

UNICEF Tsunami Communications Evaluation

**An Assessment of the Impact of Major UNICEF Media Messages on
Government and Aid Agency Policies and Programmes in Indonesia
and Sri Lanka in the Aftermath to the Great Indian Ocean Tsunami of
26 December 2004**

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Table of Contents

Introduction/Methodology and Sources	3-5
<u>Summary of Major Findings</u>	6-7
<u>The Global Dynamics</u>	8-21
<i>The First Six Weeks</i>	10-16
<i>The Situation in Indonesia</i>	17-19
<i>The Situation in Sri Lanka</i>	19-21
<u>The UNICEF Media Campaign</u>	22-24
<i>The Different Media Voices</i>	23
<i>The Different Levels of UNICEF Communications Response</i>	23
<i>The Importance of Organizational Spokespeople</i>	24
<u>The Messages</u>	25-41
<i>One Third of the Victims were Children</i>	25-26
<i>Warning of Potential Disease Outbreak</i>	27-29
<i>Getting Children Back to School</i>	29-32
<i>Plight of Vulnerable Children</i>	32-40
<i>Child Soldiers in Sri Lanka</i>	40-41
<u>The Impact of UNICEF Media Messages</u>	42-44
<u>The Legacy of the Tsunami</u>	45
<u>Lessons Learned</u>	46-47
<u>Appendix: List of Interviewees</u>	48-49
<u>Terms of Reference</u>	50-53

Introduction

The great Indian Ocean tsunami of December 26, 2004 killed more people in a shorter space of time, and generated more media coverage and donor funding than any disaster in recent times.

UNICEF was one of a minority of international aid agencies that gained early prominence in the media coverage, and as a result received substantially more funding than it usually does in emergency operations – over half a billion dollars in five weeks. In ways that are not easy to quantify, the organization gained greater credibility and influence as well.

The combination of circumstance that made it such a unique occurrence also made it unlikely that anything of similar magnitude will occur in the near future on an international scale. Because there was no villain in the disaster, and the tsunami affected what many have referred to as ‘blameless victims,’ it was possible for people to offer help without having to take sides in a human conflict. The tsunami struck some of the world’s most beautiful tropical beaches, where the affluent of the world often go on vacation – and where many were relaxing at the time it struck. Among the fatalities were a number of Europeans and Americans – a critical ingredient in the mobilization of international support. All of this occurred the day after Christmas, during the height of the charitable giving season.

The tsunami experience dramatized the extraordinary relationship at the start of the 21st century between media technology and the speed of global response at individual, government and corporate levels. As a result of staff experience, corporate preparation and a series of fortuitous developments, UNICEF was able to benefit as an organization from the convergence of these factors and establish itself as a favored organization among individual and corporate donors, and fortify its international reputation as a voice for and guardian of the interests of children.

Methodology and Sources

The purpose of the assessment, according to the Terms of Reference, “is to assess what impact this communications prominence had on government policies and UNICEF’s country programmes in the tsunami zone, and to draw lessons learned with a view to improving the future use of communication, in support of UNICEF programming and advocacy... the study would primarily look at the impact of UNICEF’s communication work in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.”

The study focuses on a group of media messages that are outlined in the Terms of Reference, which include the following:

- One third of all victims of the tsunami were children
- Hundreds of schools were damaged. Getting children back to school is critical.
- The biggest threat to health is the spread of waterborne disease from standing water
- Tsunami children are vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation
- Children must be reunited with their families
- Tsunami generation (keeping children alive, caring for separated children, ensuring children protected from exploitation, getting children back to school)
- Building Back Better (need for ongoing reconstruction and long-term development)

The basic elements of the assessment that are outlined in the Terms of Reference include:

- a timeline of UNICEF's major communication outputs during the six months following the tsunami, with particular emphasis on the first six weeks;
- a review of progress in UNICEF's programmes and advocacy on the issues related to the key messages outlined above, and the links with the national and local policy development;
- an analysis of how media messaging and specific programme actions and advocacy were decided upon;
- inclusion of observations of UNICEF staff and key partners on UNICEF's prominence in the media and the level of influence this had on advocacy and action.

The complete Terms of Reference is available as an appendix.

The assessment took place from 15 July to 15 November 2005, and was commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Communications Office for East Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, Thailand. The assessment focused on Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the two countries that were hit the hardest by the tsunami and suffered the overwhelming majority of fatalities. The two countries suffered close to a quarter of a million deaths as a result of the tsunami, with some 170,000 estimated to have died or disappeared in Aceh province of Indonesia alone.

More than 90 UNICEF staff, government officials, media representatives, government health workers, educators and child protection staff, and NGO staff were interviewed in New York, Bangkok, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and either by phone or e-mail in Geneva and other locales. Interviewees were asked questions directed specifically at the link between UNICEF's media messaging and their particular areas of responsibility and expertise.

Daily press clipping summaries for the first three months after the tsunami that were compiled by the Division of Communication in New York were reviewed, as were

various situation reports, country reports from Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and reports and feature stories available on UNICEF's website.

A media content analysis was undertaken by the London and New York offices of *Echo Research, Inc.*, a leading global reputation analyst. Their findings were used to further substantiate many of the conclusions in this report, and provide various quantitative profiles of the large volume of media stories which were built around or mentioned UNICEF's main media messages. As explained in the introduction to their report, their study "tracks messages pick up, spokespersons, issues related to the aftermath of the tsunami and UNICEF's efforts related to these issues." The period of analysis covers the three months following the tsunami from Dec. 26, 2004 to March 26, 2005.

Samples of *Echo Research's* findings and various insights are used in the following report, and credited accordingly. Their complete report is available separately, and is full of important insights about UNICEF's media performance.

Note: In both this assessment and the study by Echo Research, media messages were studied primarily in the print media. Compendiums of daily press clippings are easily available on the internet and in organizational files, but the wide range of visual imagery from television stations and private individuals is much more difficult to track. This constitutes a major limitation of both studies, but the major media messages crafted by UNICEF communications and programme staff is in full evidence in the print media.

Summary of Major Findings

- 1. UNICEF had a major influence on how the global media story was shaped during the first month after the tsunami.** Media messages were consistent, and were aimed at characterizing the nature and extent of the disaster and identifying priorities for action rather than at promoting the organization. Communications staff in the affected areas worked closely with communications staff at regional and global headquarters to shape the story as it evolved.
- 2. Global spokespeople, including the Executive Director, the head of Emergency Operations in New York, various communications staff and some heads of National Committees, were consistent in their repetition of the organization's generic media messages in the areas of education, health and child protection.** These were messages that adhered closely to the organization's set of core corporate responsibilities in emergencies, and were effective in large part because they were both generic *and* relevant to the actual situations in the affected countries.
- 3. The generic global messages provided a unifying context or operating umbrella for the more nuanced sub-messages delivered by regional and national communications staff, who had greater knowledge of realities on the ground and were able to present print, television and radio journalists with color and detail unique to the situations at hand.** The details provided by communications staff in the country offices in turn helped regional and global level staff further refine the broader global messages, and feed breaking updates to National Committee staff for their fundraising efforts.
- 4. The message that one third of the victims were children quickly established UNICEF as the global authority on how the tsunami was affecting children.** While it is not possible to substantiate in any more than a speculative way, it is quite likely that this message may have been the most important of UNICEF's messages when it came to fundraising. It helped establish a very early and very public link between UNICEF as an authoritative advocate for the interests of children and those who wanted to help. By establishing itself early as an authority, UNICEF earned a reputation that benefited all who worked for the organization in the weeks ahead.
- 5. Because the warnings of potential disease outbreaks was somewhat generic to any emergency situation, and was being issued by several aid agencies, it never belonged distinctly to UNICEF.** But the Executive Director and the organization as a whole continued to voice its concern throughout the first few weeks, and in Indonesia UNICEF launched a measles immunization campaign in northern Sumatra.

6. The public campaigns in Indonesia and Sri Lanka to restore normalcy to children's lives after the tsunami by getting them back to school was one of the most important – and most successful of UNICEF's efforts. A consistent media message was an essential part of the campaign, but equally important was the fact that in both countries UNICEF already had relations with the ministries of education, and was supporting its effort with ambitious programmes to rebuild damaged schools and construct new ones.

7. There were mixed feelings in both UNICEF and among government, organizational and media partners about the child trafficking story – specifically about its legitimacy and whether or not it was appropriate and beneficial. But there were also those who felt that one of the reasons that no one was able to uncover evidence of any substantial trafficking was because the story had generated so much concern that it worked effectively as a preventive measure.

8. Overall, the consensus is that UNICEF's communications effort – which crystallized in the form of the major media messages – supported existing policy efforts rather than directed them. But the huge volume of media coverage also exerted pressure on *all* who were involved in response to the tsunami to act – whether government officials in the countries affected, aid agency staff, rebel leaders, or individuals in faraway countries who were watching the calamity on their televisions.

9. The high visibility and media exposure gave the organization more credibility, and therefore more leverage in its varied dealings with counterparts in government, among other agencies and among donors. One senior education officer in Jakarta noted that the prominence of the media effort aided him in his talks with government, and the UNICEF regional representative in Bangkok noted that the tsunami experience has made it easier now to talk about problems of poverty and inequity in the region.

10. The media campaign put pressure on the rest of the organization to back up its advocacy with fast-track delivery of supplies and the development of programmes that were consistent with its mandate and responsive to the most urgent needs. This was seen as essential to any successful relief operation, but there were those among the UNICEF staff who worried that some of the organization's operational and administrative difficulties would compromise the credibility that it gained through its media visibility.

Part One

The Global Dynamics of UNICEF's Communications Response

Following are some basic points that characterized the global communications effort, and are intended to put the more analytical discussions of the actual messages in later sections into a broad context. When combined with the historical timeline that follows, these two sections give the reader some useful background and some relevant historical markers.

UNICEF had a major influence on how the global media story was shaped during the first month after the tsunami. Media messages were consistent, and were aimed at characterizing the nature and extent of the disaster and identifying priorities for action rather than at promoting the organization. Communications staff in the affected areas worked closely with communications staff at regional and global headquarters to shape the story as it evolved. When asked to comment on the performance of UNICEF's communications staff, the former executive director described them as "realistic."

The images of the tsunami – some initially from the video cameras of private citizens – were available to the world before any detailed information. UNICEF, with its generic understanding of emergencies and global identity, was able to provide a context for what many were seeing through its media messages and from the more nuanced interpretation of events from communications and country programme staff on the ground.

Because there was such an enormous international reaction to news of the tsunami, UNICEF and other organizations did not have to sell the story to anyone. Unlike the overwhelming majority of emergency operations for which UNICEF raises money, media and various public and private interests were the ones soliciting UNICEF in their attempts to do something for the tsunami victims. This was a highly unusual occurrence in a world in which the public is approached for donations to relief efforts to which they may or may not see any direction connection.

