recover from the effects. These responses involve both governmental and non-governmental activities designed to re-house people, restore and provide basic services (utilities, schools, social services), and rebuild the community.

- This stage may take years to be completed and journalists play a role ensuring these responses meet public needs, that they are effective, that the costs of the recovery are appropriate and money is efficiently spent, and that recovery spending serves the needs of everyone in the community.

- This stage makes coverage of planning agencies, school committees, utility providers, social service providers more important and news organisations may need to adjust coverage and staffing patterns to provide the necessary coverage.
Staying safe during crisis

Journalists face very real problems keeping safe when they are in the field during crises. “Taking care of safety does not mean surrender,” Mr Umar CHEEMA from The News in Pakistan told the colloquium said. “It lets you live for another day to tell the truth.”

Safety measures depend on the type of crisis, but all require basic safety measures and planning to avoid injury. Safety in areas embroiled in violent conflicts requires special care and preparation to ensure journalists do not become victims of the crises as well.

You cannot eliminate risk, but you can minimise it. A number of factors are critical to mitigate risk, he explained. First whether journalists are freelancers or employed by news organisations and the extent to which the news organisation can and will provide support. Second is knowledge of the area and local culture and having local contacts who are familiar with the current situation and dangers. Third is the decision whether to report with or without a byline — the latter being important if journalists are being individually targeted for their stories.

How you deal with those you interview is crucial. Journalists have to be polite and professional. They need to be mindful of the fact that they are dealing with people polarised by a crisis. Tolerate their intolerance. Be sensitive about their belief system.

In the end it is up to journalists to constantly review their safety and to react to threats with prudence. One has to be aware of the history of threatening actors and their capability to damage because attacks may follow threats.

Reporting threats to police sometimes help, but not always. So it may be prudent to leave the area in case of high risk.

Journalists who are detained or kidnapped by parties should be cooperative, buy time and favour by explaining their credentials and that they are doing their duty with full honesty without taking any side.

“Stay safe! You cannot report if you are killed or injured.”
It is the responsibility of every journalist and their employer to be aware of and protect safety, health, and security issues that may arise while they are reporting crisis.

**During natural disasters**

- Adequate steps should be taken to protect journalists from injury resulting from environmental disasters. In cases of earthquakes, tornados, floods and wildfires, for example, debris from splintered wood, nails, sharp metal and glass shards can create significant wounds so journalists should wear proper footwear and protective clothing when entering such areas.

- Loss of structural integrity can make being near or in damaged buildings dangerous, so care need be exercised.

- Journalists should be careful of moving water in rivers and creeks because the force of the stream can be exceedingly strong. These undermining riverbanks carry debris and can sweep away those filming and observing the flow. Be exceptionally wary of crossing swollen streams because even a few inches of water can carry enough power to sweep away a vehicle.

- High winds that accompany hurricanes, cyclones and tornados can carry dangerous and life-threatening debris including automobiles and building parts requiring journalists and film crews to take precautions when wind speeds rise.

- Try to gather maximum information about the present and expected scenarios in order to go well-prepared to the fields of action.

**Safety from hazardous materials**

- Natural and man-made disasters can result in release of highly flammable materials, corrosive and toxic chemicals, biological agents, radiation and other substances that can endanger the public and journalists.

- Reporting in such crisis requires great care for safety because direct and airborne exposure can be dangerous and lethal. It is important to comply with safety measures put in place by authorities and safety procedures of the news organisation in such incidents.

**During violent conflicts**

- Reporting violent conflicts require particular care and planning on the part of journalists and their news organisations. Before deploying to cover violent conflicts, careful risk assessment and safety training need to be undertaken and safety plans and equipment arranged.

- Avoid being seen as aligned with any group, be careful of getting caught in crossfire, and do not trust local contacts you do not know well.
Prevention against communicable diseases

• Journalists covering public health emergencies resulting from large scale outbreaks of highly lethal communicable diseases such as viral haemorrhagic diseases like Ebola, pandemic flu outbreaks such as SARS, and meningococcal diseases must take steps to protect themselves from exposure while engaging in coverage.

• Safety advices should be sought from relevant health authorities and followed while reporting on the emergencies. After leaving an outbreak area, journalists should seek medical advice and monitor themselves for symptoms during the incubation period appropriate for the disease.

Walking the line between being human and being a reporter

• Journalists in crisis situations are both humans and journalists and may be torn how to respond to situations and people encountered during crises. The ultimate decisions are personal, but should be guided by the principle of doing what is best for the public.

• This situation arises because crisis situations often create conflicts with the normal journalistic practices of detachment from events and participants and the admonition not to become part of the story. These conflicts become particularly acute when human lives are at stake. As a general rule, life comes before stories and in these situations journalists should respond as humans first and as reporters/photographers second.

• If no one else is available to take action to save a life or render immediate first aid, journalists have obligations as humans to help injured and shocked persons and to bring people needing assistance to the attention of authorities and aid agencies. Journalists need to be careful to stay objective in their reporting about such activities and not to make themselves the object of a story.

