




*A Guidebook for the Media* **COVERING  
DISASTERS  
THROUGH THE  
LENS OF GENDER**



Uks - A Research, Resource & Publication Centre



Global Fund  
for Women



# **COVERING DISASTERS THROUGH THE LENS OF GENDER**

*A Guidebook for the Media*



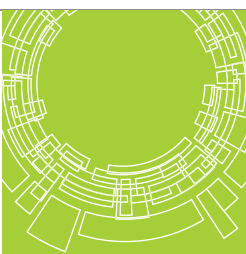
## **UKS** **Research Centre:** **An Introduction**

Uks, meaning 'reflection' in Urdu, is a research, resource and publication centre dedicated to promoting the reflection of women and women's issues within and through the media in Pakistan in a manner which is neutral, balanced and unbiased. As an advocacy and rights-based organisation, Uks is focused on the cause of gender equality and women's development with particular emphasis on the women-media relationship.

Since its inception in 1997, Uks has been monitoring the media, conducting research studies on emerging media trends and undertaking trainings and workshops to raise awareness about crucial issues regarding gender and women development in Pakistan. It is also a pioneer in issues-based radio programmes and is currently running an internet radio programme called 'Meri Awaz Sunno' (Listen to My Voice). In this short span of time, Uks has already won the support of many seasoned journalists, media organisations, human and women's rights activists, academicians and other like-minded groups.

We, at Uks, believe that the media is a powerful force which has an impact on our daily lives, thought processes, mindsets and ideological beliefs. As such, the media is an exceedingly important change agent which can be worked with to bring out changes in attitudes and behaviours for the betterment of both the women and the men who together weave the fabric of our society.

Find out more about Uks at **[www.uksresearch.com](http://www.uksresearch.com)**



# Contents

## **Chapter- 1**

Disasters, Calamities and Epidemics in Pakistan:  
From earthquakes to floods to dengue fever

11

## **Chapter- 2**

Role of Media in disseminating information  
and raising awareness:  
Why focus on Gender when reporting on disasters?

14

## **Chapter- 3**

Creating gender sensitive messages:  
Learning Sensitivities and Sharing Best Practices

19

## **Chapter- 4**

Children do matter!

29

## **Chapter- 5**

Ethics and the Media

33

Readings and References

35

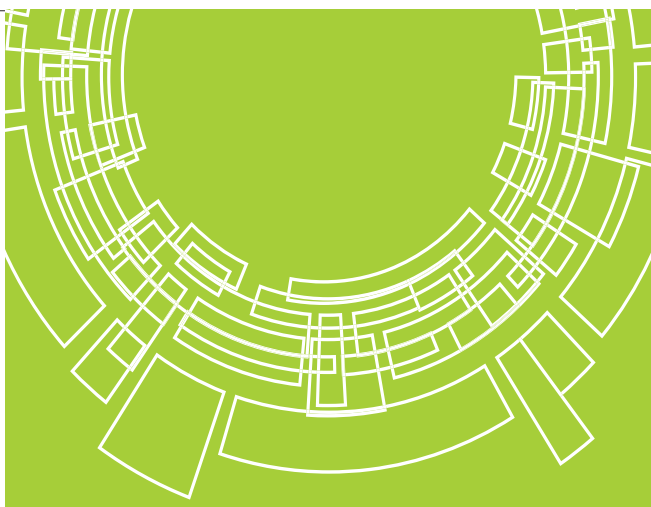


## Disclaimer

Communicating Disasters through the Lens of Gender:  
A Guide for the Media is an Uks Research Publication.

Permission is granted to display, copy and distribute this guide in whole or in part provided that:

- 1) The material is used with the acknowledgment that 'Communicating Disasters through the Lens of Gender' is a product of Uks Research Centre;
- 2) The research is used solely for personal, non-commercial, or informational use; and
- 3) No modifications are made to this guidebook



## Acknowledgements

'Communicating Disasters through the Lens of Gender: A Media Guide' was conceived and compiled by Tasneem Ahmar and written by Rehana Khandwalla.

Significant contributions were made by many others, including Rafia Arshad, Sundus Hamid, Saniya Jafree, and the entire team of radio producers who produced programmes on the floods and dengue fever epidemic.

Acknowledgment is also due to Jibran Ahmed for the graphics and printing.

Special thanks go to Global Fund for Women for understanding the need for compiling and publishing this manual.

List of Acronyms	
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organizations
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NGO	Non-Government organization
PG	Parental Guidance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund/United Nation Fund for Population Activities
TB	Tuberculosis
TV	Television
TVEAP/TVE – Asia Pacific	Television for Education – Asia Pacific



# Preface

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words and nowhere is this truer than when reporting on natural or man-made disasters. However, the picture presented by the media on the women directly affected by the recent catastrophes that have been hitting Pakistan in succession, the earthquake of 2005, the 2010-2011 floods, or the annual dengue epidemic; women who have contributed courageously to relief and rehabilitation, and worked hard to rebuild the lives of broken families, can only be described as being mainly conspicuous by its absence, and otherwise, misrepresented and ineffective.

Women constitute half of humanity; they cannot continue to be ignored if we are to establish a balanced, harmonious society. Their voices must be heard, and it is the media's responsibility to ensure that air time and space is allocated to the concerns of women, their achievements and triumphs, and their contribution to society. However, the media must beware: women are not simply 'victims'. The practice today, as is clear from an in-depth scrutiny of print, radio, and television news, as well as insights from social media such as blogging and twitter, is to simply focus on heart wrenching images of women and children, with the women being portrayed as passive lookers-on incapable of doing anything to help themselves or others. Another anomaly is to identify women only in relation to the men in their lives, that is, as dutiful mothers, wives, daughters, thus taking away from their God-given identity as 'women/females', equal members of the human race.

The media's tendency to portray women affected by disasters as passive and ineffective bystanders is not only true for Pakistan but has been witnessed the world over. During the Indian Ocean tsunami that hit large areas of Asia, media portrayal of women was mostly relegated to showing pictures of women who had died in the disaster, or were badly injured, dying. The injured women had to brave not just the natural tsunami but also the media tsunami.



In disaster coverage, the projection of women as victims conforms to a long established and rather unfortunate media perception that only sees women as subjects of pity or sympathy. One reason for this is that the media is heavily male-dominated. In the average man's world, the men are the doers and givers, and the women are the takers. However, this is not a realistic picture of society anywhere. Whether the portrayal of women as sufferers results from gender blindness or is a form of expressing sympathy, it is a lazy way of looking at disasters. Particularly during and post-disaster situations when women are at their most vulnerable, especially in Pakistan due to cultural norms, it is important for the media to inculcate a sense of outrage among informed audiences at the exploitation of women (and children) and direct the attention of the public and relief agencies to the broader connotations of these images.

The issues highlighted in this booklet, and the guidelines presented for writing, publishing, broadcasting gender balanced and gender sensitive news stories are intended primarily for the media. In addition, it is hoped it will prove beneficial for anyone who wants to familiarize themselves with the tools necessary for responsible reporting and writing, and hone their skills in 'Communicating Disasters through the Lens of Gender', for example, students and faculty in the departments of Mass Communication and Gender Studies at universities, and new entrants in the Fourth Estate. The media is a critical building block of society, and its role in disasters must not be underestimated.

Readers are encouraged to add their personal experiences to the issues related here in order to enhance the usefulness and practicality of this guidebook.

This book does not contain absolutely exclusive information. We have tried to put together our own experiences, adding references from other sources in an easy, user-friendly manner. No doubt, readers may be well aware of the importance of reporting disasters through the lens of gender. Our aim is to sensitize media practitioners, students, teachers about Gender and Child Protection issues in disasters and disaster preparedness. The guide also provides

information on how to integrate, incorporate and highlight Gender and Children's concerns before, during and after a disaster in news reports, analyses and research.

practitioners, students, teachers about Gender and Child Protection issues in disasters and disaster preparedness. The guide also provides information on how to integrate, incorporate and highlight Gender and Children's concerns before, during and after a disaster in news reports, analyses and research.

'Communicating Disasters through the Lens of Gender' encourages media practitioners to become active partners in a disaster situation and help initiate public debate on the plans and policies of governments, relief agencies and support groups. The guide is meant to assist in producing media messages regarding the safety and security of women and children in crisis situations, especially violence against women, and in raising awareness about the degradation and exploitation of women, and the undermining of their role and position in society.

The guidebook highlights the negative impact of gender oppression and stereotyping and discusses ways and means to give equal voice to women and men in all areas of coverage, including increasing the number of programmes/news stories for, by, and about women on gender-specific topics that challenge gender stereotypes.

We hope this guide will help you look at disasters as a human and gender issue. It is also our prayer that we don't face any disasters but if and when we do, our media must be prepared to communicate sensitively and sensibly. Creating sensationalism—especially in a disaster situation—is not journalism and we all need to remember this.



Tasneem Ahmar  
(Director) **UKS**





# Introduction

Pakistan is not simply a 'developing country' in terms of under development of its social and economic infrastructure, political ethos of its people, health and education etc. It is a nation that has yet been unable to shake off the shackles of colonialism, and is subject to critical internal and external pressures that have embroiled the country in almost continuous conflict since its inception. Furthermore, not only is it the homeland of greatly diverse cultures, but remains divided by a multiple range of indigenous languages that impact communication among its people. It is also hampered by the imposition of a foreign language (English), a product of colonialism, as the official language of the country, and by the fact that successive governments have failed to promote Urdu, the 'national' language, among the elite whereas Urdu remains the medium of education and communication among the masses.