The tsunami also gave UNICEF the chance to realize the potential of its new media technology. Starting in early 2004 UNICEF started to merge its internet and broadcasting abilities, and was able to provide news footage distributors such as News Market with instant video footage. UNICEF used its own staff to record videos and provide commentaries on the situations on the ground, and made them available on its website. The tsunami put a huge demand on UNICEF to provide up-to-date media products. As one indicator of how much demand increased, prior to the tsunami UNICEF was getting approximately 300 requests per month for broadcast material through News Market; in the month after the tsunami that number was close to 2,000.

But the major international print and television journalists did their own reporting, and it was toward them that the ultimate focus of UNICEF's media outreach after the tsunami was directed. The media chief for UNICEF in Indonesia noted that he made a deliberate decision to focus his efforts on the international print and television media for the first month after the tsunami because that was how UNICEF would raise the money to support its relief programmes.

It was also the first time that UNICEF collected money from individual donors online on such a massive scale, and the tsunami was one of the first examples of how much internet technology has changed fundraising. Individual donors can now contribute instantly to an organization of their choice with a mouse click. Largely because UNICEF had become visible as spokesperson for children and tsunami victims in general and was seen to be actively trying to respond, many individuals and corporations around the world chose UNICEF.

Visits to UNICEF's website increased dramatically in the days after the tsunami as individuals around the world searched the internet for information. In the days immediately after the tsunami, the UNICEF website crashed several times because it was unable to handle the enormous volume of visits to the site. That problem was quickly solved, and the Division of Communications in New York ultimately contracted with a company that allowed UNICEF to be hosted on 26 websites around the world in coming weeks. In the months prior to the tsunami UNICEF's website was getting five to six million page views a month, but that number increased to just under 15 million in January 2005. While the level has fluctuated since, that higher level has been maintained; in October 2005 the organization got over 16 million page views.

It was significant that 85 percent of the visitors to the UNICEF site were not from the U.S., and about 50 percent were from non-developed countries. The increasing use of the internet and mobile phones had opened up a broad market of potential supporters between 20 and 50 years of age, a market niche that expanded during the days after the tsunami. One of the potential benefits is the broadening of potential individual supporters, but it is one that the organization will have to work to maximize. To what extent this might increase the potential for future funding through National Committees and present opportunities to educate new constituencies is not clear yet.

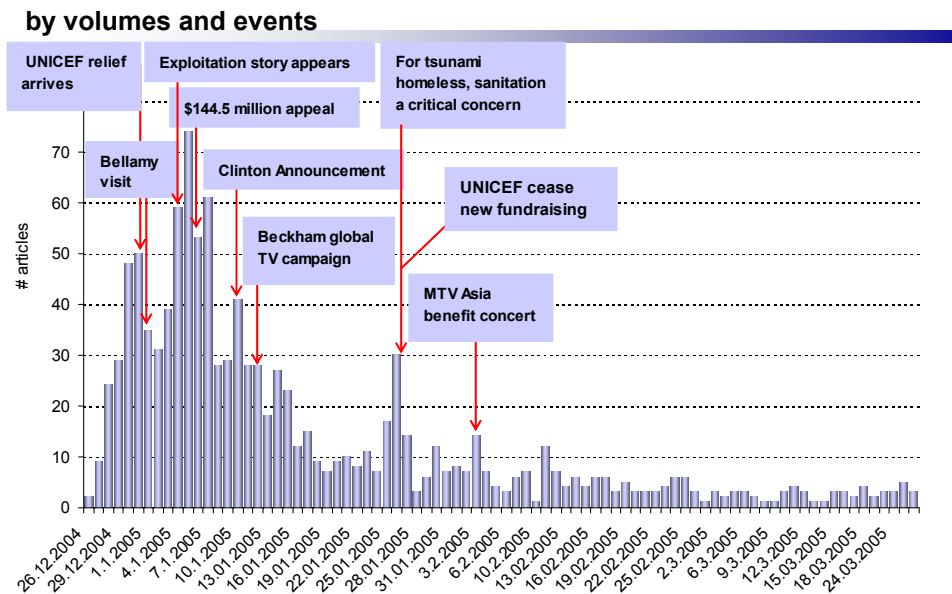
1.0 The First Six Weeks

The following is a timeline of UNICEF's role in the global media response in the six weeks after the tsunami. It was during the first six weeks that the major international media story occurred. After UNICEF and the International Committee for the Red Cross announced on 26 January that they would no longer actively solicit funding, the coverage of the organization declined dramatically. It continued for several more weeks, but diminished in volume. The focus shifted from the relief effort itself to news of corporate donations and celebrities. This decline is reflected in the accompanying graph below provided by Echo Research.

The timeline is not intended as a history of the relief effort, but is intended to give a representative sampling of developments that illustrate the complexity of UNICEF's response and the rapid pace of global reaction. It provides a background to the subsequent discussion of UNICEF's major media messages.

The account is based on interviews with various UNICEF staff, and those of government and NGO partners, and upon a daily compendium of press clippings from major international media put together by the Division of Communications in New York. All references to mention of UNICEF in the press come directly from that compendium. Certain media outlets have been cited by name in the narrative to illustrate the range of media involved; others have not been cited by name in an effort to make the narrative easier to read.

UNICEF Overall Coverage – Daily Trend



December 26 2004 – March 26 2005

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1.1 The First Week

When the giant waves of the Indian Ocean tsunami struck shore in 12 countries over several hours on ***Sunday, December 26***, most of UNICEF's employees around the world were on vacation or home leave. It would be several days before UNICEF offices in the affected countries had a full complement of communications staff.

UNICEF country office staff sent out situation reports within hours of the tsunami, which summarized existing information about the estimated numbers of those affected by the tsunami, initial government responses, supply requirements, and initial inquiries from the international media. But it would be three or four days before a more complete picture emerged of the situation *in the affected areas* in both Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Media interest was immediate, however, triggered in part by stories from Thailand and Sri Lanka that focused on the deaths of tourists from around the world, including those from Europe and the United States. The initial UNICEF response to the media from outside of the region came from a UNICEF communications officer in Geneva, who was wakened the morning of the tsunami by *Swiss Radio*. The job of developing a global media response was that of the chief of the Media Section at headquarters, who was in New York at the time. In the days to come, he would use reports from country offices to provide some details to the broader organizational media messages. In both Indonesia and Sri Lanka, country office communications staff were inundated with calls from journalists who were trying to find out what had happened.

On ***Monday, December 27*** the communications officer from the Geneva office replied to media inquiries that at least a third of the victims were children, a message that ended up influencing a *New York Times* banner headline the next day advising readers that many of the victims were children. While there was very little information at that time about actual fatalities beyond some broad estimates, his response was a quick calculation based upon his knowledge of Asian demographics. It was an estimate that quickly became a standard reference point for subsequent discussion about tsunami fatalities, and is now a fundamental part of the history of the tsunami.

By ***Tuesday, December 28*** UNICEF communications staff in the region were returning to their posts. An emergency communications officer from headquarters in New York broke from his holiday in Australia and arrived in Jakarta to support the media chief for the Indonesian country office, who had also just returned from his holiday vacation in Australia. A communications officer from the South Asia regional office in Kathmandu also arrived on the same day in Colombo to direct the international media outreach for the country office in Sri Lanka.

UNICEF was already being widely quoted in the international print media, and spokespeople were giving interviews to television and radio reporters at global, regional and national levels. The communications staff in the East Asia and the Pacific Regional office in Bangkok -- a regional media hub for the areas affected by the tsunami -- was handling an increasing number of media inquiries.

The representative in Sri Lanka warned in both international and national media that landmines might have been washed out of the minefields by the waves, and there were several reports of UNICEF supplies headed for tsunami victims. UNICEF Canada reported that their phone lines were jammed with people wanting to make donations, and both UNICEF and the Red Cross were frequently mentioned as relief agencies to which people could donate money. The Executive Director of UNICEF was quoted in several media outlets, warning that “hundreds of thousands of children in coastal communities in six countries may be in serious jeopardy.”

Because of developments in internet technology, individual donors were able to go online and donate money for disaster relief within hours of the first news reports. While UNICEF had been working for several months to upgrade its website and integrate broadcast and internet capacities, it was not prepared for the enormous volume of the response. Yahoo wanted a link to UNICEF on their home page, and warned the organization that it would get a volume of hits that they had probably never experienced before. The UNICEF site crashed several times at the beginning because it couldn't handle the load. Ultimately, UNICEF was hosted on 26 websites around the world and received an enormous number of online donations.

For the first two to three days there was very little information from the affected areas, particularly the province of Aceh on the northwestern coast of Sumatra in Indonesia – where the greatest numbers of fatalities would be recorded and which was physically remote from the capital in Jakarta. The area had been under partial martial law because of the government's ongoing conflict with rebel forces, and the UN staff had restricted access when the tsunami struck. UNICEF had a small office there that was staffed by national officers and was heavily damaged by the waves.

By about the third day information started to come in as media and relief workers reached the more remote areas of the eastern coast of Sri Lanka and Aceh. *ABC Australia* and *Al Jazeera* were among the first international media in Aceh. On the southern coast of Sri Lanka below Colombo, media presence was almost immediate after the tsunami because it was relatively easy to get there from the capitol.

Early media coverage focused on Thailand and Sri Lanka, which provided the initial television footage and eyewitness reports, and were easier for most journalists to do human interest stories on because they had more immediate physical access to these areas and because more people there spoke English than in the affected areas of Aceh in Indonesia. Ultimately, it was the aerial images from Aceh, of a 400 mile coastline stripped of everything, that were the most dramatic and showed the world just how enormous the destruction had been.

UNICEF spokespeople, most prominently the Executive Director, were warning in the media on *Wednesday, December 29*, of potential disease outbreaks from contaminated

water and that a third of the victims were children. UNICEF relief supplies continued to receive mention in the international press.

By **Thursday, December 30**, four days after the tsunami, the emergency communications officer from New York headquarters who had arrived in Jakarta on Tuesday and a national communications officer arrived in Banda Aceh, the municipality of 250,000 people in northern Sumatra which suffered the greatest damage from the tsunami. They set up a new UNICEF office there.

The media chief at headquarters wrote press releases from New York with input from communications staff in the affected countries in the days after the story broke. By then, staff members had returned to the office, and daily briefings were well attended by headquarters staff. Information notes were written on a daily basis in the morning and evenings, combining color and detail made available from country office staff with the more generic global messages that came in part from the set of core corporate responsibilities in emergencies that had been developed over the years by the organization.

UNICEF continued to warn of potential disease outbreaks from contaminated water in the media, and there were accounts of measles and diarrhea reaching health authorities in Sri Lanka. One article noted that both UNICEF and the Red Cross already had a presence on the ground, and were therefore well placed to deal with the disaster.

