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# WORKSHOP REPORT

## MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

### “Building resilient communities through media and communication”

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Hosted by:  
University of the Free State – Disaster Management Training and Education  
Centre for Africa (UFS-DiMTEC)

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**When:** 25 August 2015

**Where:** Riverside Hotel  
Durban  
South Africa

**Time:** 8:00 – 13:00

### **About the workshop**

Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management activities by humanitarian officials usually go unnoticed. However, when such activities are eventually noticed and published by the media, it is usually a response to a dreadful event, which in most cases the media attention exacerbates the situation either positively or negatively. An event published by the media and yields negative perceptions about the way the situation is handled can possibly be attributed to the fragile relationship between the media and the humanitarian officials. Although building close relations between humanitarian officials and the media is crucial, reality indicates that most humanitarian officials still do not know how to interact effectively with the media vice versa. This workshop will therefore be an initial step in bringing media and humanitarian officials in South Africa and beyond closer together in order to establish a more productive relationship in endeavouring to reduce risks, fight calamities effectively and build resilient communities.

The workshop was well attended and proved to be just what the humanitarian workers as well as the media officials needed. The workshop was attended by Disaster managers; Human development advisors; Academics in communications and disaster management studies; Public awareness officials; Communication officers in fire and rescue; Disaster Management students; Radio station journalists, Freelance journalist; Oxfam NGO; Corporate relations for ABSA bank and South African Police Services.

### **Objectives of the workshop**

- To create positive and mutual beneficial relationships between humanitarian workers and the media;
- To share and comprehend statutes related to the different professions (Disaster Management Act (Act 57 of 2002 and Disaster Management Framework 2005 and Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act of 2000 as amended and other codes under it);
- To help formulate strategies that will minimise misrepresentation of humanitarian organisations by the media so as to do away with negative corporate image;
- To find ways on how media can be involved in pre and post disaster activities of humanitarian workers.

### **Themes for discussion**

In addition to the mentioned objectives these are some of the issues which will be discussed to guide the achievement of the objectives of this workshop and are as follows:

- Civil unrest cases (Xenophobia), how media can generate positive influence;

- Hazards (health related issues such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS and natural hazards such as floods, fires, etc.), current and topical issues under scrutiny;
- Highly industrialised sites e.g. South Durban Basin and other high risk zones;
- Media interests (media as a business versus humanitarian work);
- Business continuity after a crisis;
- Assessments of how or whether new media is useful in communicating disaster risk reduction and management activities or it is just a mere uncontrolled open platform leading to a media disaster?
- Should there be a specific policy or Memorandum of Understanding between media and humanitarian workers and what should it entail, since media has the right to reserve independent expression, how can this workshop help improve relations and establish closer relations, raising awareness on what humanitarian workers are doing in the phase of risk reduction as well and not only once a disaster strikes.

### **Topics presented**

Forming part of the workshop discussions were presentations with the following titles:

- **“South Durban basin: A classic socio – economic and environmental hotspot” – Presentation by Mr Chris Skinner**
- **“Crisis communication management is an integral part of business continuity management” – Presentation by Mr Dante Mashile**
- **“Practical experience on response to displaced persons: Xenophobic attacks in the KZN Province” – Presentation by Mr Sibongiseni Ngema**
- **“Climate change and media” – Presentation by Mr Troy Govender**

### **Discussions**

Following the first presentation was a media panel entailing a journalist from East coast Radio Station in Durban, Freelance Journalist based in Durban and a journalist from Media 24. This media panel discussion was the highlight of the workshop, helping humanitarian workers to meet face to face with the media and ask questions. Here questions and discussions held during the presentations are as follows:

- ✓ With regards to the presentation on the South Durban Basin, which is a socio-economic and environmental hotspot, it was strongly recommended that for such a busy area with a possibility of a high magnitude disaster, an integrated communication strategy should be formed and it must include communication with all organisations, the business park, the residence, the chemical manufacturers and the shopping complex owners as well as constant communication with the media and emergency services.

- ✓ Social media as every organisations strategy came out strongly in the discussions, the media (for example East coast radio station) also reiterated that they make use of the social media for news publications, however issues of reliability were questioned by the humanitarian workers and the media indicated that they will have to do whatever they can because if a new story has to be out in an hours' time. Non-governmental organisations like OXFAM makes use of social media for information distribution and even obtaining donations from funders, however they use it with caution, because they believe it can be misused.
- ✓ Since social media was perceived as an unreliable information source, the media were asked if they have a social media guide usage and their response was yes, it contains verification, if not verified then it will be published as a rumour;
- ✓ During the media panel discussion, the humanitarian workers asked why their press releases were not usually taken into consideration and the media indicated that, press releases are old fashion and not necessary for information but used as a marketing tool rather.
- ✓ It was emphasised that the humanitarian workers should have a sound relationship with the media, however they should be aware of "off the record" conversations, if an "off the record" discussion is proposed, to prevent the media from publishing the story before facts are gathered, the humanitarian worker should offer an exclusive once the facts are established;

## **Recommendations**

- Media and communication should be made part of all disaster management activities from risk reduction to disaster response;
- Contingency planning as well as business continuity should be made compulsory plans for all government, non-governmental and private institutions;
- Workshops initiated by UFS-DiMTEC should be a continuous initiative and dialogue rolled out every year to build further relationships between different stakeholders and mainly media officials and humanitarian officials;
- Humanitarian officials should take it upon themselves to train and orientate the media throughout South Africa and beyond through accredited short learning programs or workshops such as these;
- In addition to workshops, Advisory forum meetings held at local, district and national level should have a permanent seat for the media operating within the local, district and national jurisdiction.