With the ordinary Pakistani buffeted from all sides, especially the cruel neglect of successive governments, including dictatorships and democratic dispensations, the Fourth Estate comes in as a driving force that can not only challenge the status quo, raise the social quotient to a meaningful level, but by encouraging positive action and enhancing awareness among its audience, the general public, can guide and lead Pakistanis towards a better and more secure future. The media, therefore, can and should play the role of teacher, guide and facilitator, as well as and beyond its stated role as a disseminator of information. However, in order to be effective in this role, the media must accept the mantle of 'social responsibility' in tandem with its focus on profits and commercial success, and through its reports on issues, events and happenings ensure that its focus remains on the good of the public. Keeping the spotlight on ultimate profit to society involves a holistic perspective of the social structure that holds communities and nations together, and this is only possible when the media recognizes the importance of including women and children, as well as men, in its mainframe. No one can refute the fact that women and



children are almost always missing from the canvas even though the world, certainly the human race, is composed of women as well as men. Comprising one half of humanity, the female has been relegated to obscurity (with few exceptions) due to age-old cultural norms and traditions that have given rise to prejudicial and discriminatory opinions and practices. This, in turn, has led to the formation of a lop-sided set of rules and regulations that control the social system by effectively marginalizing women, and placing men centre-stage. The end result is obviously a world where the abilities and talents of fifty per cent of the people either remain unharnessed or are not productively channelized, or relegated to the back room, as it were, leaving them vulnerable and open to exploitation. This is what 'gender' is all about. Gender, as we know, refers to the way members of the two sexes are perceived, evaluated, and expected to behave. As stated by Karen Young 'it refers to the social meanings given to being a man or a woman in a given society'. Simply put, biological differentiation defines the sex of a person, and social differentiation defines the gender of a person.

Like everyone else, the media is part and parcel of society, yet simultaneously sits apart when it performs the role of educator, informer, and champion of just causes. In this way, the media does not simply reflect society, but actually constructs it. When members of the media decide what to broadcast or publish, they portray to us a reality of their choice. Thus, media outlets do not only offer the public something to see, read, and hear but also shape how we perceive things and our manner of comprehending society and events. And because the media seeks to present things in a summarized fashion, generalizations are made leading to stereotypes. It is important, therefore, that all members of the media ensure that they play their role impartially, avoiding stereotypes and maintaining a gender-centric and gender balanced approach to help usher in a more uniform, stable, and balanced social structure.

Although a gender-centered approach is essential in every circumstance, during times of disaster, crisis or catastrophe it becomes even more imperative. At a time of disaster, maintaining a

gender-balanced approach means qualitative coverage of women and children as well as men which can, and does, impinge directly on disaster management. In fact, research proves that in all societies where women are at a social and economical disadvantage, they are made to bear the brunt of both natural and man-made calamities. Further, the impact of disasters upon women has a direct correlation with the position women hold prior to the event as well as other factors such as the denial of inheritance rights to women; the expectation that any money earned will be spent on the family as it is not considered their rightful property; lack of mobility (they are not permitted to travel alone) which forces them to remain in the disaster area, caring for the children and guarding the property; cultural taboos that undermine a single woman's capacity to fend for herself or acquire essential services, such as health, education, etc.

Society is a dynamic entity, nothing stays the same. However, the direction in which we move is up to us. Not only for a better tomorrow, but to usher in greater harmony and balance today, the onus lies on the media to motivate, guide, reform, to encourage better practice everywhere, and to not only enjoy the privileges accorded to the Fourth Estate, but to accept and uphold the responsibilities that go along with this privilege as a sacred trust. In Pakistan, in particular, we now have a vibrant, effective media industry that shows a consciousness and awareness of its true role; it is time to shed the shackles of discriminatory and prejudicial practices, and to open up to enlightenment, progress, and tolerance, to liberate ourselves from negative cultural and traditional norms that continue to keep half the citizens of this country from realizing their potential. Media practitioners are not simply professionals working to disseminate information; they are the guardians of society, the 'teachers' who pass on knowledge as well as data or facts and figures, it is in their power to protect the weak and vulnerable, ensure they are given space in their public and private lives, and they can herald a new age for the coming generations, for both women as well as men.



[http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/08/continuing\\_pakistani\\_floods.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/08/continuing_pakistani_floods.html)

## Chapter- 1

### Disasters, Calamities and Epidemics in Pakistan: From earthquakes to floods to dengue fever

Pakistan has endured several natural and man-made disasters and catastrophes since its creation. More recently, from the earthquake that devastated large parts of the northern areas of the country and Azad Kashmir in 2005, to the massive floods that inundated an area of Pakistan as large as the United Kingdom, and the dengue epidemics of the last few years, we have remained in an almost constant state of crises. Large numbers of the population wait to be rehabilitated; they still lack adequate housing/shelter, health and educational facilities, appropriate sanitation, suitably nutritious food, clean drinking water etc. More so in Punjab, but finding victims in other areas of the country, the dengue epidemic has taken its toll. Sadly hundreds died, with hospitals ill-equipped to cope with the sudden influx of dengue patients. However, the media hype created a state of panic, giving the impression that any individual contacting dengue fever would succumb to the infection. Focus was once again on the lack of resources and preparation of the government instead of what should have been a media blitz on, for example, necessary precautions against the disease; some idea of basic symptoms that would alert an infected person so they could seek help in good time; availability of necessary drugs/blood etc; and the fact that dengue fever was generally treatable. Later, once the season had passed, the dengue epidemic was completely forgotten whereas follow-up articles should have appeared on what is being done to prevent an outbreak the following year. The other crises tell a similar story; there has been scant, hardly visible coverage beyond the immediate aftermath of each calamity. In addition, news coverage during and immediately after the above mentioned crises suffered from a major flaw; women and children were almost completely absent, except as helpless victims. There was no mention of their particular needs, and no attention was paid to the numerous stories of courage exhibited by women in confronting the crisis. It seemed as if the

women only watched and waited, doing nothing for themselves, their families, or for their community. This is not true and media coverage did not mesh with the facts on the ground.

When covering major disasters and epidemics, it is also important for the media to not simply focus on day to day events but to consider the longer term economic and psycho-social consequences such as trauma, particularly on women and children, who are often prevented from seeking help due to cultural factors; safety and security issues for the displaced; adequate provision of medical supplies; availability of child-friendly places; suitable nutrition for malnourished children etc. In addition, they should look to, and highlight in their reports issues such as vaccination of women and children, malnutrition in lactating women, and the overall susceptibility to disease among women and children. With the loss of the breadwinner due to injury or death, as well as the loss of livelihoods in the disaster, women come to the fore by taking on various kinds of work that range from labourer to artisan to domestic worker. However, they still remain in need of assistance as well as acknowledgement from society of their predicament and of their efforts to sustain themselves and their families. The electronic media, radio and television, as well as the print media can and should play a major role in directing attention towards such women and children so that relief and aid agencies can better target recipients of aid. With the media proactive in pinpointing individuals and groups who need a helping hand to stand on their own feet, members of the general public as well as of organizations can be motivated to offer assistance in the form of microfinance, microcredit, and training.

Reporters entering the field, especially in a disaster situation, should come equipped with some understanding of the situation they will be confronted with. They should first of all be acquainted with at least a general idea of the issues involved which include not simply reporting facts and figures, but ensuring that the fullest possible picture of the disaster emerges from the report. In order to do this, reporters must actively pursue stories with a view to providing relief agencies and volunteers with information that helps them target disaster victims thus far

neglected, particularly women and children. In addition, all reporters should recognize the importance of gender balanced and gender sensitive reporting. It may be a good idea to frame some relevant questions before entering the field. One way to do this is to put oneself in the place of the disaster victim; not an easy task. However, even imagining oneself in a similar situation can and does help to develop empathy with victims and survivors. The onus lies with the management of media houses to hold workshops, orientation courses, and training sessions so that reporters and news editors are provided with a better understanding of their task. These workshops and courses should also involve members of relief and aid agencies so that contacts are established between journalists and relief workers. As awareness and understanding grows of what gender balanced and gender sensitive reporting really means, how it is defined, and how and why it impacts every aspect of relief work during and after a disaster, media coverage of disasters would become constructive, instructive, and relevant instead of limited and ineffectual.

Reporters must also learn that there are ways of circumventing Pakistan's traditional segregated outlook. Again, the onus lies with media houses to encourage female reporters to enter the field as they find it easier to approach women. However, when reporters arm themselves with relevant questions in advance, even volunteers can be requested to ascertain women's views and responses on behalf of male reporters. Even a few basic questions, such as,

'Do you need and have you received medical help/medicines?'

'Do you have adequate clothing to keep you and your family warm?' (In winter)

'Do your children have access to adequate nutrition/education/recreation facilities?'

As a rule, we often hear reporters asking those suffering from want and trauma (mostly men) simple questions such as,


'What are your feelings about your situation' (aap ke kia taasuraat hain)

Such questions are too vague and rarely elicit a helpful response. In addition, research shows that women are more focused on the needs of their



children and the home. Therefore, their take on a situation is more likely to be different from a man's, and just as relevant.