On **Friday, December 31**, the US Fund for UNICEF reported that more than 50,000 people had clicked on its site to donate money since December 26 – a response that had been made possible by the high level of organizational exposure in the media.

1.2 The Second Week

By **early the following week**, the Executive Director (accompanied by the headquarters media chief) went to the region to see the devastation, where she visited both Sri Lanka and Indonesia. She was the first major relief agency head on the ground (where she was joined by the head of ECHO), and would continue to be highly visible and focused on the main messages in the rapidly developing story of the following several weeks.

While the Executive Director was in Jakarta on **Tuesday, January 4**, communications staff were notified of a text message from Malaysia that had been sent to a UNICEF staff member. It offered 300 orphans from Aceh for adoption at no fee. There were already rumours that children from Aceh were missing and there were growing suspicions that they had been abducted and were being offered for adoption. Child trafficking had been a serious problem in several countries in the region for some time, so the executive director decided UNICEF needed to issue a public warning. In his daily report to the Division of Communications in New York, the headquarters media chief mentioned the information from Malaysia. The story quickly exploded, and soon got out of UNICEF's control. Mention of the possibility of child trafficking appeared in a story by *Al Jazeera*.

A simultaneous story appeared in the media in Thailand alluding to the possible trafficking of a kidnapped Swedish boy.

The UNICEF Executive Director, who throughout the first weeks after the tsunami remained the most prominent spokesperson for the organization, was still quoted daily in the media warning of potential disease outbreaks and the importance of clean water. The first reports came from the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka on **Tuesday, January 4** that no major outbreaks had occurred. UNICEF was quoted as estimating that there might be as many as 30,000 children orphaned by the tsunami, and while still in Indonesia the Executive Director highlighted the need to set up child friendly zones and do family tracing.

By **Tuesday, January 4**, nine days after the tsunami, all of the major UNICEF messages were in play in the international media: the plight of children separated from their families, the need to get children back to school and deal with psychosocial problems, the potential for child trafficking, and continued warnings of potential disease outbreaks.

On **Wednesday, January 5**, at an international donor's meeting in Jakarta, the Executive Director outlined four priorities for action: provision of proper sanitation, clean water and food; the reunification of children with their families; protection of children from exploitation; and the need to get children back to school as soon as possible.

By then the trafficking story was assuming prominence in the media, with the *BBC* noting that "there have been fears that human traffickers have started targeting the orphaned survivors of the tsunami." The Executive Director was quoted referring to organized syndicates, and there was news that UNICEF was starting to register separated children in response to the fears.

On **Thursday, January 6**, UNICEF advised against international adoptions until more tracing had been done. Pope John Paul expressed his concern for children who fall prey to traffickers, and there was continued reference in media reports to the 300 children suspected of having been smuggled out of Aceh. Several Australian newspapers carried a story noting that "although there was no immediate confirmation of child abductions, UNICEF's child protection chief in Indonesia said (s) he had no doubt they were being carried out by organized groups."

UNICEF's headquarters media chief was on the CNN interview show *Larry King Live* talking about trafficking. Other UNICEF staff, including the international communications officer who was first in Aceh and the head of emergency programmes in New York, were also interviewed on *Larry King Live* during the weeks after the tsunami.

By **Friday, January 7**, the *London Times* started questioning UNICEF claims of child trafficking, and the government of Sri Lanka was reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* to have banned adoptions of children orphaned by the tsunami.

By the second weekend after the tsunami, it was reported in the press that Sri Lanka had closed more than half of the 800 camps that had been set up for those displaced by the tsunami because people wanted to return home. Some schools were reported to be reopening, and aid workers were quoted as saying that supplies were now reaching almost everywhere and disease outbreaks were not occurring. In Indonesia, UNICEF was reported to be starting a measles campaign in Sumatra.

According to global media analyst Echo Research's media tracking for the tsunami, approximately half of the total media coverage devoted to the tsunami had already occurred during the first two weeks.

1.3 The Third Week

While in London over the weekend, the Executive Director learned from New York headquarters that former U.S. President Bill Clinton wanted to hold a joint press conference at UNICEF on **Monday, January 10** to announce his foundation's partnership with UNICEF in tsunami relief. A major emphasis at the conference was put on the importance of disease prevention.

On **Tuesday, January 11** the media reported on the fear of a measles outbreak in Aceh, and noted that UNICEF had supported the vaccination of more than 1,000 children in the first day and a half of the campaign. The Japanese Foreign Minister was quoted referring to "the reports that children orphaned by the disaster are being trafficked in Indonesia and other countries."

By **Wednesday, January 12**, there were media reports that the relief effort was getting smoother, and UNICEF was quoted again as mentioning the importance of registering children. A *New York Times* editorial of **Thursday, January 13** mentioned again that "children were one third of the casualties of the tsunamis," and made reference to other issues of concern to UNICEF, including the potential for disease outbreak, child trafficking, and the plight of orphans. And on **Friday, January 14** the *New York Times* ran an article on the energy and visibility of UNICEF's Executive Director.

The child trafficking story was still predominant in media coverage. The media chief of the UNICEF office in Jakarta was quoted on **Friday, January 14** as saying that "we are being careful on the issue of trafficking," but a *Reuters* story over the weekend quoted the Executive Director saying that "those who would prey upon children in this chaotic environment are already at work." Interpol was reported to be issuing an alert about pedophiles posing as aid workers.

The UNICEF Executive Director (and representative in Sri Lanka) commented on how well the relief operation was going, and again stressed the need to get children back to school. The government of Indonesia was reporting that 115, 229 were dead from the

tsunamis, and UNICEF was quoted by *U.S. News and World Report* as estimating that between six and nine thousand children were without parents.

1.4 The Fourth Week

By *Monday, January 17*, there were media reports that adoption hotlines around the world were jammed with callers wanting to adopt tsunami orphans. UNICEF was also reported to be advising against adoption and continued its warnings about potential trafficking. On *Thursday, January 20*, UNICEF was mentioned as stressing the need to treat child trauma, and allow children to talk about their experience.

By *Sunday, January 24*, Japan had announced it was earmarking \$86 million out of an overall aid donation of \$250 million for the prevention of child trafficking. The death toll in Asia was reported to be almost 220,000, with close to 170,000 in Indonesia and 30,000 in Sri Lanka. UNICEF was reported to have registered 700 children, and reunited six with their families in Indonesia.

On Monday, *January 25* it was announced that children would start to return to school in Aceh province in Sumatra, one month after the tsunami.

On *Tuesday, January 26*, UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross publicly announced that they would both cease their fundraising efforts.

1.5 The Fifth and Sixth Weeks

By *the end of January and beginning of February*, the global media story had started to change, focusing more on celebrity visits to the tsunami region, the continuation of corporate donations, and the plight of Baby 81, a Sri Lankan infant whose parents struggled for days to prove that they were his rightful parents. The media coverage now started to resemble tabloid coverage, and there was a rapid decline in coverage of the relief effort.

There was a renewal of media interest at the six month mark after the tsunami. UNICEF and other agencies released detailed reports on their ongoing concerns and summarized what they had done in the relief operation and how they had spent their money.

1.6 The Situation in Indonesia

The worst affected area in the Indian Ocean was the province of Aceh on the northwestern tip of Sumatra in Indonesia, where as many as 170,000 deaths were ultimately estimated to have occurred. The area was a long distance from the capital in Jakarta, and had been isolated by and suffered physical damage to educational and health facilities from several years of guerilla war between liberation movement fighters and government military forces. When the tsunami struck, the area was under partial martial law and UNICEF had a small office run by national staff – one that was badly damaged by the waves.

The UNICEF office in Indonesia was not well prepared when the tsunami struck. It was in what one staff member described as a state of turmoil. It was in between representatives, and it was at the end of the year's budget. Both international and national staff had little emergency experience and there was no emergency plan

Despite such limitations, the UNICEF staff in Jakarta started sending situation reports to UNICEF regional and headquarters offices as early as the day after the tsunami, and put in supply orders for medical supplies and family survival kits. Communications staff in Jakarta started responding to media inquiries within hours of the tsunami. By the end of the first week the country office had sent staff to Aceh to start assessing needs and deliver small amounts of relief supplies.

Because of the overall lack of preparedness, the media story was very much in front of the response. Some of the senior international staff in Jakarta were worried at the end of the first week that supplies weren't moving quickly enough to Aceh, and that behind the promising media messages that the organization was producing on a global level was an inadequate relief effort. But in general, the international media did not focus as much on the failures of individual agencies as much as they did on the plight of the victims and occasional stories about problems that were generic to the whole effort such as logistical bottlenecks. Several of those interviewed for this assessment in both Indonesia and Sri Lanka expressed some surprise that the media had not been as critical of the actual relief effort as they might have been.

The problems were compounded by the lack of substantial information from Aceh in the first few days. According to senior management at *Metro TV* in Jakarta, which broke the tsunami story in Indonesia, there was no communication with Aceh in the first few days after the tsunami. The story was broken when an Indonesia radio reporter filed a story by phone as he was running away from the first wave. Pictures came a day after, of dead children in one of the hospitals. After two days they had an amateur video of the tsunami.

A Ministry of Health official who was one of the first government representatives in Aceh after the tsunami remembers that at the beginning, he and his colleague from the ministry knew there had been an earthquake, but until they reached Aceh they had not known about the tsunami. The only broad picture they were getting in the first couple of

days was from what he described as “amateur radio,” which was giving out death estimates. What he and others found when they got there was chilling. “There were more bodies than people,” was how he remembered it several months later.

International journalists arrived the third day. By then the Indonesian military was covering dead bodies in rows along the roads. People went down the rows and uncovered them to see if they could identify them, and then they were buried. They were still burying bodies three months later.

The Indonesia military and the Indonesian Vice President’s office for tsunami relief coordination were issuing ongoing estimates of fatalities. They rose by about 30,000 a day for a week. The total for confirmed dead remained under 100,000 for several days, then rose up to around 150,000. Ultimately as many as 170,000 were estimated to have died or disappeared. As the relief effort grew, the 22 flights a day into the Banda Aceh airport in normal times rose to about 100 a day in the early part of the relief operation. According to the Indonesian government agency that was responsible for coordinating the relief effort, there were about 145 organizations that had come to help, about a third of which were associated with or coordinated by the UN.

Among the first UNICEF staff members to arrive in Banda Aceh from Jakarta were an emergency communications officer from New York and a national communications officer. They arrived on Thursday, four days after the tsunami, and spent the first day and a half setting up a UNICEF office before working directly with the journalists who were starting to arrive in Aceh.

When they reached Aceh, they began to work with the UNICEF media chief in Jakarta to feed breaking details to the Indonesian office and New York communications staff. They provided the media chief in Jakarta with local developments and the media chief provided them with updates on what international media and New York headquarters were doing. The three of them functioned as journalists for about the first week, providing some of the initial reporting to media outlets and the UNICEF system until the international media arrived in force. Because of global media demand, they followed a 24 hour news cycle, starting with reports to Asian media at 4 AM, then 2 PM for Europe and 8 PM for the United States.

