



Photo: THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION/Thin Lei Win

Richard Padelia, his wife Rosanna, and two of their four children had lost their home during the typhoon Haiyan, that hit the Philippines in 2013

„It's all about people“

CRISIS REPORTING Why long-term follow-up makes a difference

Stefan Osorio-König

Nargis and Haiyan – just two names many might not recall. Yet the first one was a cyclone that hit Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar in spring 2008, killing a 138.000. The second one was a typhoon hitting the Philippines in 2013. The death toll reached a 6.340, with a 1.601 people still missing.

When a major natural disaster strikes it immediately makes its way to the front pages of the newspapers, reporters are being dispatched on the ground and broadcasters go on air with special editions. Yet, when the public interest starts waning, so do the headlines. However, the real suffering of the survivors is often just about to begin when the spotlights of the global press are being swit-

225.000

people have died in the biggest natural disaster in the past decade: the earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010

ched off. One of the missions of the Thomson Reuters Foundation is to pull out of the oblivion the disasters of the past decade and give their victims a face.

Belinda Goldsmith has been a foreign correspondent for more than 30 years, of which 20 with the news agency Reuters. Since

last year she heads the Thomson Reuters Foundation as Editor-in-Chief. „A major focus of the Foundation is the long-term crisis reporting“, says Belinda Goldsmith. „When an earthquake occurs like in Afghanistan last week, the focus of the press is on the quake itself, then comes the measurement of the magnitude, then the press will cover the destruction and after that the arrival of the aid agencies.“

It is this short-term reporting that makes the headlines for a few days. But soon they will be replaced by other news.

„We at the Foundation look at the longer term“, explains Ms Goldsmith. „We take a close look at what happened to the public services, the housing, jobs, education or water supply in the affected areas a few years down the line. And we also look at gender issues, as in many countries women are often more affected by the consequences of a natural disaster than men.“

The earthquake in Haiti in 2010 took the lives of a 225.000 people. „It was the largest natural disaster in the past decade in terms of losses of human lives. And we wanted to check how things have evolved five years after the quake, how the money has been spent and if it has reached its aims.“

Hence the Thomson Reuters Foundation dispatched reporters to Haiti, who had already been on the ground in 2010. „We track some people we talked to five years ago to see if and how their situation has changed“, says Ms Goldsmith. „There is a woman who has lost a child, a man who lost his job or a family that lost its home – if you have a human-face-story, you can better relate to what happened.“

While short-term reporting is about getting the headline, long-term reporting is about „getting back the headline“, says Ms Goldsmith.

The money plays a key part in disaster relief. „We are talking

ASEF in Luxembourg

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) brings together journalists and editors-in-chief from both continents. These meetings always take place in conjunction with the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) of the heads of state and government of the

member countries. Considering that Luxembourg is presently holding the presidency of the Council of the EU, the ASEM meeting takes place next week in the Grand-Duchy. This year's focus is on crisis reporting.

about billions of dollars“, she says. „It is taxpayers money and money coming from private donations.“ If it turns out it has not been spent well, then the question arises „how to spend it better next time“.

But there is also the problem, that a lot of the money committed by the governments did not even go to Haiti. Often it is other situations that surge and divert the attention. „The intentions are generally good, but sometimes mistakes are made“, explains Ms Goldsmith. „For example aid workers, who did not speak French, were sent to Haiti – a francophone country.“

Belinda Goldsmith also pleads for a more transparency for NGOs. „On the whole they do an

excellent work. Nevertheless they need a better oversight.“

The importance of long-term crisis reporting lies in the fact that „it is all about people“, she says. „Peoples' lives are affected and sometimes a single photo is enough to remind us their fate.“

Natural disasters will continue to occur, „but in the long term we must aim at a disaster risk reduction. It is about better warning systems, a better preparation of the people in potentially affected areas and about a better relief work“. Especially Asia is strongly exposed to earthquakes and tropical storms. Densely inhabited urban areas or poorly accessible mountainous regions often magnify the fatal consequences of a natural disaster.

Crisis reporters at the Thomson Reuters Foundation are thoroughly trained for their missions and they receive appropriate counselling. „Journalists and especially aid workers are emotionally strongly affected. There is a general recognition, that there often is a need for counselling“, says Ms Goldsmith.

A particularly difficult issue arose last year with the ebola crisis. „Ebola is problematic, because it is hard to control“, she says. This is why the journalists reporting on ebola got external advice on what they can and cannot do.

„And one message is very clear“, says Belinda Goldsmith „'No story is worth your life'“.



One message is very clear: „No story is worth your life!“

Belinda Goldsmith
Editor-in-chief,
Thomson Reuters Foundation

Belinda Goldsmith

Belinda Goldsmith is the Editor-in-chief of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, running a global team of nearly 30 journalists and a network of about 100 stringers covering humanitarian issues, women's rights, human trafficking, climate change and corruption. Belinda joined the Thomson Reuters Foundation last year after 20 years of working for Reuters from over 20 countries, reporting on political, financial and general news and leading various news teams. Recruited in Papua New Guinea where she was the first female correspondent for Australian Associated Press, she worked for Reuters in Australia, Sweden, the United States and Britain in a variety of roles including head of Investment Banking in New York, Global



Editor of Entertainment and Lifestyle, and Chief Correspondent for Britain. She has run courses for journalists in developing countries and is a regular speaker at universities and in the media on careers in journalism. Belinda, who has two teenage children, trained as a journalist in London after graduating from Reading University.