In addition, reporters should also concern themselves with the sentiments/needs of children. In order to do this it is important to approach children directly. Apart from the very young, children are completely capable of voicing their feelings and their requirements, and reporters may be quite surprised to hear their side of the story. For example, for a group of children in a relief camp, a ball to play with may hold as much importance as food and clothing, and help in their recovery from the trauma experienced in the disaster. Likewise, children often express the wish to be able to go to school, and for media audiences, hearing these children's voices may prove critical in prompting financial and other assistance to enable a resumption of educational classes. Apart from the actual reports prepared on the basis of field visits, once again the media, especially the electronic media, can play an important role by conducting an on-going campaign during, after, and even prior to possible disasters of awareness, education and instruction on first-aid in emergencies and disasters, where to go for assistance, how to locate lost children, etc. for those affected by the disaster and for volunteers. Media houses may want to consider allowing time and space when they plan their programme schedule not simply as a measure of public service, but as an investment in the social sector that is also their reader and their audience.



**Chapter- 2****Role of Media in disseminating information and raising awareness: Why focus on Gender when reporting on disasters?**

We now live in the age of information technology and instant communication, with the media best placed to play their due role in disseminating information and raising social and political consciousness among the public. However, a moot point is whether the information circulated by the media is constructive, pertinent, and productive. Although the media, especially the electronic media—the 24x7 news channels—generally tends to place political news in first place, this single minded devotion to politics takes away from far more important and relevant socio-economic issues particularly in view of the challenges to this nation in terms of abysmally poor health, education, and other social indicators that have been further tested, and held back, by the various natural and manmade disasters and epidemics that have befallen us.

The media must recognize and play its due role which is to inform the public on matters of

general and specialized interest that relate to the overall interests of society at large; subjects that ultimately benefit society. These subjects include politics, but should be balanced with news on other issues that affect society. It must also acknowledge, through its news coverage, that although a disaster may affect, at any one time, certain segments of the population, its repercussions and consequences touch the entire country and social and economic fabric and are felt over the span of several years, even decades. Thus, such events should be followed up with investigative stories that direct the attention of government agencies as well as NGOs and the general public towards necessary relief and rehabilitation work.

An anomaly seen so far in media reports on disasters is the almost complete exclusion of women and children in its coverage. Both during and after a disaster, the media failed to mention women and children except as passive, weeping and silent victims. This absence of women and children in media reports not only presented an erroneous image but had serious implications on relief work. If the media had done its job better, it could have assisted in several areas of relief work such as impact assessment, locating areas lacking supplies and succor, raising awareness of the need to ensure the safety and security of women and children, particularly in terms of shared



<http://en.rian.ru/health/20110917/166923565.html>

shelters, children's educational and recreational needs, special needs of women such as suitable clothing, especially chadars and supplies for personal hygiene (sanitary pads), vulnerabilities of mothers and newborn, even the increased cases of gender-based violence, early marriage of girls, abandonment (especially of injured or ill women), child labour, child trafficking etc.

It is necessary, therefore, that the media, including women as well as men working in the industry, take cognizance of the importance of a gender-balanced approach to writing and reporting the news. When the media plays its due role, it becomes an active partner during periods of disaster, helping to initiate public debate on plans and policies to align them with the demands of experts and affected communities. In fact, post-disaster relief and recovery is an opportunity to channel and leverage investments to upgrade the living standards of the poor, to enable the most marginalized to participate in non-traditional ways, and to establish dialogue mechanisms between affected citizens and government.

Both print and electronic media are important players in shaping public opinion, communicating with the masses, keeping the public informed of various aspects of disaster preparedness and relief, as well as serving as an accountability mechanism of the functioning of the state disaster relief agencies.

In fact, the media can and should play a central role in assisting policy makers and relief agencies to adopt a gender based approach in crisis control and amelioration, rehabilitation and relief. Writers, owners, editors, advertising agencies, the news agencies, freelance reporters—everyone who constitutes the media—must play a part in creating and maintaining a responsive environment, one in which social responsibilities are acknowledged, and a genuine discourse on women-related issues created. It must be remembered that when the entire focus is on men, the needs of women and children get overlooked.

In the various disaster situations mentioned above, several examples of the media's gender blindness and gender insensitivity became apparent in the visual as well as verbal/written



Aamir Shazad

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood\\_in\\_Alipur,\\_Pakistan\\_2010\\_3.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood_in_Alipur,_Pakistan_2010_3.jpg)

coverage. This was compounded by the media's focus on the failure of the government and relevant authorities to render effective and prompt assistance to the huge numbers of the populace affected by the disaster instead of concentrating on supporting relief work in various ways such as gathering and transmitting information about affected areas; alerting government officials and relief organizations, as well as the public about specific needs, especially the needs of women and children; facilitating discussions about disaster preparedness and response; providing timely, accurate, and sensitive communication; demonstrating cost effective means of saving lives (such as water filters), reducing property damage, and increasing public understanding; and finally, directing media communication apparatus towards educating and empowering people to take practical steps to protect themselves from natural and manmade hazards.

There were serious repercussions to the media's blitz on government inadequacies to the extent that foreign and local assistance was held back when positive coverage would have invited greater contributions from all sides. When reporting a disaster, a journalist can either work towards benefitting the affected communities or simply cause panic and despondency. Thus, however inadvertently, the media, especially the electronic



media, became the biggest threat to the feeble Pakistani state during a time of national misfortune. Television is especially popular during times of disaster because it provides validity to the coverage as well as attention grabbing visuals. The majority of Pakistanis (70 per cent), being illiterate, look to the electronic media for information; for them, both television and radio are the main channels of communications and news, thus, before, during, and after times of disaster, the medium cannot be separated from the agenda of grassroots rehabilitation and development.

With global warming and climate change, the possibility of natural disasters such as the flood increases with each passing year. Along with relevant disaster management agencies therefore, the media must play its part in preparing strategies for reporting on damage assessment, reconstruction, and rehabilitation, ensuring gender balance and sensitivity for a holistic approach. In fact, the media should play an active role in the preparation phase, for example, before the monsoon season, in assessing disaster vulnerable areas, disseminating information about flood forecasts and suspected disease outbreaks, and highlighting issues such as the demarcation of secure spaces for women and children, availability of vaccines etc. It is an accepted fact that during the flood of 2010, women and children's health and hygiene suffered the most. However, even female reporters and anchors stressed governance issues rather than health and safety challenges. It is imperative that the issues of women and children not be neglected and that the media, especially reporters, exhibit a more socially responsible and committed approach. The media must understand that in the same manner it is a part of society and wants to be heard; women and children are a part of society and their stories, and their endeavours, especially during times of crisis, should be known too.

A pertinent example of how the issue of gender has far reaching consequences comes from the catastrophe wrought by the tsunami. Reports cite that in many areas far more women were killed than men. In Ache, Indonesia, for instance, more than 75 per cent of those who died were women, and among the survivors the male-female ratio is

3:1. The scale of the disaster actually brought about a demographic change, and can lead to significant social issues. Further, the sudden death of a large number of women, many of them mothers, impacts on infant mortality; early marriage of girls; neglect of girls' education; trafficking in women, and prostitution. Similarly, if a disaster leaves more women survivors, there would be a major transformation in the socio-economic and political sphere of the affected region.

With this overview of the situation of media and gender, we come to some women and child-related issues that need to be recognized and



<http://pakistanisforpeace.wordpress.com/2011/09/15/pakistan-struggles-to-curb-dengue-fever/>

acknowledged, and reasons why the media must turn its focus towards women and children, ensuring gender-balanced and gender sensitive reporting:

1. Due to prevailing cultural taboos in Pakistan, as a rule women are not permitted to approach or come into direct contact with male relief workers. Thus, women, especially single women and widows, are deprived of the aid given by relief agencies. The media can play a role by highlighting such issues so that relief agencies can circumvent the problem to ensure aid reaches wherever it is needed.
2. Shared shelters put women and young girls at risk of sexual aggression including molestation, trafficking, and forced prostitution. This is a very dangerous phenomenon and the media should ensure



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Damaged\\_bridge\\_from\\_flooding\\_in\\_Pakistan,\\_2010.JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Damaged_bridge_from_flooding_in_Pakistan,_2010.JPG)

3. It has been seen that very few toilets are set aside for women, forcing them to visit open spaces at night and leaving them prey to sexual exploitation.
4. The media must maintain the readers/viewers sense of outrage at the exploitation of women and the broader connotations of these issues.
5. Women have special needs and the media must draw attention to these requirements, such as sanitary napkins, to prevent diseases and infections.
6. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, child labour increases as each member of a family must contribute to make ends meet.
7. In large parts of Pakistan, women are still considered a commodity. Thus, after the earthquake, severely injured women were often left behind by their families. The media must counter such bias by emphasizing the value of all human life, not just that of the breadwinner.

8. Media reports on disasters must stress the fact that women are not just passive victims but active participants in the rehabilitation process.
9. The focus should be on the need to empower women economically to reduce their physical insecurity before, during, and after a disaster.
10. The media must recognize and portray women as having special needs, not as being helpless victims. A gender sensitive approach is needed to transform deeply embedded stereotypical images of women.