Both communications officers left Aceh toward the end of the second week with a group of staff members and the Executive Director, who had arrived just over a week after the tsunami. That left the understaffed UNICEF office in Aceh without a communications officer. For several days, staff had to deal with both the high pressure demands of setting up a complicated relief operation and dealing with what was turning into a media invasion. By then visits from National Committees were starting, which put even more responsibility on programme staff. They knew that the visits were essential to future funding, but they found themselves in the awkward position of trying to show visitors programmes that they had not had enough time to develop because of all the time they were spending with media and other visitors. Much of the pressure from media scrutiny

eased when UNICEF's second communications officer arrived from the UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok at the end of the third week.

The head of the UNICEF office in Aceh in the days immediately after the tsunami noted that one of her biggest challenges was managing space between her team and the press. At that time, things were very chaotic, and the pressure on the few UNICEF staff who were there was intense. She noted that she had never seen so many journalists, not even when the international media was gathered on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan before the US invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. She felt that her staff needed to know they had a privileged space which the media would not violate, where they could discuss delicate issues without fear that word would get out through the media and back to the government.

By the end of the second month after the tsunami, the UNICEF office still did not have a full staff in Aceh, but it had provided clean water and shelter, undertaken a measles immunization campaign, set up the first childrens' centers, and started rehabilitating schools.

By mid-March the media chief in Jakarta realized that to continue to be pro-active on the Aceh story might be counter productive. It could result in overkill and contribute to declining interest or prompt the media to ask the difficult questions that it had never really asked.

1.7 The Situation in Sri Lanka

The tsunami struck the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka the hardest, resulting in the highest proportions of the approximately 30,000 estimated fatalities. As many as three quarters of a million people were estimated to have been displaced by the calamity. But the waves also hit the major international tourist hotels and residences in the area around Galle along the southern coast a few hours by car from Colombo, where both national military and medical authorities as well as national and international media were able to respond within hours.

The UNICEF representative was among a group of aid agency representatives who met with the military authorities on the day of the tsunami to discuss logistical needs. A child protection staff member with SCF- UK noted that both SCF and UNICEF were able to pass along information to authorities from their contacts at district level. In the following days UNICEF was involved in daily meetings with other UN agencies and NGOs.

In Sri Lanka the initial response to the tsunami victims came from national authorities and Sri Lankan citizens. UNICEF country staff – in particular the national staff – responded immediately, sometimes as private citizens. Staff in four of the five UNICEF zonal offices that were in areas affected by the tsunami were immediately involved in searching for bodies and responding to initial needs. Some were dragging bodies out of

the sea. The zonal offices in Trincomalee and Batticaloa on the northeast coast provided information on the relief effort for country office situation reports.

Because of seasonal floods in Sri Lanka, UNICEF had supplies in country and an emergency plan, but the organization was not prepared for a disaster of such magnitude. The office sent supply orders to Copenhagen for medical kits for 150,000, and received them within 72 hours. Even though UNICEF was getting a huge amount of money from online donations in the first few days, money still took time to work its way through the bureaucracy to the office in Colombo – which was a problem the first several days because the office had come to the end of its 2004 budget. One of the factors that contributed greatly to the fundraising efforts was the regular reporting and updating of fact sheets sent to National Committees by communications staff.

An international communications officer arrived on the third day after the tsunami from the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia in Kathmandu to work with national staff. By then, journalists were starting to arrive in substantial numbers, and the country representative was using the international and national media to warn citizens of the potential danger of landmines that may have been washed out of mine fields by the waves.

According to one senior programme officer in Colombo, the UNICEF office in Colombo initially struggled to clarify its niche, and decide on what the priorities for action would be. But within days they emphasized the need for clean water, the importance of getting children back to school as close as possible to the beginning of the regularly scheduled term at the end of January, and the importance of finding alternatives to institutionalization for children who had been separated from their parents. This was a menu of media messages that was consistent with UNICEF's global media messages.

In the couple of years before the tsunami, the country office had put a priority on the monitoring of child soldier recruits by the LTTE in northeastern Sri Lanka, where Tamil separatists had been waging a war with the government for a couple of decades. Since a major part of the damage from the tsunami was among the coastal communities on the northeastern coast along the Indian Ocean, UNICEF was concerned that a number of children who had been separated from families as a result of the tsunami would be recruited as child soldiers. Responding to that possibility became one of the country office priorities, and resulted in a UNICEF media campaign that was specific to Sri Lanka and managed by the country office.

UNICEF programme staff in education, health and child protection worked with counterparts in government ministries and other organizations from the beginning, thus relying on relationships that already existed as part of the country programme. UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Education, for example, to provide school uniforms and organize community brigades to clean up schools that had been damaged but otherwise survived the tsunami. Its contribution to the revival of the educational system in the weeks following the disaster was cited by a number of those interviewed as perhaps its most successful work.

The initial media story focused on the southern coast below Colombo, and was based on footage of the destruction of tourist hotels and big structures around Galle. More damage had been done in coastal areas of the east, but those areas were more sparsely settled, some were in areas affected by the ongoing civil conflict, and they were on the other side of the country from government and media centers in Colombo. It took the media longer to get to the east than to Galle, which could be reached in several hours by car or less in a helicopter.

The story moved quickly. In the first few days it was what one BBC correspondent referred to as “eyewitness time,” as she and other journalists tried to provide some sense for the world of the scale of the disaster and motivate a response. The story moved to concerns about disease outbreak, and after that to concern for traumatized victims. She said she made a deliberate effort to cover the efforts made by Sri Lankans, who responded in large numbers and with immediacy in the first few days after the tsunami.

At the time she felt that UNICEF had a clear idea of where things were going, a consistent message, and was very accessible when she covered the tsunami in Galle. The organization wasn’t just talking about children, she remembered, but about damage to schools and the need for water as well -- concerns that affected the broader society.

Part Two

The UNICEF Media Campaign

2.1 Introduction

The following section focuses on four principal message areas that guided UNICEF's response to the media in the days after the tsunami, and became the template for UNICEF's media campaign in the weeks that followed. They were:

- One third of the victims were children
- The dangers of waterborne disease and importance of a clean water supply
- The importance of getting children back to school
- The need to protect separated and otherwise vulnerable children

A fifth general media message – that of the importance of ‘building back better’ – was intended as part of the inquiry but subsequent research provided by *Echo Research* and interviews for this assessment suggest that while it was important as a guiding principle for the rehabilitation effort, as an actual message it was not as prominent as the other four. Very few who were interviewed for the assessment volunteered any discussion of the campaign to ‘build back better.’ Their concerns had been more with immediate needs.

The impact of UNICEF's media messages on policy and programmes during the weeks following the tsunami can best be understood by discussion of some of the dynamics of the problems themselves, how relevant the messages were, and whether, to what extent and how the messages supported action on the ground.

In many cases the impact was supportive in a general way, providing a steady pressure on people to act, and highlighted certain needs and priorities. While it is difficult to isolate direct connections between particular media stories that reference UNICEF and actual policy decisions and following action, there were a few cases in which there were more discernible connections between comments by UNICEF spokespeople and subsequent government response.

The end of the major media campaign can be marked by the organization's decision to publicly announce that it was no longer seeking funds for tsunami relief on 26 January. The volume of coverage decreased dramatically after that point, and media concerns went from the drama of the relief effort itself to reports of celebrity visits to the region and corporate donations. By the end of the first month, it was also clear that children were returning to school, there had been no major disease outbreaks, and a number of relief agencies were reporting that they were finally getting control of their logistical operations.

2.2 The Different Media Voices of UNICEF

UNICEF presented more than one face to the media, and thus it can be said to have had different identities. These are important to identify, for they help to understand the total impact of UNICEF through the media. What ultimately made the UNICEF media campaign in the weeks following the tsunami effective was that all of the identities and corresponding voices worked together.

The voice of authority on children. UNICEF spokespeople were able to present information, characterize the disaster, and suggest priority actions in response, that fulfilled its role as a recognized international authority on issues related to children. In this way UNICEF provided a context for what media consumers around the world were seeing and hearing about the tsunami.

The voice of an organization that was on the ground at the start, and was providing tangible assistance. One journalist with the BBC noted that what made UNICEF credible as a source for information during the tsunami coverage was that it had programmes and government relationships in the affected countries. And within a couple of days of the tsunami, there were reports in both television and print media of UNICEF supplies on their way to stricken countries.

The voice of human rights advocate. UNICEF also played a major role as an advocate for the protection and rights of vulnerable children, which ultimately became the big children's story most directly associated in the media with UNICEF. There were several people from various sectors of society who were interviewed for this assessment who noted that the first time they became directly aware of UNICEF through the media was when the story of child trafficking and the plight of separated or abandoned children assumed prominence.

2.3 The Different Levels of UNICEF Communications Response

The prominence of media coverage in the global response to the tsunami provided an opportunity to observe how the different parts of UNICEF's global communications system worked together in the days and weeks after 26 December.

While communications staff were subject to the same level of uncertainty and confusion that other relief staff experienced in the first two to three weeks after the tsunami, when viewed as a whole the performance of communications staff at global, regional and national levels was remarkable in its faithfulness to the main global media messages.

Global spokespeople, including the Executive Director, the head of Emergency Operations in New York, various communications staff and some heads of National Committees, were consistent in their repetition of the organization's generic media messages in the areas of education, health and child protection. These were messages that adhered closely to the organization's set of core corporate responsibilities in

emergencies, and were effective in large part because they were both generic *and* relevant to the actual situations in the affected countries.

These generic global messages provided a unifying context or operating umbrella for the more nuanced sub-messages delivered by regional and national communications staff, who had greater knowledge of realities on the ground and were able to present print, television and radio journalists with color and detail unique to the situations at hand. The details provided by communications staff in the country offices in turn helped regional and global level staff further refine the broader global messages, and feed breaking updates to National Committee staff for their fundraising efforts.

It is important to note that the media campaign would not have been successful if either of those two major components did not function consistently and in a way that was complementary. While a number of communications staff who were interviewed for the assessment noted how chaotic things often seemed, particularly in the first few weeks, and how difficult it often was to develop a full understanding of rapidly changing events in a number of different places, the overall affect was of a *coordinated* campaign. A small number of UNICEF staff and NGO partners used the term ‘media machine’ to describe UNICEF’s media operations during the aftermath of the tsunami.

2.4 The Importance of Organizational Spokespeople

In their detailed research on UNICEF’s media output during the three months after the tsunami, *Echo Research* concluded that it was the direct contact between UNICEF spokespeople and the media that was responsible for the overwhelming majority of instances in which UNICEF was mentioned in the press.

