

CDAC NETWORK TYPHOON HAIYAN LEARNING REVIEW CASE STUDY: RADYO ABANTE: A COLLABORATIVE COMMITMENT TO CWC & ACCOUNTABILITY - NOVEMBER 2014



First Response Radio reporters broadcasting from the roof of the Mayor's Office in Tacloban, days after Typhoon Haiyan made landfall. Photo courtesy of World Vision International.



This case study was written as part of the CDAC Network Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review¹, which examines communication with communities (CwC) initiatives and coordination of CwC during the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November 2013.

BACKGROUND

Radyo Abante, meaning 'move forward' in local dialect, is a community radio station established during the response to Typhoon Haiyan after many existing local media stations had been destroyed to provide affected populations with critical information and support, and act as a communication channel between communities and local and international humanitarian responders. Radyo Abante, based in Tacloban city, reaches communities within a 40 kilometre radius, in the provinces of Leyte and Samar, and sporadically reaches some areas in the nearby provinces of Samar, Biliran and Eastern Samar (see Map 1).

The community-focused station is staffed by a team of experienced local journalists and producers who were previously employed in various commercial media outlets that were destroyed during the typhoon. It is currently managed by locally-based organisation, the Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON).² PECOJON supported local journalists in the aftermath of the typhoon with food parcels and equipment, and acted as a bridge between local media and the humanitarian sector.³ This involved highlighting to

humanitarian agencies the role local media could play in sharing information and soliciting feedback from communities.

Radio Abante started life in a suitcase: established just six days after the typhoon by the International Coordinator of First Response Radio (FRR)⁴ and a team of journalists from Manila, who had been previously trained as a preparedness measure to use the First Response 'suitcase radio' to broadcast immediately. The station is currently funded collaboratively by World Vision International (WVI)⁵ with funds from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)⁶ and the German Catholic Aid Agency Misereor.⁷ UNFPA⁸ also provided initial funding to keep Radyo Abante on air.



Map 1: Radyo Abante map showing their broadcasting reach

1 CDAC Network Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review, 2014. Access at: www.cdacnetwork.org

2 www.pecojon.org

3 This short video (<http://bit.ly/1wupLJD>) by PECOJON explains the importance of supporting local capacities, and empowering communities to lead relief efforts to 'build back better'.

4 www.firstresponseradio.org

5 www.wvi.org

6 www.dec.org.uk

7 www.misereor.org

8 www.unfpa.org

The Radyo Abante team was formed in January 2014 from the pool of local media who had been supported by PECOJON since November 2013. In December 2013, through coordination with OCHA's Communication with Communities (CwC) staff, WVI and UNFPA agreed to provide financial support, as both organisations had been using radio as a key channel to reach affected populations, based on assessment data of community communication preferences. Through exit interviews with service users, UNFPA had discovered that the majority of women attending UNFPA clinics had heard about them on the radio, while WVI understood from communities that they were lacking information about relief efforts outside of the WVI programme. The fact that WVI could not meet communities' information needs alone was a catalyst for WVI to support the station.¹⁰ PECOJON, FRR and Internews¹¹ provided radio equipment and training in humanitarian broadcasting for the new Radyo Abante team, formed through a collaboration of a variety of different agencies.

'The information we could provide was just about our programme, but communities needed a bigger range of information than that. That's why we wanted to support Radyo Abante.' WVI Programme Staff Member

WHAT DOES RADYO ABANTE AIM TO DO?

Radyo Abante aims to provide listeners with useful information and an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about the humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan, acting as a bridge between government and international humanitarian agencies and communities affected by the disaster. It also aims to provide good quality local and national news, as well as entertainment and



Radyo Abante reporter interviewing community members.
Photo by Caroline Austin.

psychosocial support to its listeners, for example through Sunday afternoon karaoke sessions and the popular weekly comedy show. Every Saturday the station has an 'Accountability Hour', where listeners call in and ask questions of humanitarian agencies or government representatives. IOM were at the forefront of sharing humanitarian information over the air when they launched an interactive live radio programme called 'Tindog Kita!' (Rise Together)¹² in February 2013. The programme invited guests to answer communities' questions on pressing humanitarian issues like protection, shelter, health and sanitation, live on Radyo Abante every Saturday morning.