• Humanness should also be evidenced through the exercise of cultural sensitivity involving depictions of pain, death and grief caused by the crisis, which may differ at the location of the crisis and for the audience of the reporting.

"Life comes before stories and in these situations journalists should respond as humans first and as reporters second."
Conclusions

The information in this handbook shows that journalism during crises involves many issues and challenges not experienced during normal news gathering and dissemination. These require news organisations, editors and producers, and journalists in the field to behave differently.

Suggestions for news organisations

• Plan and prepare the organisation prior to crises. Every news organisation should ensure that it and its staff are prepared to respond to and provide coverage necessary during these events.

• News organisations should have effective disaster plans in place to ensure they can function during crises in their place of operation and that alternative facilities, equipment, power, and communications capabilities are available to support news gathering and distribution. These contingency plans are crucial if the organisation is to be able to carry out its work.

• News organisations should also provide training ahead of time to ensure journalists' safety during crises, including preparation for potential crises involving hazardous materials in their coverage area. Organisations are responsible to ensure that risks are understood, that safety measures are taken, and that journalists are prepared to handle conditions they will encounter when deployed to local or distant crises.

• News organisations need to ensure that they can support the needs of journalists in the field and that any necessary equipment and organisational support is and can be provided.
Suggestions for editors and producers

• Editors and producers should not have to invent coverage when a crisis occurs, but have basic plans in place about how such coverage will be handled, what information will be sought and provided in the varying stages of crisis. This preparation should include identifying contacts for sources of information that will be needed and preparing basic content that can be used immediately for public safety and to explain causes of crises that may potentially occur in the coverage area.

• The first priority of editors and producers must be the safety of staff deployed in the field. If they are injured or killed, they cannot help provide the news and information the public needs. Editors and producers should constantly address safety issues with journalists, particularly during highly hazardous crises.

• Editors and producers should carefully consider where they deploy staff. This includes deciding how many should be deployed to the locations of the events or spread to different locations to gain and convey the bigger picture of scale and scope of the crisis and to obtain information needed from different areas. The ability to communicate with journalists in the field is crucial and it may be appropriate to have standards pre-deployment assignments that the journalists will carry out in the event of loss of communication and their absence from the newsroom. As communication is re-established, the journalists will have thus already gathered some of the essential information needed for coverage.

• Editors and producers need to be constantly considering how the crisis is changing and how the public’s need for information is being altered. Considering the stages of crisis and new coverage needed the newsroom managers better plan coverage that needs to be undertaken.
Suggestions for journalists in the field

- Journalists in the field seeking the information and stories that help the public understand what is happening should keep in mind that one of the main priorities is their own safety so that they can continue carry out those tasks. Staying aware of risks and mitigating them are vital.

- Journalists in the field should not only be finding information assigned to them, but also look out for information and images that could help the public comprehend the events, help make their lives better, and help inform authorities of what is necessary to make conditions better. This means focusing on what people need, the challenges being faced in different areas, and what is going right and wrong in the response. Journalists in the field are the eyes and ears of the community and facilitate exchange of information among the public, emergency responders, public authorities, and aid agencies.

- Because crises often result in fatalities, widespread injuries, and large-scale disruption of lives, journalists need to be aware of the trauma and emotional states of survivors they are interviewing and photographing. Journalists should be constantly vigilant to ensure they are treating people with respect and empathy.
Self-sufficiency during crisis:

1. Who is responsible?
   - Yourself
   - Organisation/Regional office coordinator

How to cope with disruptions:
- Kit (Satellite phone)
- Local contacts/fixers
- Team up with other organisations

Emergency kit:
- Laptop
- Electronics
- Food/MRE
- Water purification
- Aid kit
- Pills
- Storing by
Resources for journalists covering crises

  http://victims.jrn.msu.edu/public/newslet/spring01/disaster.html

- BBC, Journalism Safety Guide

- Emergency Journalism Net, European Journalism Center
  http://emergencyjournalism.net/


- Journalists and Emergency Managers Discuss Disaster Response, Communication Currents, August 2012
  http://www.natcom.org/CommCurrentsArticle.aspx?id=2645

- Deborah Potter and Sherry Ricchiardi, Disaster and Crisis Coverage, International Center for Journalists

- Reporting on Crisis, Disaster, Homeland Security, Journalists’ Resource, Shorenstein Center, Harvard University

- Reporting Disaster and Disaster Preparedness: A Training Handbook, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
  http://www.igep.in/live/hrdpmp/hrdpmaster/igep/content/e48745/e50194/e51519/Media_and_DRR_Training_Handbook_GIZ_2012.pdf

- Reporting Natural Disasters, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma
  http://dartcenter.org/content/teaching-effective-coverage-natural-disaster

- Frank Smythe, Journalists’ Security Guide: Covering News in a Dangerous and Changing World, Committee to Protect Journalists

- Tips for journalists covering disaster zones (video), IJNet
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVIxNgFhl&feature=channel


- Verification Handbook: A definitive guide to verifying digital content for emergency coverage. European Journalism Center
  http://verificationhandbook.net/
# Speakers at the 10th ASEF Journalists’ Colloquium

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• **Aid agencies** – Governmental and non-governmental organisations with the purpose of providing assistance to the public during crises. The term encompasses groups including the Red Cross/Red Crescent, Save the Children, UNICEF, and emergency aid bureaus of individual foreign governments.