Major catastrophes such as the earthquake of 2005 and the flood of 2010, annual epidemics of dengue fever and other widespread diseases, can not only lead to serious demographic changes but destabilize the normal social equation and transform the cultural boundaries of a region, for example, leaving large numbers of women responsible for their own and their family's sustenance, or alternatively, men unable to find wives due to the death of great numbers of women. However, what one may call a positive

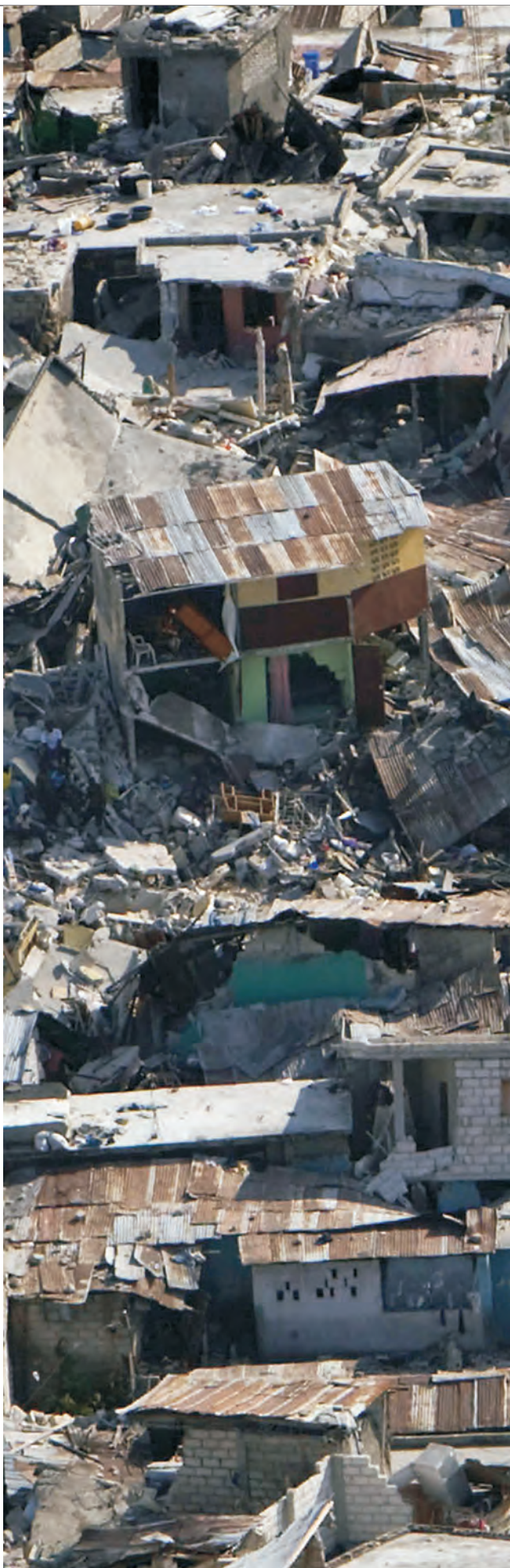


aspect of an otherwise tragic situation is that, as seen in the West after the First and Second World Wars, disasters can also lead to the empowerment of women. This phenomenon has been witnessed in Pakistan after the earthquake, with a large number of women becoming not just breadwinners but decision makers; positive contributors to the economy and society. For the very first time, they have a say in what happens to them, and how they wish to live their lives. Thus, women's empowerment post-earthquake should have received strong impetus from the media by ensuring their voices are heard, their stories told. At the critical, post-earthquake period, such stories, publicized in a gender sensitive and gender balanced manner, could have also had an impact on potential contributors to the rehabilitation effort; people looking for ways to support survivors. Thus, it is high time the media consider its responsibility towards society in terms of its power to 'construct' society; not simply disseminating information, but ensuring the information is balanced, the reporting gender sensitive, the account accurate and complete. The following are some pointers for the media to consider, especially during and after any disaster:

1. Media houses must get larger numbers of female reporters into the field to counter cultural taboos that make it difficult for males to interact with affected women.
2. Workshops should be arranged to reinforce gender sensitivity among reporters and other media personnel so that news stories reflect a gender balanced approach, and in order that reporters learn to frame their questions in a gender sensitive manner. In any disaster situation it is important to avoid sensationalism and respect an individual's privacy when collecting information/making the report. The electronic media, in particular, and all media in general, needs to ensure that inappropriate language is not used, especially when mentioning women.
3. The media needs to be equipped with relevant literature to enable gender balanced and gender sensitive reporting and writing.
4. A very important issue is the need for the media to widely publicize laws that protect the rights and status of women; this can

help to bring about a sea change in people's attitudes and behaviour towards women in general.





[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/Haiti\\_earthquake\\_damage.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d2/Haiti_earthquake_damage.jpg)

## Chapter- 3

# Creating gender sensitive messages: Learning Sensitivities and Sharing Best Practices

### Learning Sensitivities

In order to arrive at the point where gender balanced reporting in the media becomes a normal, everyday, conscious and deliberate effort, it is very important that more women enter the field of journalism at all levels. Since to date, the major economic resources remain in the hands of men, invariably those who own media outlets such as television channels and newspaper houses are male. It is these men who must take the initiative to remove the 'glass ceiling' that prevents women from reaching the very top rung of the ladder. As women journalists access higher levels of responsibility from below, media owners and bosses must put aside their prejudices and appreciate that women can contribute as positively, often better, as compared to their male counterparts. Women's contribution would not be limited to the media organization, although that would be the main focus, but simultaneously, a female perspective would have a progressive effect on society as a whole; and the media is a part of society.

Gender balanced and gender sensitive reporting not only means ensuring that women and children are not sidelined or neglected in particular in times of disaster, but that all aspects of a situation are covered. For example, a survey of media reports during the height of the dengue fever epidemic highlighted several acts of omission and commission. It was clear that content policy was not reflecting the concerns of the audience. Accurate information was not given out giving the impression that dengue fever was a fatal disease leaving few survivors. There was a lack of information on precautions and symptoms, and where information was available (at a much later date in the crisis) it was often cited in a few hurried words instead of being mentioned repeatedly (on the electronic media) and in a calm and lucid manner. Similarly, the fact that it was usually the weak, the elderly, and the very young who were at



greater risk, was not highlighted. Most otherwise healthy individuals recovered. Since the dengue mosquitoes lay eggs in water, the media should have raised awareness to a greater level that even tiny amounts/puddles of water were enough to breed these mosquitoes, and that all citizens should ensure that no amount of water, even a cupful, should be left without a covering. Here, the focus should have been on women as more often than not they are responsible for household affairs that include chores relating to the usage and storage of water. Women also keep an eye on children at play, and when well informed, can take steps to ensure that children do not play in areas inundated with water, and take the initiative to drain out water that collects in pools in potholes, on the sides of roads, etc. which is also a potential risk. All other safety precautions needed to be publicized frequently and effectively. Areas most at risk should have been identified, thus galvanising government agencies into playing their role by spraying mosquito repellent and draining stagnant water in open plots or on the sides of roads etc. All precautionary measures for citizens and government agencies should have been clearly and widely circulated. Irresponsible journalism can negate the efforts of those who work to ameliorate a situation. An example can also be taken from the flood of



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan\\_flood\\_damage\\_2010.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_flood_damage_2010.jpg)

2010 when the electronic media repeatedly showed footage proving government inefficiency and corruption leading to a steep fall in aid coming in from abroad and from within the country.

Furthermore, there should have been more stories portraying how aid workers, donors, and of course those affected by the disaster are working towards rehabilitation, maintaining a healthy balance by drawing attention to women's contribution as well as men. The work of volunteers should particularly be appreciated. Such reports have a positive effect on all concerned, including potential donors. The media can offer incentives to reporters in the field in order to encourage such stories. In this respect, the contribution of nurses and doctors in the field needs to be highlighted, and that of nurses in particular, as this noble profession does not merit the value it rightly deserves among the public. Certainly there are both male and female nurses, and both cadres deserve kudos. However, all in all there are far more trained female nurses in Pakistan, and as a community, they need to be recognized as an important segment of society. Any one of us simply needs to suffer from an illness and we realize the extent to which nursing contributes to our recovery. In times of disaster, especially, nurses and other medical aid workers are run off their feet, putting in work cycles of up to 30 hours and more, working in the obviously abysmal conditions that any traumatic event leads to, often lacking basic amenities and needing to constantly improvise to ensure that the injured are taken care of to the best possible extent. Their stories should be heard too, and an awareness of their rights, duties, responsibilities, and worth inculcated among the general public by the media.

Historically 'Corporate Social Responsibility' may appear to be a relatively new concept in business and industry, but it comes as a result of the recognition of the plain and simple truth that every group or community of people working together, as well as every single individual, has a responsibility towards society and the environment. Ultimately, we, be it the media or any other industry, are society, and the environment is our home. It is to our collective benefit, therefore, for the media to also assume the mantle of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' in

its reporting as well as in its administrative design. In fact, the onus is on the media to not only practice 'social responsibility' within the industry, but through effective reports on the subject, even by running special campaigns, to raise awareness and consciousness on the subject within all social groups and individuals. It must be acknowledged however, that 'corporate social responsibility' carries within it an inherent 'balance' towards the



[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_dgoPZ\\_VJq40/TlqIh83BRRl/AAAAAAAAAPVo/8Jh4yfBc8H4/s1600/177232-pakistan-flood-relief+theaustralian.com.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_dgoPZ_VJq40/TlqIh83BRRl/AAAAAAAAAPVo/8Jh4yfBc8H4/s1600/177232-pakistan-flood-relief+theaustralian.com.jpg)

genders; both women as well as men (and of course children) must figure as recipients and targets of plans and campaigns enacted as tools of social responsibility, particularly in times of crisis.

Whenever a newsworthy incident takes place, reporters collect facts and figures to convey information on the subject to their audiences and readers. This factual information should be gender balanced, especially during times of crisis and disaster, as the information can facilitate in mobilizing rescue teams through the provision of guidelines and updates.