WHAT DO LISTENERS SAY ABOUT THE STATION?

Radyo Abante estimates its current listenership at 230,000, currently the 4th most popular station in Tacloban after local commercial station DYVL and national FM stations Bombo Radyo and ABS-CBN. A recent study by IOM¹³ found it to be particularly popular amongst people displaced by the typhoon and living in bunkhouses. It is listed as a key source of information by community members: 'Our main source of information is the radio, since we no longer have television here. The programmes we listen to most are where the DJ discusses the upcoming project activities of NGOs' Palo Bunkhouse Resident, Leyte. Many community members also seem to know someone who has called in to ask a question, make a complaint, offer feedback or express their gratitude: 'Some of my neighbours already participated, if they have problems here in the bunkhouse they express their views on the radio station. We listen in a group.' Palo Bunkhouse Resident, Leyte.

'It's only Radyo Abante who comes here – thank you for giving us a chance to express ourselves!' Listener from remote barangay during on-air interview

In terms of monitoring the impact of the stations' work, the team explained that they feel appreciation from the community in many different ways. 'We received 40,694 SMS between January 13 and August 31 2014. And I don't know how many phone calls, at least ten per day. And we have 500 'likes' on Facebook – sometimes people write comments on there but they don't really use it to ask questions' Reporter, Radyo Abante. Reporters at the station explained, 'What is very interesting is that people started giving us food and gifts to say thank you. We can feel they appreciate it, from what they say and the gifts they bring'.

HOW DID THE STATION ENGAGE WITH HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS?

An INGO representative interviewed in Tacloban felt that it was 'really important to have community-owned and led radio coverage that was independent, impartial and perceived as neutral'. Radyo Abante now seems to be trusted by humanitarian actors in Tacloban, and the contribution of local media in improving