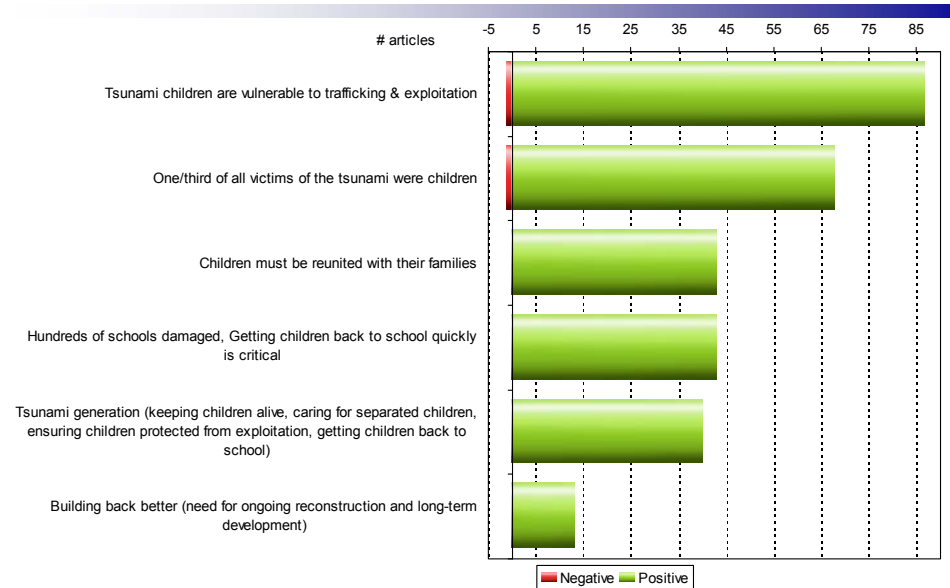
The organization sent out press releases, offered its own reportage on its website in the form of feature stories and video, and sent situation reports to various divisions within the organization with details of what UNICEF was doing as a relief organization. But as *Echo Research* noted, “press release activity was very much subordinate to communications from spokespeople on the ground. In a fast changing news environment this proved to be the most effective and flexible way for UNICEF to present its message... UNICEF’s simple set of messages helped spokespeople stay consistently ‘on message.’” Because media technology allowed any UNICEF spokespeople to be seen or heard around the world, UNICEF spokespeople at all levels of the organization were global spokespeople.

It was the *accessibility* of organizational spokespeople that made the difference. They were available to the media, responded to their inquiries, and projected the sense that the organization had a plan for response and knew what was going on. A number of experienced journalists who were interviewed for this assessment also recognized the reliability and availability of the organization’s spokespeople as a major reason for the effectiveness of UNICEF’s media presence.

Part Three The Messages

The following section offers a critique of the origins and impact on programme policies of UNICEF's four main message areas in both Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The graph that follows indicates the volume of stories that mentioned each of the main messages.

UNICEF Overall Coverage – Tsunami Specific Messages by volume and impressions



December 26 2004 – March 26 2005

© Echo

3.1 One Third of the Victims Were Children

This estimate was made by a UNICEF communications officer in Geneva to international media inquiries the day after the tsunami, and became the focus of a front page banner headline story the next day in the *New York Times*. A number of people noted that it was impossible to know what the numbers of affected children really were, and some suggest that the toll might have been even higher than a third, but no one had any trouble with the legitimacy of the claim.

While the message was a generalization that was offered at a time when there was still very little information from the areas affected by the tsunami, it was based on demographic data from Asia. It was largely because of its generic quality – there was no precise number – that it was so easy to grasp. There were no complicated numbers at that early stage of the drama, and it was clear to everyone that defenseless children had been major victims. That the estimate achieved prominence in the media in the days immediately following the disaster made it a common reference point in the weeks that followed.

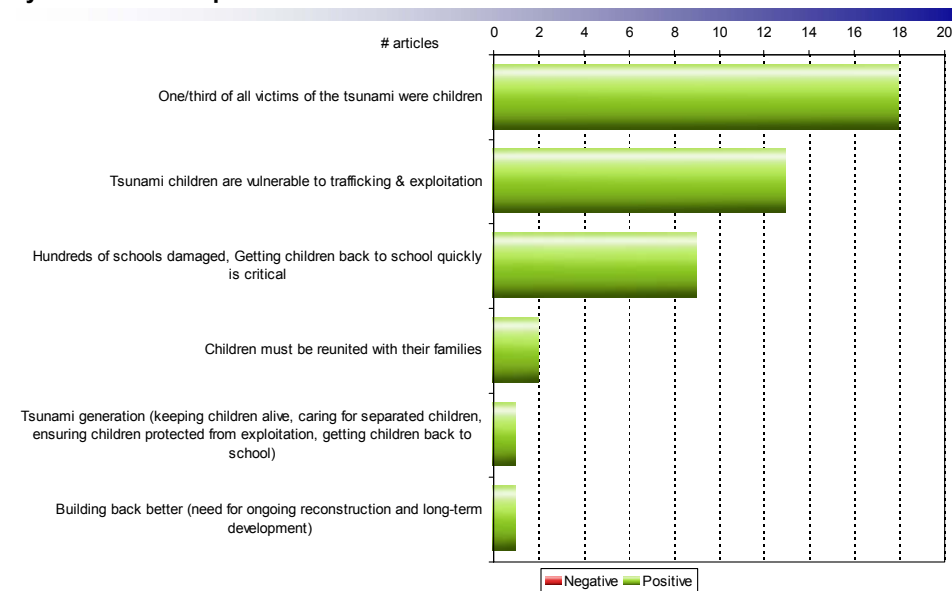
The message quickly established UNICEF as the global authority on how the tsunami was affecting children. While it is not possible to substantiate in any more than a speculative way, it is quite likely that this message may have been the most important of UNICEF's messages when it came to fundraising. It helped establish a very early and very public link between UNICEF as an authoritative advocate for the interests of children and those who wanted to help. By establishing itself early as an authority, UNICEF earned a reputation that benefited all who worked for the organization in the weeks ahead. As can be seen from the graph on the following page produced by *Echo Research*, it had a particularly strong impact in the Sri Lankan media.

The degree to which it has been accepted and made part of the historical context was reflected in the foreword written by the Managing Director of *CNN International* to a book published on the tsunami shortly after it occurred.

“The tsunami... led to one of the world's largest-ever relief efforts,” he wrote, “as countries and governments across the globe pledged billions in aid to the shattered lives of those who had survived the tragedy. More significantly, perhaps, was the outpouring of sympathy from millions of private individuals for *a third of the victims* – the children of the tsunami, those who had died and those who were either orphaned or left with a single parent trying to rebuild their lives.”

The message came at the right time and helped establish an early sense of where children fit into the larger context. Other messages quickly surpassed it in the days ahead as attention focused on relief needs, but it was one of the most successful and important of UNICEF's major media messages on the tsunami.

UNICEF Tsunami Specific Messages - Tsunami Zone – Sri Lanka by volume and impressions



December 26 2004 – March 26 2005

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3.2 The Warning of Potential Disease Outbreaks from Contaminated Water

The broader concern about potential disease outbreaks following the tsunami was voiced initially by the World Health Organization in Geneva. The organization warned that more deaths might occur as a result of disease outbreaks after the tsunami than from the tsunami itself. UNICEF global health staff were not convinced of that claim, and focused UNICEF's message instead on the need to prevent disease from contaminated or standing water. Because the message was somewhat generic to any emergency situation, and was being issued by several aid agencies, it never belonged distinctly to UNICEF. But the Executive Director and the organization as a whole continued to voice its concern throughout the first few weeks, and in Indonesia UNICEF launched a measles immunization campaign in northern Sumatra.

Rather than being a direct cause of subsequent action, it did help to establish relief priorities from the start and added a steady pressure to a complex set of reactions by government bodies, aid agencies, communities and those directly affected by the tsunami.

What is striking about the aftermath to the tsunami is that there was no major disease outbreak in either country, even though the ingredients were present in both. One of the main differences between the countries affected by the tsunami and many that have suffered from ongoing, complex emergencies in which there are serious disease control problems is that the tsunami killed large numbers of people very quickly, leaving others who were basically healthy. Because the waves only penetrated a few kilometers in most places, the rest of the society was left intact and was able to respond with systems that had not been destroyed.

In Sri Lanka, the ingredients for a serious problem were there: there were concentrations of dead bodies, wells that were contaminated by carcasses and debris swept in by the waves, and pit latrines were overflowing in the early days of the displaced camps.

But as one Sri Lankan woman who worked with UNICEF and national NGOs noted, the country has a good, village based administrative system that responded to the problem at the local level. Because Sri Lanka has camps for those displaced by its ongoing civil war, there is experience with how to manage such collectivities of vulnerable people. The collection of dead bodies took place quickly, and many quickly left areas where there were concentrations of dead bodies.

One UNICEF medical authority in Sri Lanka listed the following factors as reasons why there were no outbreaks:

- Immunization rates were high, and the government saw no need to undertake a major measles immunization campaign beyond the re establishment of basic services (even though UNICEF encouraged them to do so).
- UNICEF and various agencies trucked clean water into the camps and constructed latrines.
- There was good access to health care before the tsunami. People were physically closer to health clinics in Sri Lanka than in many other countries. With damage to only coastal areas, the interior of the country was physically unaffected and health workers and others could go to the help of those on the coast.
- With a high literacy rate, it was possible to distribute information to the camps and expect that people could read it.
- UNICEF and the Ministry of Health promoted breastfeeding as an alternative to formulas mixed with potentially contaminated water.

In Indonesia various international militaries that arrived to help had set up field hospitals, and there was no big sanitation problem largely because the Indonesian military moved quickly to bury bodies and used disinfectant. In the first few days the residents of Aceh wanted to follow traditional Muslim burial ceremonies, but after five days the military finally started mass burials as a sanitary measure. The provision of sanitation facilities

in the camps was slow, and dead bodies were still being collected three months after the tsunami, but as in Sri Lanka, people in Indonesia were generally well educated, and had maintained a manageable level of sanitary care before the tsunami. Many of them relied on tanked or purified water brought in by UNICEF and other agencies. The head of one of UNICEF's international NGO partners noted that one of the great achievements of the international community in Aceh was the prevention of a disease outbreak.

The head of the Indonesian government relief body was less specific in his conclusion than some others had been. "We were lucky," he said. A leading official from the Indonesian Ministry of Health who was one of the first aid workers to arrive in Aceh attributes the lack of a disease outbreak to "God's will" and notes that they were all surprised.

3.3 The Importance of Getting Children Back to School

The public campaigns in Sri Lanka and Indonesia to restore normalcy to children's lives after the tsunami by getting them back to school was one of the most important – and most successful of UNICEF's efforts. It addressed the need respond to the psycho-social needs of children and their communities.