The media should ensure focus on providing necessary information and factual reporting, giving due consideration to authenticity and credibility, and not succumb to the demands of publicity seekers.

In order to ensure gender balanced and gender sensitive reporting, particularly during a disaster, the media must provide training to reporters to assist them in developing a consciousness of

gender issues and the level of sensitivity needed when approaching disaster victims. Even though reporters may be fighting deadlines, they need to be patient and compassionate when posing questions to traumatized people. One way to comprehend the importance of this issue is to put oneself in the victim's place. For example, immediately after the death of family members, would a survivor wish to respond to questions such as 'how do you feel about this?' In its place, a gender sensitive query may be 'what kind of assistance do you need to help you cope with your loss?'

The media can also be held accountable for the image of their country. In Pakistan, in particular, the media's almost single-minded tendency to focus on the inadequacies and weaknesses of our government, as well as individuals, has little value other than creating a sense of despondency among the people. Furthermore, it tarnishes the image of the country throughout the world. It is important to maintain a balance, especially during and after disasters, so that stories illustrating how thousands of victims, both women and men, as well as other citizens, are working together for relief and rehabilitation inspire, encourage, and give hope, even where corruption and degradation in certain areas is being illuminated.

Disasters obviously bring about great anguish and trauma among immediate victims as well as compassionate citizens. Television, in particular, but also newspapers and magazines play their part in imparting relevant information. Pictorial images play a very important part in relaying the extent and scope of the disaster. However, the media must remain clear on depicting images for the sake of sensationalism; this is not the media's mission. Pictures and photographs must be selected and represented with a gender sensitive and gender balanced lens. Even so, to the extent that pictorial images are a part and parcel of communications, the electronic media should incorporate a PG (Parental Guidance) rated system so that children are not exposed to inappropriate messages/photographs, and public service notices informing sensitive audiences that graphic footage follows, allowing them an opportunity to tune off.



[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2010\\_Pakistan\\_floods\\_-\\_flown\\_out\\_Pakistanis.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2010_Pakistan_floods_-_flown_out_Pakistanis.JPG)

Worldwide, but particularly in Pakistan, the transition into modernity has been sudden, erratic, and uneven. Essentially a patriarchal society with a very poor educational base, men and women both often look purely towards the male sex whenever opinions are solicited without considering the fact that women are more in tune with the needs of their entire family, and particularly when the family is affected by disasters or calamities, can provide information and views on their short and long term needs. Furthermore, in order to accurately mirror our society and to produce coverage that is complete and diverse, it is critical that the news reflects the world as seen through the eyes of women as well as men. Thus, the nature of news, the choices made about what is newsworthy and the way the story is reported must change too. Women also need to be used more as the sources and subjects of stories; to be interviewed as commentators and experts and participants in the process of social evolution and progress.

In order to produce gender sensitive reports, therefore, media persons can use the common elements of one of the first things they are taught: 'Who', 'What' 'Where', 'When', 'Why', and 'How'.

Thus,

**'Who'** the reporter

**'What'** To be more aware of gender issues and incorporate this into the way the work is approached

**'Where'** At the workplace, in the editorial department, and on the beat/in the field

**'When'** All the time

**'Why'** Because professionalism, equity, and good sense demand it

**'How'** Through being aware of the language used, being open-minded and fair, and careful selection of the stories and their sources.

For a thorough, in-depth report, journalists may turn to the five 'Ws' and 'H' once again:

**'Who'** Who is missing from the story?

**'What'** What is the context of the story?

**'Where'** Where can we go for more information? Have we missed prime sources?

**'When'** When do we use ethnic identification, and when should we abstain?

**'Why'** Why are we including or excluding certain information?

**'How'** Expand your horizons, add diverse people/communities to your contact list. Ask yourself 'how many sources are women'?

#### Source: *Gender-Sensitive Reporting*

Language plays a critical part in avoidance of stereotyping, and gender sensitive reporting and writing, and the media can be proactive in changing perceptions about people in a society by using gender neutral terms to the greatest extent. Terms used to refer to the subject of a story tell a story in themselves. For example, rather than 'lady' or 'wife' use 'colleague', 'expert' 'doctor' 'manager' etc. as relevant. That is, refer to the female in terms of her profession or her personal identity not her sex. A woman deserves to be known in her own right, not simply as an appendage to the man she has married.

few examples of gender sensitive and gender balanced reporting are mentioned here:

1. A caption terming NATO personnel providing relief post-earthquake, including teachers and medical caregivers, as 'soldiers' rather than the usual 'lady soldiers' or 'lady doctors'. After all, no one ever thinks to write 'male doctors' or 'male soldiers'.
2. A story on the role of girl guides in assisting earthquake affected people. Instead of picturing all women as helpless and 'victims', the story on the girl guides exhibited how



women can be mobilized as an effective support group.

3. An interview with a female journalist covering the disaster showed that women are also important agents in communications and disseminating information.
4. An interview with a female philanthropist in the field, distributing goods and interacting with community members affected by the flood may have inspired other stay-at-home women and men to enter the disaster area and help in the distribution process.

### **Sharing Best Practices**

As greater understanding and awareness of the importance of gender sensitive and gender balanced reporting grows among members of the media, especially with regard to coverage of disasters, editors, news writers, and reporters, as well as media management, can learn from each other. They can share experiences and best practices not only by keeping themselves informed about news writing practices worldwide, but also by getting together at national and international forums to discuss how to improve reportage. Such conferences are already taking place, for example, the Regional Brainstorming Meet on Communicating Disasters organized by TVE Asia Pacific-UNDP in 2006 led to the identification of several truths underlying disaster coverage relating to the critical role played by the media in terms of access to information and raising awareness, and in shaping democratic governance structures and promoting safer communities.

The crucial role played by the media in disaster coverage is well illustrated by Bernard Kouchner's (co-founder of Medecins sans Frontieres) pungent comment: 'Where there is no camera, there is no humanitarian assistance'. The World Disaster Report 2005 has recognised 'Information' itself as a 'relief item', and although the media has a responsibility to remain unemotional when reporting on most events such as related to politics, economics, etc., the opposite is the case in disaster coverage. In a disaster situation, the media is not there to dispassionately report the news; in fact it becomes a vital link between the rest of the country and the scene of the disaster. There are documented cases where telephone

and radio systems failed, and only TV signals got through providing the only link with the outside world; as when the tsunami crashed into the Maldives.

However, reporters must not allow the excitement and tension of a disaster situation to deter them from ascertaining the complete facts and presenting the full picture. This can lead to major disruptions in the relief process as happened during the tsunami. A villager working in Singapore was able to warn the people of his village (in another location) about the tsunami and thus saved their lives. However, reports of this incident gave the impression that all was well in that particular village leading to no aid reaching the affected villagers, whereas everything had been lost in the storm and supplies and assistance were sorely needed. This then presents a fine example of erroneous and careless reporting that can cause harm to people already in distress. Here we see how necessary it is for media practitioners, disaster managers, and development professionals to maintain contact and develop a greater understanding of potential problems and issues in disaster relief and rehabilitation. This can be done through the medium of workshops, conferences, etc. so that all three groups can work harmoniously and effectively together. Media managers in particular need to facilitate such meetings for reporters and aid workers. In addition, reporters need to know what's happening and not just go 'blind' to the scene of a disaster. Understanding and reflection are important attributes of a good communicator.



<http://media.photobucket.com/image/flood%20pakistan/survivor69/MISSONS/PAKISTAN%20FLOOD%20AUG%202010/YOUNGFLOODSURVIVORS.jpg?o=12>

It is a good idea to train journalists living in calamity hit areas to monitor issues relating to women, as they can contribute to the process of relief and rehabilitation.

Furthermore, journalists need to be trained how to cope with trauma themselves, and with those traumatized by a disaster in order to be able to cope with the shocking and painful images that confront them of a sudden. They should also know how to balance the public's right to know with the individual's right to privacy.

With 24 hour television and radio, and global coverage, audiences and readers throughout the world are almost constantly bombarded by news of disastrous events; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, tsunamis, pandemics, wildfires, tornadoes. There is no end to it, and the quality of reporting on these events is very similar. In addition, there is a barrage of statistical information, and this has led to a kind of numbing and desensitisation among the audience. It is important, therefore, that news reports be more personalized and varied, and one way is to take up the stories of a few victims, and their rehabilitation, to showcase the entire tragedy. Stories that move around the initial experience, and then look towards recovery and rehabilitation encourage donors to contribute to what is perceived as a hopeful cause. As the numbers move up, statistics don't mean so much to the general public, and there is also the need to move beyond headlines and examine the social, cultural, political, and even scientific impact of a disaster. An example of how information can be used as a response to increased levels of gender-based violence, for example, comes from Nicaragua following a hurricane. The information campaign used various different media to transmit one simple message: Violence Against Women is one Disaster that Men can Prevent. The campaign proved very effective at changing men's attitudes towards violence against women and could be used as a model for women collaborating with men at the community level in disaster situations.