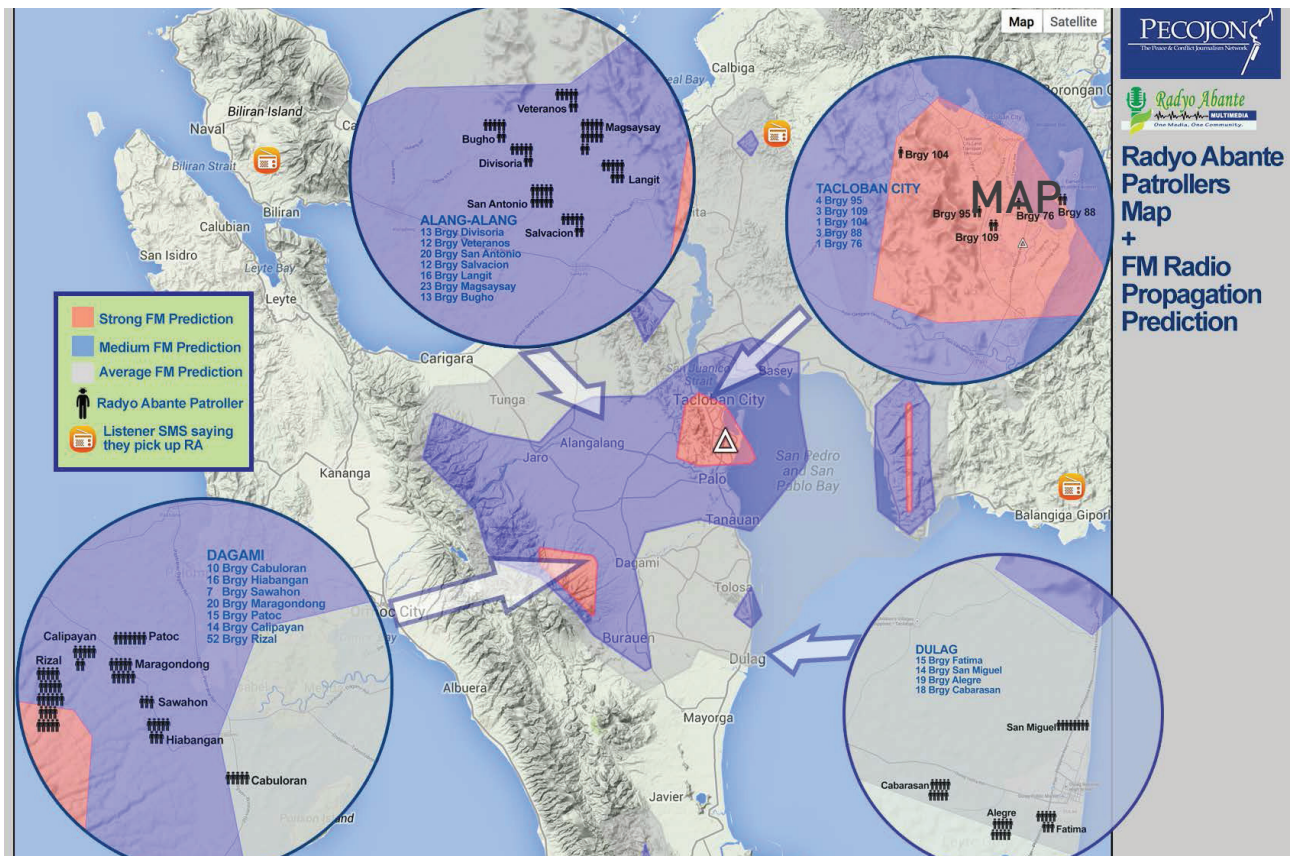
9 www.unocha.org

10 CDAC Network, Needs Assessment: What Happened in Typhoon Yolanda, January 2014. (Internal Document)

11 www.internews.eu

12 IOM, Blog: IOM launches interactive radio for disaster-affected communities in Philippines, 2014. Access at: <http://bit.ly/1xzMmCC>

13 IOM, Starting the Conversation, Information, Feedback and Accountability through Communications with Communities in Post-Typhoon Philippines, November 2014. Available at: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20141104151927-ezofu>



Map 2: Areas where Citizen Journalists have been trained by PECOJON

communication between humanitarian agencies and communities better understood.

The relationships between local actors and the humanitarian sector took time to build, a fact which should be acknowledged when considering how to best prepare for effective communication with communities when a disaster strikes. The difficulty can be attributed in part to differences in terminology and therefore understanding of accountability and other terms, and also uncertainty on the part of humanitarian agencies regarding which local actors to include in technical 'Communicating with Communities' working groups in the humanitarian cluster system. 'For at least two months it was really hard to encourage humanitarian agencies to work with local media. I was offering these people [local reporters] to OCHA from the beginning, I don't know why, they just didn't see the strength.' Chief of Operations, PECOJON.

The importance of humanitarian responders understanding the role and aims of Raydo Abante within the response was emphasised when the station shared information on air about contaminated food: 'We broadcasted news that expired sardines had been distributed, so people needed to check the date on their food. We had negative feedback on this reporting, as it was viewed as criticism. But it was actually to keep people safe, so they didn't eat the sardines' Reporter, Radyo Abante.

'As local media we understood perfectly our role, but the agencies took some time. In journalism CwC is the process, while accountability to affected populations is the essence.' Chief of Operations, PECOJON

According to PECOJON, there was a shift in the use of the radio by humanitarian agencies when concerns around 'Accountability to Affected Populations' (AAP) became more prevalent in the response, and AAP became a resourced area of work. 'Only when AAP was emerging, this was when humanitarian agencies started to appreciate and understand. This is when feedback was more solicited' Chief of Operations, PECOJON. The shift was also a result of having CwC focal points within OCHA and other agencies who understood the benefits of, and encouraged working with local media. Experiences from staff at Internews station Radyo Bakdaw in Guiuan¹⁴, the first municipality to be hit by Typhoon Haiyan, was that the humanitarian community was smaller than in Tacloban, and closer knit, so trust was developed between humanitarian responders and the emergency radio station staff quite quickly. 'When new INGO staff came in, they were immediately introduced to Radyo Bakdaw, so everyone understood its role' Staff Member, Radyo Bakdaw. As humanitarian staff trusted the station and understood its aim to provide accurate information and listen to communities, they were less hesitant to participate in programmes and answer questions.

WHAT ARE THE BEST TECHNIQUES FOR DEALING WITH COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND ENSURING FEEDBACK IS ACTED UPON?

When dealing with audience questions, the Radyo Abante team have found that 'collaborative reporting' works well, where one reporter is based in a community, and another at the organisation in question, so they can collect and get listeners' questions answered as soon as possible.