A consistent media message was an essential part of the campaign, but equally important was the fact that in both countries UNICEF already had relations with the ministries of education, and was supporting its effort with ambitious programmes to rebuild damaged schools and construct new ones.

Echo Research has pointed out that the media in both Sri Lanka and Indonesia provided more coverage of the campaign than the international media, a finding that is consistent with a consensus among some of those interviewed in both countries that national media had responded as integral parts of their country's relief efforts.

3.3.1 In Sri Lanka, Restoration of the Education System Benefited from UNICEF's Existing Relationships with Government and Partners

In Sri Lanka, UNICEF programme staff in Colombo cited the campaign to return children to school as an example of a combined media and advocacy job that worked. They pointed out that the media outreach complemented one-on-one advocacy with counterparts in the ministry.

In the first several days, some of the displaced people in Sri Lanka had sought shelter in school buildings, but were afraid to leave without government promise of an alternative. Many feared losing their rations if they went somewhere else. For UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, a major priority was making learning spaces available for children. But they did not want to force the displaced out until there were suitable

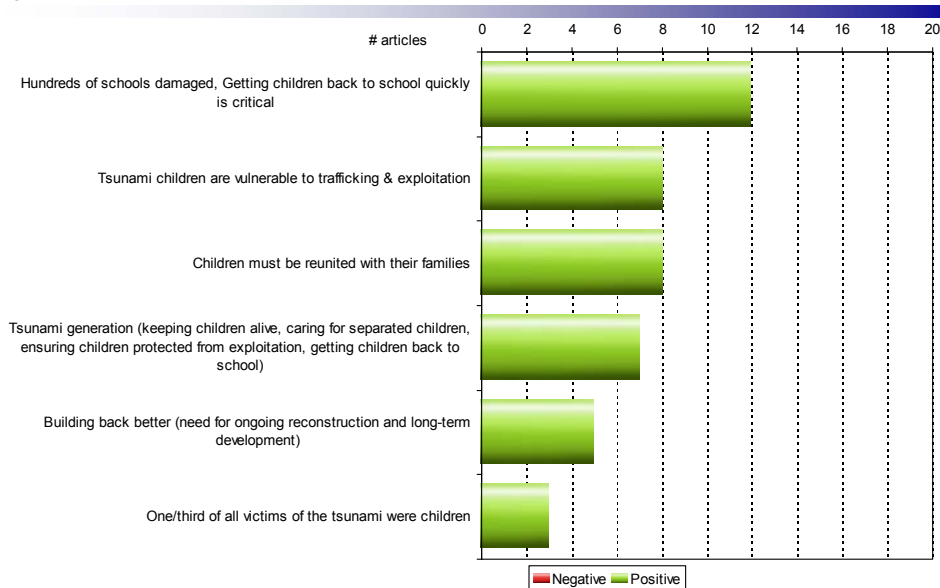
alternatives. UNICEF and SCF warned not to rush the resettlement of IDPs living in school buildings, but urged authorities instead to use other locales until suitable living arrangements could be made for the IDPs. Their fear was that the government would have pushed the IDPs out if they had not intervened and advocated against them doing so.

That was what inspired UNICEF to start talking about the possibility of holding classes under trees, and of developing learning spaces as opposed to entire schools. Ultimately more than 200 spaces were established in schools that had been partially destroyed or were being occupied by displaced people, and the priority was to start school again by late January.

But the success was also strengthened by the fact that, as one official at the Ministry of Education who is in charge of the school reconstruction programme pointed out, UNICEF was the first organization to come to the rescue after the tsunami. And even before the tsunami, he pointed out, the ministry was working with UNICEF on design of child friendly schools. UNICEF education staff, the administrative heads of the districts and the Ministry of Education worked closely together on relief to the educational system.

In the days after the tsunami, UNICEF organized community teams to clear schools of debris, and provided uniforms and textbooks. The provision of supplies was essential to the broader objective of getting children back to school by late January. MOUs for school reconstruction appeared in local newspapers, providing evidence that there was some progress and that UNICEF was involved. Even so, the campaign did not have instant widespread support. Many parents were too preoccupied with immediate survival needs to focus on getting their children back to school. It took until late February or March for the system to start returning to normal. By the end of March, as much as 80 percent of children were back in school.

UNICEF Tsunami Specific Messages - Tsunami Zone - Indonesia by volume and impressions



December 26 2004 – March 26 2005

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3.3.2 In Indonesia, UNICEF Efforts to Rehabilitate Schools were Seen as Its Most Visible and Important Work

In Indonesia, UNICEF and the government of Indonesia worked together to publicize the importance of getting children back to school, an initiative that was expedited by the presence of a national officer in Aceh who could communicate with local authorities.

The prominence of UNICEF media messages on the importance of getting children back to school can be seen in the graph above by *Echo Research*, which indicates that of all the organizational media messages it was the one related to education that resonated the most with the Indonesian media, and quite likely with the public as well.

One senior UNICEF education officer noted that media messages on education gave UNICEF support in its talks with the government. The government requested UNICEF assistance with tracking information on the rebuilding of schools, and the organization provided hardware and teacher training for new schools. This was possible, as the education officer noted, because UNICEF had money that had been donated in response to media outreach.

To many of those in the media who were covering the relief operation from inside the country, it was UNICEF's messages and actions in the area of education that were most noteworthy – a feature of the relief operation that was influenced in part by organizational press releases. According to the editor for health and education issues at

Kompas, Indonesia's leading newspaper, UNICEF's most significant efforts were to reunify people and rehabilitate education.

And according to an *Associated Press* reporter based in Jakarta who covered UNICEF's work in the aftermath of the tsunami, UNICEF's strong point has been its rehabilitation of schools in Aceh. It had an ongoing message about education, he noted, and kept the issue alive. When asked what role UNICEF had played in the larger relief operation, the head of the Indonesian government relief cited its support of education and children, and was particularly struck by "school in a box."

In the months following the tsunami, UNICEF's programme to build temporary schools as a preliminary to the larger objective of building better schools did fall behind schedule. The UNICEF education officer in Jakarta suggested that it would have been good to do some outreach in the national media to explain why the process was slow.

3.4 The Plight of Vulnerable Children

In both countries there were those who said that it wasn't until the stories about potential trafficking and adoption that they became aware of UNICEF as a distinct presence in the larger galaxy of aid agencies. One prominent Sri Lankan journalist pointed out that the stories about potential child trafficking were the first ones that focused specifically on children, and which he identified with UNICEF.

Child protection issues are probably the most challenging ones for UNICEF to craft media messages around, in part because there tend to be protagonists and victims. Often the protagonists are governments that are not sufficiently protective of the nation's children, or certain sections of society that have violated the rights of children, or opposition and guerilla movements that draft children into militias. That means that UNICEF must play its role as human rights monitor and advocate, and find ways to be critical while at the same time protecting its relations with all parties

A frequent dilemma for child protection officers is how to inform the media without violating the confidentiality and privacy rights of children, or providing hard numbers when they either do not have them or are uncertain as to what they are. As one UNICEF child protection officer put it, the challenge is "to give media what they want without giving them what they want."

In both Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the priority child protection concerns were for separated children – those who had lost one or both parents in the tsunami or had become separated and could not find their parents – and to a lesser extent those children who might have been kidnapped by child trafficking interests. This concern found its expression in the repeated statements by the executive director highlighting the importance of reuniting children with their families.

The child trafficking story, which evolved around the initial speculation by UNICEF that trafficking of tsunami children was happening (specifically in Indonesia), achieved huge prominence in the international media even though, and perhaps because of the fact that no one could find any real evidence of trafficking related to the tsunami. As can be seen from the graph below, what *Echo Research* has characterized as the ‘exploitation story’ exploded quite suddenly and with enormous velocity.

It is worth noting that in Sri Lanka, UNICEF’s child protection staff originally identified four message areas for media outreach in child protection. They included the following, none of which were directly concerned with trafficking.

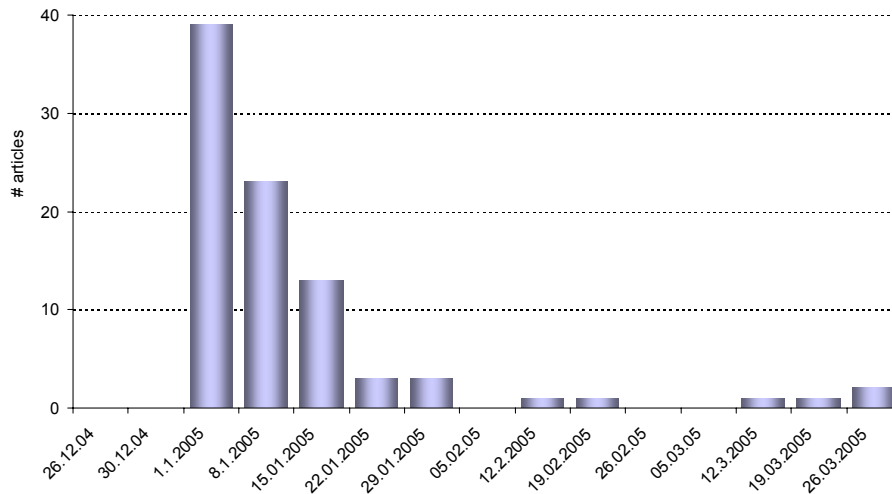
- Unaccompanied children
- Psycho-social needs
- Danger of loose mines
- Sexual abuse and exploitation

The media stories that focused on the fates of separated children, the efforts of individuals from around the world to adopt them and the campaigns in both countries to establish orphanages, were probably more closely aligned with realities in both countries than the larger trafficking story.

The most successful media campaigns were those that involved UNICEF and government partners. In Sri Lanka, for example, UNICEF, SCF and the national Child Protection Authority issued joint press releases in the weeks following the tsunami advocating against putting separated children into orphanages, part of a larger effort that ultimately paid off. In Indonesia, UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Woman’s Empowerment to establish policies on the movement of children. The government issued its ban on the movement of children under 18 out of Aceh on Friday of the week *before* the trafficking story first appeared in the media.

UNICEF Overall Coverage – Exploitation Message - Weekly Trend

by volume, favorability & rating



December 26 2004 – March 26 2005

© Echo

3.4.1 The Child Trafficking Story: An Inflated Media Story with a Positive Outcome

Child trafficking – which technically involves only children who have been taken illegally across national borders – was a reality and therefore a legitimate concern of child protection workers in South Asia. A substantial portion of commercial sex workers throughout South Asia are under the age of 18, and girls would have been enlisted into the trade even without the disruptions of family life during the aftermath to the tsunami.

There were mixed feelings in both UNICEF and among government, organizational and media partners about the story – specifically about its legitimacy and whether or not it was appropriate and beneficial. Some felt that it was a distortion that was not based on reality, and as such might have deflected attention from more worthy stories. Some of the same people also felt that their time might have been better used in service of other pressing concerns.