The media should also publicise slowly evolving disasters in all their manifestations, e.g. drought leading to famine, higher incidence of dengue fever (that may be contained by spraying, ensuring no stagnant water etc.) as they have far

reaching consequences and often toll up more victims than a single calamity. Whatever the catastrophe, the media must remember that both women and men are affected, no doubt equally, but in different ways, and seek to cover both their stories. Women are often constrained by virtue of traditional cultural norms, especially in the mountainous areas of Pakistan, as well as in rural areas, from entering public spaces, free expression of opinions, sentiments, ideas, and this prevents them from contributing fully towards the progress and uplift of communities and society as a whole. However, the major upheaval caused by a calamity can cut across these barriers, as was seen after the earthquake of 2005 when these very same women came out of seclusion to fend for their families and even help others. Their stories abound, if only the media takes women into consideration in their coverage. Uks has taken several initiatives in this respect, including a series of Focus Group Discussions aimed at urging the media to bring forward positive and gender sensitive reports from areas affected by floods and the dengue epidemic (See Box). In addition, a series of radio programmes on the 2005 earthquake were produced that aimed to give a voice to women directly affected by the tragedy; their responses, perceptions, experiences. A few examples, taken from these radio programmes, not only prove that women are equal to men in terms of their contribution to social progress, but act as a beacon for others to follow suit; they deserve to be heard.

- Khamsaa began working in the development sector (she is now a project coordinator with an NGO) to augment the family income due to heavy losses sustained in the earthquake. She was able to negotiate with her husband-to-be to continue working after marriage, remain economically independent, and utilize her talents and abilities fully. This was a big step for an otherwise traditional, conservative family, and it was Khamsaa's raised self-esteem that gave her the confidence to discuss the issue as an equal.
- After Kashmir's only tertiary hospital collapsed in the earthquake, a group of young women working with UNFPA and Sungi set up and ran a reproductive health centre, providing information and training on important health issues relating to safe

delivery, neonatal care etc. Considering our patriarchal culture it was a challenge for these young women to be taken seriously and for local villagers to accept and appreciate their contribution towards the health of women of the area.

- Women were heading local community-based organizations and associations with the help of UNDP and working on the reconstruction of their villages and lands. Some of these women had to struggle to persuade their men to allow them to go outside the home in order to join the various agencies that had initiated projects to help rebuild their lives.
- A young woman who had lost all her family began to work at a radio station broadcasting from a tent during the earthquake.
- Nigar Gogi brought theatre to the distressed communities as a means of helping survivors to cope with their loss.

Uks Radio Project also prepared radio programmes on the impact of the floods and dengue fever, and we reproduce here the radio producers take on their experience in the field: Asif Mohmand: 'Although I have been reporting on disaster situations for quite some time, I find it is very difficult, and very different from theory. I also realized that journalists can help both the victims of the disaster as well as relief agencies by providing relevant information to both groups, and maintaining the focus on the human angle. It is necessary for reporters to be polite, and phrase



<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/201025.html>

their queries in conversational terms rather than asking direct questions, particularly when acquiring personal information. Their privacy should be respected and the difference between acquiring information and simply invading someone's privacy should be kept in mind. Reporters should also be aware of local customs and norms, for example, it is not acceptable in many communities that the names of their womenfolk be mentioned. The women need to be referred to in other ways such as mother, daughter etc.'

Some other useful input from Asif Mohmand is noted below:

- Reporters should never manipulate information or allow their own opinions or prejudices to be reflected in the report.
- When introducing themselves as journalists, they should not make promises they may not be able to fulfill.
- Reporters should endeavour to help bridge the communication gap between victims and aid organizations or concerned authorities.
- Reporters should do their homework on all aspects of the disaster they are reporting, social, economic, cultural, political, etc.

Rabia Arshad: 'Through my experience in covering the recent catastrophic floods, I learned a number of lessons that are extremely useful when reporting on disasters:

- Reporters should liaise with relevant relief agencies and the government, and ensure their information comes from reliable sources.

□ Journalists should not rely on previously

<http://aipeup3bbsr.blogspot.com/2011/09/dengue-new-threat-precautions-to.html>





[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US\\_Navy\\_051013-N-8796S-119\\_The\\_city\\_of\\_Muzafarabad,\\_Pakistan\\_lays\\_in\\_ruins\\_after\\_an\\_earthquake\\_that\\_hit\\_the\\_region.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_051013-N-8796S-119_The_city_of_Muzafarabad,_Pakistan_lays_in_ruins_after_an_earthquake_that_hit_the_region.jpg)

given facts and figures but seek to obtain current information, after due verification.

- The language used should be precise and to the point, but compassion and empathy with disaster victims is necessary so that focus remains on the human angle, not simply statistics.
- All reporters, male and female, should seek to view the disaster situation through the lens of gender to ensure that both genders are covered, especially women and children who have been neglected in media reports to date.
- Reports on disasters should also give prominence to precautionary measures that should be taken by the government as well as individual citizens as they can save lives such as floods, dengue fever, other epidemics such as TB, malaria, HIV/AIDS etc.
- Reporters should give due credit to all those working for relief and rehabilitation as a form of encouragement, as well as to disaster victims who struggle against great odds to build their lives again.
- Follow-up news stories are essential to monitor relief and rehabilitation efforts, and highlight communities and areas that are being neglected.
- Journalists have an important role to play in building the image of their country, and in disaster situations, in soliciting aid and assistance from the rest of the world. Positive reporting is essential in this respect; the language used in the reports make a big

difference to world opinion.'

Shumaila Khan: 'I have been reporting on the floods and dengue fever outbreak and based on experience have the following suggestions for reporting on disasters:

- News stories referring to children should be phrased in a manner that child victims or their reputations are not harmed in any way.
- Reporters should consider their questions carefully in respect of the people they are interviewing and their situation on the ground. Some queries that may be pertinent in normal times may appear ridiculous in disaster situations.
- Reporters should endeavour not to allow their personal emotions to affect their work; they must empathise with the victims, but ensure impartiality in all their dealings.
- Endeavour to phrase necessary questions in simple language; be focused on what information is relevant to a news report.
- Media houses should send more female reporters into the field as segregation norms in our society tend to make it difficult, if not impossible, for women to speak openly before male journalists. Even children tend to communicate better with female journalists.
- Reporters should liaise frequently with the various humanitarian agencies working in the disaster area. They not only offer valid information, but are cognizant with the ground realities and can help journalists to focus on the various aspects of the disaster.'

Finally, a word on the amount of international aid pledged and actually delivered which has been seen to differ greatly, particularly in the case of Pakistan. This is an important fact in follow up stories of rehabilitation efforts, including the quality of aid, conditions attached to aid, and what the country may have to sacrifice to receive aid, should also be covered.

# **Recommendations**

Uks held a series of Focus Group Discussions with media practitioners to advocate positive and gender sensitive reporting. After due deliberations and discussions, the following recommendations were agreed:

- ✿ Media owners need to respond to the concerns of their audience and improve their content policy.
- ✿ Positive stories should be encouraged and rehabilitation efforts brought forth to motivate the public. Incentives should be given to professional and citizen journalists to search for and highlight these stories. Volunteer relief/aid workers should be appreciated.
- ✿ The media should focus on themes that lead to 'social responsibility', and run awareness campaigns on first aid, coping strategies, etc. for crisis victims.
- ✿ Media should liaise with relief agencies and seek to facilitate rescue efforts by providing information and updates.
- ✿ Due consideration should be given to authenticity and credibility of information and the focus should remain on factual reporting.
- ✿ Media practitioners must act responsibly as custodians of our cultural heritage; they will be held accountable for the image of the country.
- ✿ The electronic media (television) should incorporate a PG (Parental Guidance) rated system and display public service messages warning sensitive viewers/children of distressing content.
- ✿ Media managers should facilitate reporters through training sessions, workshops, to enable suitable and gender sensitive disaster reporting.
- ✿ Members of the media should scan reputed international press reports/channels to widen their horizons on acceptable standards of reporting.
- ✿ Research and Development is an important aspect of journalism and media houses should focus on upgrading them.
- ✿ A suitable code of ethics incorporating the essentials of gender sensitive reporting should be agreed by the media.
- ✿ Media managers must take the lead in facilitating training for reporters to enable gender sensitive reporting.
- ✿ Reporters should ensure they have covered a story from all angles and that both male and female perspectives are given space.
- ✿ Due importance should be given to authenticity and credibility of information.
- ✿ The sentiments of disaster victims should be respected, and questions suitably addressed.
- ✿ When the subject of a news story has endured severe shock and grief, it helps if reporters put themselves in the victims place in order to create empathy with respondents; reporters should consider what their own reaction might be to inappropriate questions or rough handling of sensitive issues.
- ✿ Ethical guidelines should be the mainstay of a reporter's vision when seeking information as well as reporting it.
- ✿ It is important that reporters seek out positive stories that can also contribute to bringing about a change.
- ✿ Incentives should be offered to reporters to encourage human interest stories, particularly with a focus on women and children.
- ✿ A consciousness of social responsibility as part and parcel of journalism should be encouraged among all media practitioners.



Specific suggestions relating to the floods and dengue fever epidemic were as follows:

- ✱ The media failed to illustrate the concerns of women such as sanitation issues, lack of toiletries and other hygiene related products.
- ✱ Evacuation measures were not discussed. The focus remained on the destruction caused by the floods, rather than relief and rehabilitation.
- ✱ The media fulfilled the role as an informant but the role of educator was missing; there were no early warning messages that could have alerted people to enable them to move to secure areas before the flood waters reached their area.
- ✱ Lessons should have been learnt from the war of 1965 when the media gave space and time to public service messages, including how organised bodies such as civil defence, scouts etc. could assist in relief efforts.
- ✱ Instead of focusing on the failure of government to initiate timely and appropriate relief and rehabilitation efforts, the media should have highlighted what is being done.
- ✱ There was no coverage on disaster preparedness in general and the role and work of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).
- ✱ The media should have sought to liaise with officials of NDMA in providing relevant information.
- ✱ Programmes should have been designed to educate and inform women on self help measures, first aid, etc.
- ✱ The media hype on the dengue fever epidemic also failed in positive outcomes but simply created an atmosphere of panic.
- ✱ Failure to follow up news stories with credible investigative reports constitutes an ineffective media that appears to thrive simply on sensational headlines and the 'Breaking News' syndrome instead of concentrating on in depth reporting aimed at positive outcomes.