¹⁴ See CDAC Network Case Study: Radyo Bakdaw: Accountability and Media in the Response to Typhoon Haiyan



The Radyo Abante team following humanitarian broadcasting training. Photo courtesy of PECOJON.

It is also important to be frequently present in the community – including hard-to-reach areas, to keep up to date as situations can change quickly. Radyo Abante journalists travel to the farthest flung Barangays to ensure voices of residents in these hard to reach areas are not overlooked. ‘People in the furthest barangays sometimes use us as a channel to communicate with the City Government. They say no-one else ever goes out there’ Reporter, Radyo Abante. A reporter is assigned to each area, and it is their responsibility to follow up on getting the community’s questions answered. PECOJON also trained 360 people living across the affected area to become ‘citizen journalists’ (see Map 2), which has been effective in soliciting feedback and sharing information about humanitarian response. These citizen journalists work alongside Radyo Abante reporters to share news and feedback from their communities with the station. Not only does this increase Radyo Abante’s reach, but ‘through citizen journalism – people are starting to understand accountability – that they have a right to ask, to complain’ Reporter, Radyo Abante.

‘The CwC Technical Working Groups played a key role in developing trust between Radyo Abante and humanitarian staff, and therefore improving information flow between communities and humanitarian agencies in and around Tacloban.’ Chief of Operations, PECOJON

Radyo Abante and PECOJON representatives also attended the Tacloban CwC Technical Working Group¹⁵ meetings and developed relationships with staff from humanitarian agencies. The relationships built through the Technical Working Groups meant trust was built over time, alongside an increasing understanding of how local media and humanitarian actors could work together to meet communities information and communication needs. Radyo Abante staff submitted community feedback received from listeners to the group through the Consolidated Community Feedback

Form¹⁶, which meant their feedback was included in Inter-Cluster Coordination Meetings, and responded to by humanitarian cluster leads. Although time consuming, station staff found the process useful, as they used the consolidated feedback coming from other agencies to choose stories to follow up on in their programmes.

Some staff felt there also needed to be a faster, more effective common referral system, ‘so all actors (media, humanitarian, government) can refer community questions on and get answers for communities quickly’ Reporter, Radyo Abante. The team felt that it was easier to connect with some agencies than others: ‘A gap at the moment is that some INGOs are well connected with us. But others, who don’t have contact with OCHA, they are not in the humanitarian directory and we don’t know how to contact them’ Reporter, Radyo Abante.

HAS JOURNALISTIC INDEPENDENCE BEEN AFFECTED BY HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT, AND HOW HAS THIS PARTNERSHIP WORKED?

Humanitarian broadcasting focuses on supporting a humanitarian response through providing useful, actionable information to disaster affected communities.¹⁷ During the transition from commercial to humanitarian broadcasting, there have been instances when the experienced journalists at Radyo Abante have felt somewhat compromised as reporters on a humanitarian radio station, as they have felt they can’t report negatively about aid providers. For example, they received criticism from some humanitarian agencies for reporting on protests about relief efforts in January, and the expired sardines mentioned earlier. A reporter undertaking First Response Radio’s training on humanitarian broadcasting explained: ‘I initially felt curtailed, censored, like I was being told what I could and couldn’t say. However, as we go on with more training, deepening our knowledge of journalism and reporting humanitarian affairs, I understand where the

15 Communication with Communities (CwC) Technical Working Groups were set up at humanitarian hubs across the area affected by Typhoon Haiyan. Representatives from humanitarian agencies, local government, local NGOs, local media and telecommunications companies attended.

16 See CDAC Network Case Study: Consolidating Community Feedback through CwC/AAP Working Groups

17 CDAC Network, Humanitarian Broadcasting 101, 2012. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1s3opzn>

humanitarian organisations are coming from. It makes sense. This is the right time for us to spread this message to other journalists – it’s part of building back better’ Reporter, Radyo Abante.

The Radyo Abante team explained how different humanitarian broadcasting is to the way they were used to working: ‘As traditional journalists, we report on the spot. We don’t think too much about the impact. As humanitarian journalists we have to go round and find out what happened, get every side of the story, to make sure we support rather than undermine the relief effort’ Reporter, Radyo Abante. ‘We still discuss issues on air, but make sure that it’s constructive. We have a role in holding humanitarian agencies to account. It does have an effect, I think a positive effect as a humanitarian journalist’ Editor, Radyo Abante.