In its summary of conclusions, *Echo Research* noted that “The international media’s frenzy in reporting incidents of child abduction and trafficking meant UNICEF’s other relief priorities were somewhat overshadowed as a result. Certainly, there were a significant number of media articles where unconfirmed reports passed for fact and UNICEF appeared to be caught up in this melee.”

But there were also those who felt that one of the reasons that no one was able to uncover evidence of any substantial trafficking was because the story had generated so much

concern that it worked effectively as a preventive measure. *Echo Research* noted that the media attention “undoubtedly focused government minds on protecting children, with bans on adoptions across America, Europe and Asia.” But they also point out that “what was missing in the aftermath was a sober assessment of how much exploitation and child trafficking had actually taken place. UNICEF could have provided this assessment.”

Following is a lengthy discussion of the origins of the story and the highly mixed feelings that many had about it at the time. It is an example of how easily certain fears can be magnified under the intense pressure of a rapidly growing story like that of the tsunami.

The Origins of the Story

The story originated in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, although concerns about child trafficking were already there among UNICEF staff and government officials – as was the desire to do something about it.

Child protection staff at UNICEF in Indonesia had been getting odd reports of potential child abductions, but so far had no evidence of actual cases. One of the larger NGOs in Indonesia reported that 20 children had been taken from Aceh, stimulating fears among Indonesians that just as their children had been taken away by the tsunami, they might now be taken away by unscrupulous traffickers. The government decision to prevent the movement of children under 18 out of Aceh was made at the end of the first week in Indonesia, where by Friday the Ministry of Social Welfare, UNICEF and others engaged in child protection had already worked out the details.

The Sri Lankan government adopted a similar measure, also in consultation with child protection partners which included UNICEF, which was reported in the media later the following week. Several days later, in a 28 January policy paper on the care and protection of children issued by the children’s desk of the government body coordinating tsunami relief, it was noted that “steps have already been taken by the NCPA (National Child Protection Authority) to inform the Department of Emigration through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Department of Emigration and Immigration to prevent children being taken abroad illegally. So far no cases have been officially reported, but strict surveillance is important.” The rest of the 15 page policy paper was devoted to the tracking and care of separated and unaccompanied children.

The UNICEF communications officer in Malaysia received a text message that was forwarded to her from a friend early in the second week after the tsunami. The message offered children under 18 for adoption at no cost to Muslim homes, and a phone number. A Malay friend tried to call the number, but there was no answer. The communications officer passed it along to the officer in charge, and the message ultimately made its way to Jakarta when the Executive Director and headquarters media chief were there.

When the Executive Director and media chief saw the text message, they decided to make mention of it in that evening’s daily update to headquarters. They were all worried

about the story; they knew it would be tricky because it was so far based on speculation and assumption rather than hard evidence. The story quickly got out of hand, and in large part because there was no hard evidence to substantiate the claim media interest grew quickly as journalists tried to find evidence that such crimes were being committed.

While UNICEF staff who were interviewed several months later remembered that they had tried to be cautious about the story when it broke, there is evidence that some added to the growing fears. Both the Executive Director and the child protection officer in Jakarta were quoted in the media as expressing certainty that traffickers were at work at that very moment, even though neither had any firm evidence. One BBC journalist who was covering the tsunami from his public affairs show in London at the time the story broke felt that it was UNICEF that had exaggerated the threat, enough that he and his fellow editors decided not to cover it anymore.

The Growing Fears of Child Trafficking

Given the pressures of the time and the cultural assumptions and fears of many international staff and journalists, it is not difficult to see how the story achieved such velocity. According to UNICEF's headquarters media chief, the major concern in the international media was that *children were alone*. In western countries that would be a reasonable fear to have, but in both Sri Lanka and Indonesia, it became apparent that children were never really alone. Several among the interviewees who were from either of the two countries pointed out that family members and friends took in most separated children in the first couple of days after the tsunami. Other children were among the populations living in camps for the displaced, where there were both parents and camp officials.

But under the enormous pressure and rapid pace of events of the first couple of weeks, fears about trafficking took hold. Rumors continued about possible child abductions, and it was possible that the growing interest in adopting tsunami children by foreigners in other parts of Asia, and in Europe and the United States was creating a demand for abducted children. UNICEF staff in Bangkok had already gotten calls from people in North America who wanted to adopt, and it was known that there were Muslim families in Malaysia who had expressed interest in adopting children from Aceh, where Islam is the prevailing religion.

There was more than one UNICEF staff member who noticed the small numbers of children in many of the camps for the displaced in Aceh. One remembers a visit to the camps in Aceh at the time that the trafficking story was gaining momentum. Medan, the main city of northern Sumatra and a short plane ride from Banda Aceh, was a known trafficking center. When she first saw the camps, she noticed that there were few children, which made her suspect possible abductions. UNICEF had already told the world that between a third and half the victims had been children. Later, after the furor had died down, she realized that a lot of children had died, and that many were either taken in by friends and family, Islamic institutes or ultimately reunited with family under the tracing programme.

The Ambivalent Reactions of UNICEF Staff and Partners in Government and the Media

The woman who was handling media relations at headquarters in New York while the Executive Director and media chief were in Jakarta and first broke the story noted afterwards that she knew it would be tricky. She had no real proof, but felt they had to warn nonetheless. She worried about the story taking energy from other important concerns, and even refused some media interviews when she suspected that the reporters only wanted to talk about trafficking. She was able to do that since UNICEF was inundated with requests from media at the time.

Others were cautious as well. In Thailand, the regional communication officer for EAPRO made a decision not to respond to the huge volume of media requests for UNICEF confirmation of a story based on speculation that a Swedish boy had been kidnapped for possible trafficking.

Another communications officer in the region was also suspicious. From his point of view it was a huge distraction, even though he realizes New York had to issue such warnings as a preventive measure. A leading child protection authority in Sri Lanka felt that the media coverage of trafficking in her country was distorted, and that as a result people had engaged in what she described as a 'media inspired worry.' The head of the government relief operation in Indonesia thought that it was "not realistic." One prominent Sri Lankan journalist referred to the story as a 'hoax.' And a UNICEF child protection officer now regrets that the story ever made it to the public because it consumed an enormous amount of her time that she would rather have devoted to the more important issues of separated children, psycho-social needs and illegal adoptions.

It is worth noting that most of the attention was in the international media, perhaps because the story involved potential criminal acts, cross border smuggling, and the involvement of people from the United States and Europe. There was also coverage of it in Sri Lanka, where years of media reporting on child soldier recruitment had given journalists an ongoing interest in the fate of kidnapped children. There was less interest in Indonesia. When concerns were first voiced in public, a reporter who had written on child trafficking for *Kompas*, Indonesia's largest and most influential newspaper, investigated and was unable to come up with any evidence that it was happening in response to the tsunami.

The Positive Impact of the Trafficking Story

The story achieved a magnitude that was out of proportion to reality. To date there have been no substantiated cases of actual trafficking related to tsunami children. Whether or not that is because UNICEF sounded the alarm and both citizens and public authorities were on the alert or because there never was any trafficking of tsunami children has been

the subject of some discussion. The child protection officer in Sri Lanka recalled that it was possible that trafficking was occurring somewhere, but they found only two cases that required collaboration with police – neither of which qualified as trafficking.

But even among those who questioned the validity and appropriateness of the story was agreement that the enormous attention given to the trafficking story helped to establish a media platform from which UNICEF could discuss the whole range of child protection issues. The broader consensus is that even if the story was an exaggeration, it had a substantial impact in the region and served as a means of opening a public discussion about child protection issues and giving UNICEF some leverage on other related child protection concerns. Some have pointed out that in response governments in the region earmarked money for child protection, and that there are governments around the world now who are more aware of child protection issues. The Japanese government responded to trafficking fears by earmarking a substantial portion of its aid donation to fight potential traffickers. The UNICEF country programme in Indonesia had not been getting much money from donors for child protection but that began to change as a result of the trafficking story and the accompanying debate about adoptions and separated children. The coverage did make people in the community cautious about giving their children to strangers, and that was a positive effect.

But it was also helpful in more specific ways. The head of child protection for UNICEF in Sri Lanka noted that it gave him the chance to further engage the police in discussions on security for internally displaced people in the camps and other issues. In neighboring India, notice of the UNICEF Executive Director's warning about trafficking in the international press stimulated the national relief coordination office to put pressure on its local office in tsunami stricken Tamil Nadu to be on the alert for child trafficking.

In the end, it was precisely because there never was any real substantiation of what started out as an expression of concern and developed into implications of certainty, that the merits of the trafficking story and UNICEF messages are still open to debate. There is less debate over the fact that what some considered excessive media coverage drew valuable attention to the broader concerns of child protection in the region.

3.4.2 The Story of Unaccompanied Children and the Need to Reunite Them with Their Families: A Media Story that Supported an Ongoing Policy Initiative

A story that ran parallel to that of child trafficking fears focused on the fate of separated children, and whether they would be adopted, sent to orphanages, or an alternative form of family care. One of the major observations that UNICEF staff and others made in the days immediately following the tsunami is that there were more parents without children than there were children without parents – and therefore a serious attempt to reunite children with their parents could make the resort to orphanages unnecessary.

According to one of the child protection staff who felt that the trafficking story was a major distraction, the real story was about international adoption. UNICEF's goal was to get the word out enough to calm people down and get them to understand that neither adoption nor orphanages were the best options. When it came to separated children, UNICEF had a proactive policy initiative.

One international journalist in Jakarta noted that the debate in the media about adoption and unaccompanied children was essential to, but not uniquely responsible, for the policy decisions that were ultimately made. Such decisions would ultimately have been made with or without the media coverage.

In Both Indonesia and Sri Lanka, UNICEF Worked with Counterparts and the Media to Counter a Growing Movement to Put Unaccompanied Children in Orphanages

In Indonesia, UNICEF child protection staff were under pressure from the media to come up with numbers for separated children, but were reluctant to do so because they felt they were not reliable. Different ministries were coming up with different numbers of children who had no parents, including the Ministry of Social Welfare. The Indonesian Vice President's office was advocating for putting children in orphanages and madrassahs, presumably in response to the estimates – some as high as 30,000 -- and the fears of the Muslim majority in the country that Christian groups were trying to take children out of the country for adoption and religious indoctrination. The desire to build orphanages among various NGOs was gathering momentum.