• **Biological hazards** – Biological substances that threaten human and other life. These include infectious substances such as bacteria and viruses and medical waste. These biological substances or agents are often used for medical and other research and vaccines or result from treatments of human illnesses and injuries. Some have been used in warfare and terrorism.

• **Chemical crisis** – A crisis caused by the release and public exposure to chemicals that are toxic and corrosive. Humans, animals, and the environment can be damaged by breathing or coming into physical contact with chemicals. Exposure to some chemicals may be fatal and contamination may make an area uninhabitable.

• **Communicable diseases** – Diseases that can spread among the population from interaction with those who have the disease. Spread through physical contact with infected individuals, their fluids, and coughs and sneezes. Some communicable diseases lead to fatalities and other severe conditions. Such diseases include various types of flu, measles, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, hepatitis, cholera, malaria, and hemorrhagic fevers.

• **Disaster, manmade** – These disasters result from risks associated with human activity such as accidental release of chemicals, biological agents, or radiation that can be harmful to humans, wildlife, and the environment and harm to communities done by war and conflict.

• **Disaster, natural** – These disasters typically result from unusually strong geological, climatological, and hydrological activity. They include phenomena such as earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides, flooding, tsunamis, storm surges, avalanches, blizzards, ice storms, heat waves, droughts, strong winds, tornados, hurricanes, and typhoons.

• **Emergency services** – Official and officially sanctioned services that are first responders to emergencies and crises. They include police, fire, rescue, and ambulance services designed to respond to immediate acute needs.

• **Epidemics** – Rapidly spreading disease that affects large number of people in a short period of time, generally in a specific location and arising from a common source. It may or may not be contagious and includes meningococcal infections, cholera, and flu outbreaks.

• **Evacuation** – The movement of persons from an area that has or is about to endangered by continuation of a crisis. Evacuation is ordered by emergency
authorities and evacuees are typically moved to an assembly area, refuge, or shelter. Evacuations may be small or large in scale and rely on both personal and public transportation.

- **Evacuee** – A person who has been evacuated from an endangered area.

- **Hazardous materials** – Substances and material can affect the safety of the handlers, carriers, or the public during their acquisition, creation, use, or transportation. These include gases, flammable liquids and solids, oxidizing agents, corrosives, and toxic and radioactive materials. Improper handling and accidental release can create both small and large-scale crises depending on the materials, the amount involved, and the areas and populations exposed.

- **Humanitarian crisis** – Events or series of events that endanger the welfare and survival of an entire community or large group of people by preventing them from accessing basic necessities. Humanitarian crises can result from war and conflict, drought, or prolonged effects of natural disaster.

- **Lifeline information** – Critical knowledge that those coping with crisis need to protect themselves and respond to crises. Media supplying lifeline information help the public improve safety, sanitation, shelter, and access basic necessity needed to survive.

- **Pandemic** – Outbreak of infectious disease that spreads widely through the population across a large region or globally. These have included the plague, smallpox, tuberculosis, HIV, and the H1N1 and SARS viruses.

- **Radiological crisis** – A crisis created by release of unusual amounts radiation and public exposure. Depending upon the degree of exposure illness and death may result. Exposure to radiation cannot be sensed and can only be detected with specialized instruments. Low natural levels of radiation are universal, but higher and potentially dangerous levels of radiation are used for medical, electrical power, and military purposes. Accidents and other events can lead to release of radiation from these sources.

- **Response** – The initial stage in crises when emergency services, utility services, and aid agencies react, dealing with the immediate aftermath of events precipitating crisis, begin working on infrastructures to restore public services, and begin providing assistance to the public.

- **Recovery** – The second stage in crisis immediate emergencies have been addressed and government and non-government actors work to help individuals and the community improve a life, infrastructures, buildings and restore normalcy.

- **Refugees** – Persons forced to leave a country because of war or conflict and religious or political persecution. Refugees have special legal status in international law and national law in many countries.

- **Transportation infrastructure and services** – Includes roadways, waterways, railways, airports, bridges, and other methods used to move persons and goods into and out of communities.

- **Utility infrastructure and services** – Public and private systems and providers of telecommunications, water, electrical, sewer, natural gas, and waste collection and treatment services. These services construct, operate, and maintain the infrastructures and provide services to the public.
Acknowledgements

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The ASEF team, Ms Debasmita DASGUPTA, Mr Rafael SECADÉS and Mr R Raj Kumar, were responsible for the concept and development of this media handbook.
The ASEF Media Handbook is for journalists from journalists. It is a result of exchanges between Asia-Europe media professionals. The Handbook tackles a specific area of journalism and its challenges. It also presents suggestions for better quality stories based on experiences and insights shared during the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) media projects.