There are two aspects which meant Radyo Abante journalists felt their journalistic independence was protected, despite the station being funded by humanitarian and development partners. The first was the fact that PECOJON acted as a bridge between humanitarian partners and the station team, protecting the journalists’ integrity while at the same time advising on sensitive and appropriate ways to broadcast potentially inflammatory information. ‘If you are asking about curtailment: in PECOJON’s way there is no curtailment at all. Even if WVI is one of our funders. There is agreement between WVI and PECOJON that we will be allowed to work independently. So I feel there is a protection ‘bridge’ in between us and WVI which is PECOJON’ Reporter, Radyo Abante. As PECOJON’s Chief of Operations explained, this is really part of their role.

‘In PECOJON we understand how humanitarian agencies work, and how media agencies work. This kind of broadcasting can only happen if we respect how media works – if we control or limit or sanitise information, we won’t see the big picture, the honest picture, and it would be waste of money.’

The second was the ‘commitment to accountability’ demonstrated by WVI. PECOJON and WVI staff explain the role of Radyo Abante in sharing information about what WVI were doing and dispelling rumours: ‘People need to know who is going into their community and what these people are doing there’ Chief of Operations, PECOJON.¹⁸ A Radyo Abante reporter explained:

‘It doesn’t compromise us [as reporters] actually. Because accountability is [WVI’s] priority – they encourage us to do accountability programming, so WVI like to hear negative comments, so they can improve’.

One example was cited during citizen journalism training: ‘During our interaction with communities there were concerns about WVI. So we reported it, sent feedback to them. Some were discussed on the radio programme. Other communities were encouraged and gave feedback about other organisations, because they then felt they could complain’ Reporter, Radyo Abante.

‘PAY IT FORWARD’: WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

PECOJON and Radyo Abante are now working on a sustainability strategy for the station, and are thinking about how they can use their expertise as part of disaster preparedness.

‘We could train other journalists in the Philippines with our knowledge, so they are prepared if there is a disaster in their area. We are envisaging that we can map the media responders across the Philippines in the future. Pay it forward. There is definitely a need for continuing capacity building in humanitarian reporting’ Reporter, Radyo Abante.

In terms of preparedness for communicating with communities in the wider sector, both humanitarian agencies and media partners interviewed as part of a recent review¹⁹ felt there is a need for awareness building between humanitarian workers and the local media, particularly looking at the role of the media in emergencies, and for media partners on how the humanitarian system works. Mechanisms and potential partnerships could be set up prior to emergencies to ensure broader coverage and effective working relationships as soon as disaster strikes, building on relationships that have been built through the CwC Technical Working Groups during the Typhoon Haiyan response.

One such preparedness activity was undertaken recently by FRR which invited humanitarian staff to join radio teams in its humanitarian radio training in Bohol, the Philippines, where participants learn how to set up a suitcase radio and begin broadcasting critical information in a matter of hours following a disaster. An IOM staff member who attended the training noted how important it is to have skilled humanitarian journalists ready to respond, particularly in the Philippines where the next disaster is never far away.²⁰ FRR and IOM are also looking into signing a Memorandum of Understanding, detailing how they will collaborate during future emergencies in the Philippines.

The information in this case study was collected during field work for the CDAC Network Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review, in August 2014. A focus group discussion was held with Radyo Abante staff, a number of whom also attended learning workshops in Tacloban and Manila, which were held as part of the review. Data also came from on-air interviews with Radyo Abante, and key informant interviews with community member in Palo Bunkhouse and Dulag in Leyte. For more information please see the full learning review, available at www.cdacnetwork.org

Since field work for the review took place, PECOJON has become an Associate Member of the CDAC Network. First Response Radio, IOM, OCHA, UNFPA, Internews and World Vision International are also Members.

18 World Vision International, Humanitarian Accountability in Typhoon Haiyan Response [short film]. Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1VudhHw-4E>

19 The CDAC Network Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review. Available at: www.cdacnetwork.org

20 Mihara, N. A Crash Course in Humanitarian Radio. The Migration Blog, IOM. Access at: <http://weblog.iom.int/crash-course-humanitarian-radio>