# Children Do Matter

No one can doubt that the children of Pakistan are our future, and thus, mirrored in the state of Pakistan's children we find a reflection of our tomorrows. Never does this come home to us more poignantly as when we consider the impact of any disaster or epidemic on this most vital, and yet most vulnerable segment of society. Unfortunately, however, although the media has proliferated and gained strength over the last twenty years, it has almost completely neglected the children of this nation, especially during cataclysmic events such as the flood of 2010 and the earlier earthquake of 2005, and the dengue fever epidemic that led to an atmosphere of panic and the closure of educational institutions (in Punjab) mid-term. This state of affairs must change, and the onus lies on the media to propel government and civil society to focus on the situation of children, their needs, their cares, their today and their tomorrows.

There are many ways in which the media can, and should, give due attention to children enduring the impact of disasters and epidemic illness. First, of course, comes recognition of the media's responsibilities in this regard: as a conveyor of information, in raising awareness of children's needs and the rights of children, and continually prodding relevant authorities and social groups to work towards ameliorating the condition of children. As a conveyor of information, reporters on the beat must look at the big picture, for example, where are the children directly affected by the disaster? Who is looking after lost, abandoned, and orphaned children? Sadly, large scale disasters such as earthquakes and floods lead to major displacement of people, and children especially remain prey to child traffickers and other criminals working individually and in organized groups. It is quite easy to set up a tent ostensibly for the succor of lost or abandoned children, but a dedicated investigative reporter should seek to



Taimur Mirza

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood\\_relief\\_-\\_Pakistan.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood_relief_-_Pakistan.jpg)

ascertain whether it is a camouflage for illegal activities. In recent years, particularly during the flood of 2010 and the earthquake of 2005, a few reports in the media did mention the disappearance of children, but they were few and far between, and no in-depth investigative report seems to have come to light on this serious issue. Reporters in the field are not only in a position to raise consciousness and awareness among the general public through factual reports, but they can also alert the authorities to criminal activities targeting children.

During and immediately after a disaster, most victims being rendered homeless and having lost all their possessions tend to take shelter in camps. These camps are crowded, lack basic amenities, and throw thousands of complete strangers into a state of close proximity where the safety and security of individuals, especially children, can become a critical issue. As a huge proportion of Pakistan's population live in the rural areas, in close-knit communities, they need to be informed that they should be wary of trusting strangers with their children. Used to sending young children to fulfill errands, the media, particularly the radio, can warn parents/adults to refrain from leaving children unattended. The media should also broadcast information on bona fide relief agencies that can safely be approached for assistance so that victims do not fall into the hands of criminals posing as relief workers.

Many other issues affect the health and safety of children in disasters; among the most important are nutrition, medication, vaccinations, trauma, education, recreation etc. The media needs to put the spotlight on all these matters affecting children, raising awareness and consciousness among the general public about their needs, and thus generating contributions in terms of goods and services, and among government and international relief agencies, as well as non-government organizations that are working in the field to provide succor.

So far as nutrition is concerned, the media would do well to interview nutritional consultants who can advise on food items for disaster victims that offer greater nutritional value and have a longer shelf life, as well as monitor the food being given to victims to ensure it is of good quality. During



[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood\\_in\\_Alipur,\\_Pakistan\\_2010\\_1.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flood_in_Alipur,_Pakistan_2010_1.jpg)

the floods of 2010 the media did report cases where contaminated food was being provided to flood victims in camps. However, there was no follow up that could have exposed the guilty parties who were obviously using relief funds for their own benefit instead of spending it on food that was safe for consumption. Many children became seriously ill and some died from the contaminated food, and the media should have given this greater importance. During the earthquake of 2005, the media was slow to report that contributors to the relief effort should concentrate on non-perishable items of food, food that could be consumed without cooking, or cash, as large amounts of easily perishable food items either decomposed due to the time it took to reach the affected population, or could not be used in areas where there were no cooking facilities at that time. This was also an issue during the floods of 2010. Along with the problems that arose due to contaminated food, were similar issues due to contaminated water that also led to high incidences of cholera, dengue fever, diarrhea and other diseases among children in particular.

Media management would do well to arrange workshops where reporters and other media people, and members of relief agencies could get together, and aid workers could apprise the media of relevant information that would assist in pertinent and effective reporting strategies.

For disaster victims who have lost everything, although food, shelter, and clothing are of



paramount importance, for child victims, education, recreation, safety and security, and medical help for trauma related illness are equally significant. Incidences of child molestation, child abuse, and child trafficking have been reported, but such reports are sparse and not highlighted by the media, and neither are such stories taken up for in-depth, investigative reporting. Shared shelters can prove dangerous in this respect, and not only to girls. Boys are equally endangered, and news reports and stories should raise awareness among the public of this fact. Traditionally, Pakistanis have only looked to the safety and security of young females; many are oblivious of similar danger to young males from older youth and men. There is also the question of special children, those who are already mentally, aurally or visually challenged, or those with polio or other health problems that impede their mobility and/or communication. Trained teachers are needed for these children and the media can play a role by directing the attention of groups, individuals, and relief agencies to this particular issue. Gender sensitive stories in the media can go a long way by touching a chord in some responsive heart, and getting ordinary people involved in relief and rehabilitation efforts, including special education.

For children who witness the sudden end of life as they know it; the loss of their homes, dislocation, loss of relatives and friends as well as parents, visible scenes of dead bodies floating in flood waters or thrown up by earthquakes, emotional and mental trauma is a painful reality. These children need psychological support, and the media, by highlighting such aspects of a disaster upon children, can raise awareness of these issues, and by broadcasting and publishing stories on the subject including interviews with experts, can help parents and caregivers in providing necessary help. Research has shown that the trauma suffered due to the loss of parents and caregivers, and experience of distressing and shocking events, continues to affect children for years even impinging on their ability to assimilate in society, to learn, to cope with the stresses of life. Both the physical, emotional, and mental well being of children is at risk when the trauma suffered due to a major disaster is not treated. To help children adjust to normal life, and of course as a matter of child rights, education and

avenues for recreation remain equally important. Many women choose teaching as a career in Pakistan and it has been seen that women come to the fore in times of disaster to impart education to children, especially in camps. The efforts of these women, as well as men, should be applauded and encouraged by wide dissemination of their efforts through the media, as well as of the constraints they work under, and their requirements, sometimes as simple and basic as slates/books to write on, and chalk/pencils to write with that are invariably in short supply. Other educational kits are books, drawing paper and pencils/crayons, and for smaller children, educational toys that help them to learn as they play. These may seem to be simple things that we take for granted during our everyday lives, but for disaster victims, they can prove lifelines to a more stable and better future. Similarly, space and facilities for children's recreation is also an essential element of a child's life, and the media should voice the importance of these aspects of a disaster situation immediately after the event and during the rehabilitation process. Thus, where new settlements are planned, adequate spaces should be demarcated and set aside so that children have a play area when their families move in. Similarly, relief camps should also have spaces set aside for children to play in.

Sadly, child labour is ubiquitous in Pakistan, so much so that people take it for granted. The media can and should take up this issue as major tragic events such as earthquakes, floods, and even pandemics leave larger numbers of children either orphaned and self-supporting, or the only support for injured or ill parents/family. Not only should means be found to support such children so they are able to continue their education and learn skills instead of becoming breadwinners at a young age, but action should be taken when children are placed in hazardous labour, or made to work long hours, which is against the law. In this respect the media once again is in a position to highlight these issues, raise greater awareness not only of the deprivation that child labourers suffer, but also of the legal aspect, the child labour laws, which could prove a deterrent for unscrupulous employers. Investigative reports can lead to such employers being penalized, as under the law, and as examples abound, journalists would not have to look too far for such stories.



<http://www.appne.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderpictures/re3.jpg>

Along with the various manifestations of child labour are the critical issues of juvenile justice and corporal punishment. Although certain laws on the statute books do seek to ensure that special considerations are accorded to children convicted of criminal offences, implementation is lax, and children are often placed with adult, hardened criminals in jails. Corporal punishment, a form of punishment that involves the deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for an offence, is also an important aspect of child rights. Not only is it still being practiced in schools, but employers of child labour, including domestic labour, resort to it with impunity on a regular basis.

The succession of disasters that have befallen this nation have led to increasing numbers of homeless children out on the streets in urban areas where they have drifted in from rural outposts looking for work. They end up being picked up by the various mafias that control begging, thievery, and other illicit acts in the cities, and once brought under the influence of these mafias, these children are never allowed to leave under pain of punishment or death. The media has a responsibility to raise a voice in this regard, taking to task government agencies that have the authority to put a stop to such activities but have until now turned a blind eye, and not letting the matter go until such criminal and socially condemnable activities are stopped.

As Pakistan experiences one major calamity after another, not to speak of the repercussions of militancy and conflict in large parts of the country, in particular Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan, more and more children are suffering and the media must take cognizance of the positive role they can play in ameliorating their lot by raising awareness through focused, meaningful reporting. Despite so many issues that need addressing to ensure justice to the children of Pakistan as well as fulfillment of their rights, the media has been seen to have almost completely ignored children in news reports and supporting stories. Thus, in terms of disaster and post-disaster situations, the plight of children, their rights, their voices merit much greater attention on the part of the media that can act as a leader and catalyst in ensuring that children's needs are addressed and their future secure.

# Ethics and the Media

A long with the suggestions outlined above, the issue of 'ethics' in mass communications not only impinges on every aspect of media on a day to day, moment to moment basis, but requires special concern on the part of all reporters, writers, anchor persons, editors, publishers and station owners, and the workers who sell the advertising and subscriptions to sustain the business. Despite deadlines and die-hard competition with other media outlets that leave little time and energy for questioning whether a report has an ethical foundation, or whether 'ethics' have featured during the collection of information and data, no journalist, media manager, or media organization worthy of their reputation can relegate 'ethics' completely to the backburner if they wish to gain professional satisfaction and credibility with their readers and viewers.

A newspaper, TV station or radio station with a reputation for credibility and reliability has an excellent chance for commercial success in the long run. Thus, in addition to moral incentives for practicing ethical journalism, there are economic drivers as well. Accrued benefit comes from the



fact that governments also hold themselves accountable to media that represents high ethical standards. Although there is no separate thing called 'journalism ethics', any more than there is a separate medical or legal ethics, journalists should report 'through the lens of ethics' on what is happening in society, particularly during times of crisis and disaster. All members of the media should use the language of ethics in addition to the familiar language of politics and economics. They should ask not only, 'Is this expedient?' or 'Is this economically feasible?' but 'Is this right?' Further, it must be remembered that developing ethical standards is not only a personal exercise, but a collective endeavour too. Effective and





meaningful ethical standards can never be imposed from an external source—they must be an outgrowth of those who practice them every day. Ethical practice in general, and in journalism in particular, rests on common human values. This universal platform bridging continents, races, and languages—prevents the discussion of ethics from breaking apart into personal moralities. An action is not ethical because of how it turns out. It is ethical because it is based on a principle you are willing to universalise.

In Pakistan, a history of authoritarian governments has left a legacy of traditions (and laws) and institutions intended to regulate the practice of journalism. However, with the advent of a free press, although journalists may resist government regulation under any guise as a threat to freedom of the press, they must recognize the need for statements of journalistic principles at various professional levels. These include codes by professional journalistic organisations, councils sponsored by professionals or media owners to enforce standards, and specific policy statements on standards and ethics by individual news organisations. Any code of ethics, however, remains incomplete without the element of gender balance and gender sensitivity. It is as much a matter of ethics as other accepted moral principles to consciously allow space to women and children in the media, especially in news coverage, as it is prejudicial, discriminating, and downright damaging to neglect this essential aspect of the social discourse.

A free press has allowed for more assertive, less defensive journalism, and with it should come a greater consciousness of the need for standards to ensure quality and avoid abuse. As Dr. Rushworth Kidder of the Institute for Global Ethics has observed, larger institutions, high technology and the worldwide systems of the current era have raised the stakes enormously. The consequences of ethical failure in an era of global economics, instantaneous communication and systems of mass destruction are much more serious than in simpler times when damage from ethical failings was more likely to be isolated and contained. In the words of Dr Kidder, 'I don't think we will survive the 21st century with the ethics of the 20th century'.

<http://smallbusinessindia.intuit.in/technology/mobile-apps-small-business/>

The credibility of a healthy, independent press is linked to the commitment to truth, to the pursuit of accuracy, fairness and objectivity, and to the clear distinction between news and advertising. The attainment of these goals and the respect for ethical and professional values may not be imposed from outside. These are the exclusive responsibility of journalists and the media. In a free society, it is public opinion that rewards or punishes and professional ethics plays a defining role in preserving the characteristics of a free, independent press. Here, a bottom-up, team work-based approach recognises that ethics draws strength from each person's commitment to the values that underlie the norms of society. Thus, to be effective, ethical decision-making in newsrooms should involve a relatively simple process, understood by all, that allows most problems to be dealt with at the lower levels of the organisation.



# Bibliography

Ahmed, Khaled (2010): Is Media Promoting Good Governance in Pakistan, South Asia Media Monitor, Published by SAFMA Central Secretariat, 177A, Shadman 2, Lahore, Pakistan.

Cockburn, Patrick (2011): Catastrophe on camera: Why Media Coverage on Natural Disasters is Flawed, January 20. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/catastrophe-on-camera-why-media-coverage-of-natural-disasters-is-flawed-2189032.html>

Coloroso, Christina (2005): What is The Role of The Media in Disasters? The Media Capitalizes on The Tragedy of Others to Boost Their Own Ratings –The Daily Utah Chronicle.

Curtis, Lyndal (2011): Disasters and the media: a necessary voice, updated February 24, 16:41:00. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-02-24/disasters-and-the-media-a-necessary-voice/1956440>

Dennis, Wenger (1985): Mass Media and Disasters, preliminary paper#98, Disaster Research Centre, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, USA.

Dursin, Richel (2005): TSUANAMI IMPACT- Mental Health of Aceh Women Survivors Overlooked.

Enarson, Elaine (2000): Crisis Response and Reconstruction Working Paper on Gender and Natural Disasters, Recovery and Reconstruction Department, Geneva, September. [http://www.ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/---ifp\\_crisis/documents/publication/wcms\\_116391.pdf](http://www.ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---ifp_crisis/documents/publication/wcms_116391.pdf)

Gender and Disaster Network (2005): Gender Equality in Disasters: Six Principles for Engendered Relief and Reconstruction. [http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/GDN\\_GENDER\\_EQUALITY\\_IN\\_DISASTERS.pdf](http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/GDN_GENDER_EQUALITY_IN_DISASTERS.pdf)

Global Fund for Women (2009): Aao Sunain Unkahi Batani, Unsuni Kahanian (Let Us Hear Unheard Voices, Untold Stories) A 8-part Radio Programme Series Advocating Women's Empowerment During Reconstruction in the Earth Quake Areas Produced by Uks Radio Project.

Hassan, Kiran (2011): How Not to Report Disaster? Reflection on Pakistani Flood Coverage, July 4. International Disaster Communications (2010): The Role of the Media in Disaster Mitigation: Roundtable on the Media, Scientific Information and Disasters, December 21. <http://www.annenberg.northwestern.edu/pubs/disas/disas32.htm> accessed.

Lynne Masel-Walters, Lee Wilkins, Tim Walters (1988): Bad Tidings: Communication and Catastrophe; First published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, Publishers. 365 Broadway Hillsdale, New Jersey 07642.

Madhavi Malalgoda Ariyabandu and Maithree Wickremasinghe (2006): Practical Action South Asia Publication: Gender Dimensions in Disaster Management

Mann, Robert (2010): Government and Journalism in Crises: Blame to Share, in *Covering Disaster: Lessons on Media Coverage of Katrina and Rita*, edited by Ralph Izad and Jay Perkins. Copyright © by Transaction, Publishers New Brunswick, New Jersey, Printed in the United States of America.

Matthews, Joanna (2009): Media and message: Communicating Crises, *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, September. <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-44/media-and-message-communicating-crises>

Robert W. Tracinski (1999): Natural Disasters Demonstrate Man's Power, Not Nature's.

Shah, Anup (2005): Media and Natural Disasters.  
<http://www.globalissues.org/article/568/media-and-natural-disasters>.

Shahzada, Irfan (2005): Rehabilitation of Journalists Affected by Earthquake, South Asia Media Monitor, SAFMA Central Secretariat: 09-G, Eden Heights, Jail Road, Lahore, Pakistan.

Uks - Global Fund for Women Report (2006): series of Workshops on MANAGEMENT OF DISASTER REPORTING THROUGH WOMEN'S EYES "Analyzing the Violations of Women's Human Rights during Disasters: A Tool for Advocacy and Rights-based Reporting, January – December

Uks (2006): Chalo Phir se Muskoraen' (Let's smile again) - Radio Series to Support Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Earthquake Survivors, March.

Uks (2008): Channelling the Voices of Earthquake Affectees - A Six-day Field-based Media Training Workshop, February.

Uks: Media Content Analysis of Selected English and Urdu Newspapers of Pakistan, Television and Radio Channels conducted by Uks Team.

Uks Radio Series (2007): Nayee Manzilain, Nayee Umeedain (new goals, new hopes) - Post Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Process, August.

Uks (2006): Report on "Who Makes the News" Developing the Skills of Media in Understanding Human Rights and Documenting the Experiences of Women in Situations of Disaster, March.

UNICEF ROSA (2006): BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION IN EMERGENCIES: A TOOLKIT: United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia.

(2001): Environmental Management and Natural Disasters Mitigation: Middle Eastern Gender Perspective.



**Karachi Office:**

#7/1C(1 Floor),  
Stadium Road, Khadda Market,  
DHA, Karachi - Pakistan

**Islamabad Office:**

51-A, Street 63  
F-8/4, Islamabad - Pakistan  
Tel: +92 51 2850906, +92 51 8365900  
Fax: +92 51 2850908  
E-mail: [info@uksresearch.com](mailto:info@uksresearch.com)  
URL: [www.uksresearch.com](http://www.uksresearch.com)



Uks - A Research, Resource & Publication Centre