UNICEF put a lot of effort into talking to government and using local media to get their message across. They had press briefings and workshops for journalists. They advocated for continued family tracing and alternative family care

In Sri Lanka, there were early requests for adoption coming from *inside* the country, and there were those who worried about orphans and wanted to set up orphanages, but SCF and UNICEF advocated for alternative family care instead. They knew that there were only a very small number of children living in institutions who actually were orphans – less than 10 percent. In Sri Lanka there has always been what from UNICEF's point of view is an over reliance on putting children in institutions, even those who still have one parent. Many parents see orphanages as ways to provide better care for their children. There was a fear that in the aftermath of the tsunami that thousands of children would be put in institutions. The message from UNICEF that adoption should be a last resort did come across in the Sri Lankan (and international media), where it became a critical part of a larger, coordinated effort. In Sri Lanka the unaccompanied, separated children story actually came out in the media *before* the trafficking story, and one child protection officer concluded that it would have been a major media story even if there had been no trafficking story.

The child protection staff conducted surveys which indicated that only a tiny fraction of the children affected by the tsunami in Sri Lanka had no parents. At the same time, a

lawyer on the child protection team found laws dating back to the 1940s on foster care, and worked with the government to update them. UNICEF then started placing children in foster care, with the involvement of the courts. By the middle of 2005, over 700 children were living with relatives and get government financial support. Over time, different NGOs came to Sri Lanka offering to put money into foster care, there were recurrent media stories on it – and no new orphanages.

The head of the child protection section said he felt that media exposure was helpful to the discussion, and that his unit at UNICEF deliberately used the media as part of its effort. The media was very supportive of child protection in general, and he found that they generally got the story right. He reported dealing directly with as many as 70 media inquiries.

In the months following the tsunami, the issue was still there. In Indonesia, many families that have taken in children are poor, so they are having trouble taking care of them. The danger is that when they become too expensive they will send them to orphanages.

3.4.3 Child Soldiers in Sri Lanka: Direct Impact Through the National Media

An experienced Sri Lankan correspondent for one of the international news wires said that UNICEF was not of serious interest to journalists in the country until 1998, when it started to publicly comment on the recruitment of child soldiers in the country's ongoing civil war. The issue achieved prominence during the weeks after the tsunami, amid growing concerns about the fate of separated children.

In the two years prior to the tsunami, the UNICEF country office had elevated the prominence of the issue in UNICEF's country programme, and UNICEF had an ongoing role in the larger dynamic of the country's war monitoring the recruitment of child soldiers by the LTTE. Starting in late 2003, UNICEF started to regularly place the issue before the media and provide reliable figures on child soldier recruitment as part of the country's ongoing peace process.

As a result, UNICEF had been criticized both by government media and the LTTE, but the organization's presence and stature in the national debate on the subject was a vital part of the reporting on the war in the national media. The former representative, who was quite vocal on the subject of child soldiers while in Sri Lanka, noted that there were times when the media were so focused on the issue of child soldiers that it made it difficult for the organization to focus media attention on other message such as the importance of rehabilitating the educational system after the tsunami.

The issue became a significant part of UNICEF's response to the tsunami. The country office had concerns that the LTTE had recruited tsunami children into their armed forces.

Some staff wanted to use the tsunami aid as leverage with the LTTE, and hoped that donors would put conditions on tsunami aid that would penalize child recruitment (something which did not happen).

In a 14 January situation report, the country office noted that “UNICEF is currently assessing cases of child recruitment by the LTTE reported by the Zone Offices. A letter will be sent to the LTTE on this issue in the next few days giving details of all reported cases of underage recruitment. There have been 14 reported cases of underage recruitment in the first 10 days of January, seven of which have been verified.”

In the days following, the issue of child recruitment by the LTTE was covered in the national media. On February 4, the international media reported that the LTTE had released 23 of a reported 40 abducted children. One of SCF-UK’s child protection staff noted that event had the positive effect of lowering the numbers of recruits in the months immediately following, but by the middle of the year the numbers were rising again. As Echo Research notes in its findings, “communications were especially successful in raising awareness of trafficking syndicates operating in Indonesia and alleged abductions by the LTTE in Sri Lanka.”

The LTTE have a sophisticated, global public relations machine networked into Tamil groups around the world. They want international legitimacy, so there is some sensitivity to the value of releasing child soldiers, particularly those who are underage. UNICEF zonal offices in Tamil territory monitor the recruitment of children with its partner SCF and lobby for their release. Sometimes UNICEF puts out press releases condemning recruitment of child soldiers, and sometimes it works and they are released. At other times it backfires and they get frozen out of a dialogue with the LTTE. UNICEF issues regular bulletins on recruitment, and their press statements are taken seriously in both local and international media.

By the middle of the year, some Sri Lankan journalists who covered the story of child soldiers were beginning to worry about recruitment of children in the transitional living camps in rebel areas. This is one ongoing issue that played a role in the larger dynamic of tsunami relief and will continue to be an issue that attracts fluctuating coverage from national media in the future

Part Four

The Impact of UNICEF's Media Campaigns

Overall, the consensus is that UNICEF's communications effort – which crystallized in the form of the major media messages – *supported* existing policy efforts rather than *directed* them. But the huge volume of media coverage also exerted pressure on *all* who were involved in response to the tsunami to act – whether government officials in the countries affected, aid agency staff, rebel leaders, or individuals in faraway countries who were watching the calamity on their televisions. One senior UNICEF official in New York likened the media coverage during the days after the tsunami to “a huge siren that no one could avoid,” obligating everyone to get involved in a positive way.

Among those in country offices, there was a common perception that the effect of the media outreach could not be isolated from the rest of the organizational effort. One of the communications officers who worked in Colombo concluded that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to identify tangible and specific links between media messages and subsequent government or aid agency reaction. The connection is more complex and nuanced. Effective advocacy is the result of parallel efforts by the representative, the programme staff and the communications staff. They are at their most effective when they are all sending out the same messages but tailoring them to their respective audiences – be they government ministers, technical counterparts in the ministries, or journalists

The following are the main points raised by those who were interviewed.

- **The huge volume of media coverage in the first two weeks created the need for a response that was commensurate with the attention that UNICEF received. Given its high visibility, UNICEF was under considerable pressure to respond. It also gave UNICEF an identity and a role,** which allowed the organization to keep the media focus on children even though there were a lot of other important issues that attracted media attention (such as infrastructural and economic needs).
- **The high visibility and media exposure gave the organization more credibility, and therefore more leverage in its varied dealings with counterparts in government, among other agencies and among donors.** One

senior education officer in Jakarta noted that the prominence of the media effort aided him in his talks with government, and the UNICEF regional representative in Bangkok noted that the tsunami experience has made it easier now to talk about problems of poverty and inequity in the region.

- **The high volume of media exposure enabled UNICEF to raise an enormous amount of money**, which in turn gave it credibility and great leverage because it could afford to provide financial support to its advocacy positions. The head of the emergency section at UNICEF in New York noted several months after the tsunami that the huge amount of funding generated by the media coverage allowed the organization the freedom to develop emergency programmes that it was confident it could pay for.
- **The media campaign put pressure on the rest of the organization to back up its advocacy with fast-track delivery of supplies and the development of programmes that were consistent with its mandate and responsive to the most urgent needs.** This was seen as essential to any successful relief operation, but there were those among the UNICEF staff who worried that some of the organization's operational and administrative difficulties would compromise the credibility that it gained through its media visibility.
- **The experience re-energized UNICEF, pulled staff together, and reminded everyone of the organizational mandate.** Several staff members who were interviewed at headquarters in New York commented on the huge turnout of staff for the daily conference calls. It came at a time, as one New York communications staff member pointed out, when the executive director was about to leave, morale was not good, and many saw an uncertain future.
- **The experience demonstrated, perhaps in a way that had never been so prominent before, the importance of early reporting to the media in the first 72 hours.** This had been emphasized several times in previous years by emergency communications staff, but during the tsunami it was demonstrated clearly for all in the organization to see.
- **The media set up a checks and balances system, both internationally and nationally.** National media – in Sri Lanka, for example – kept tabs on aid agencies and publicized it when they were not moving quickly enough or fulfilling promises. While there were often more complicated reasons why aid agencies were not able to deliver – having to do with everything from local politics, bureaucratic regulations, internal staffing or operational problems – it did nonetheless set up some system of accountability.
- **The enormous and constant media coverage spurred a revival of philanthropic giving** in the United States and Japan, and helped enhance an ongoing spirit of philanthropic giving in Europe. UNICEF was one of the primary beneficiaries.

- **The huge media coverage also created a new base of individual and corporate donors for UNICEF and other international relief agencies.** Huge amounts of money can now be made available within the first few days after a major emergency through online donations, something which UNICEF is now prepared to handle because of its experience during the tsunami. While the money is still subject to various bureaucratic procedures and may still take a long time to reach beneficiaries, the dynamic of fundraising has been decisively changed by the tsunami experience – and it has changed as a result of the powerful relationship between media coverage and individual donors.
- **UNICEF’s international communications effort did not include enough attention to the efforts of local citizens to respond to the tsunami, part of a broader and all too common tendency for international aid workers to interact more with each other than with the nationals of the country in which they are working.** But in both countries, citizens and local institutions were in most cases the first responders. They were the ones who made the big difference to most people *within the first 72 hours*. But their stories were for the most part either overshadowed by or ignored in the larger rush to mobilize international attention and aid.

Part Five

The Legacy of the Tsunami—the Fading Story

Well into the second half of 2005, there were those in both countries who worried that other issues were crowding the tsunami story out of public awareness at the very time that the countries needed to continue paying attention to the fate of those who continued to suffer the consequences of the tsunami. Many still lived in camps for the displaced, no major studies had been done on the fate of the separated children, the rebuilding of homes and schools was proceeding much more slowly than originally anticipated, and complicated inheritance and land issues threatened to perpetuate the crisis for many families for months if not years to come.

UNICEF's 'build back better' message was the organization's attempt to focus international attention on the long term, but it was not one that achieved much prominence. "The limited visibility for UNICEF's 'building back better' message, urging for better reconstruction and ongoing development in the region," noted *Echo Research*, "underlined UNICEF's limited position in the media debate on these key policy issue. This was an arena where UNICEF could have exerted a stronger presence as media interest in the Tsunami began to ease."

Some eight months after the tsunami, some national journalists suggested that it was the right time for an organization with the credibility of UNICEF to step forward and be more proactive in the national media on the aftermath to the tsunami story.

While agency staff were preparing for what they expect to be a serious annual review of the tsunami relief operation by the international media, there is also a continuing conversation that needs to take place in the national media on the new realities spawned by the tsunami.

Part Six

Lessons Learned

Major Factors Responsible for a Successful Media Campaign

The UNICEF response to the Indian Ocean tsunami provides an unusual opportunity to observe how a successful UNICEF media campaign works. Following are some lessons from the tsunami experience that can be applied to any UNICEF media campaigns.

1. The UNICEF media campaign during the aftermath to the tsunami was effective because all levels of the organization’s global communications system worked together. Various organizational spokespeople reinforced the basic organizational messages repeatedly in the four to six weeks after the tsunami. They included not just communications staff but senior management and division heads at global, regional and country levels.

2. Generic global messages provided a universal context and organizational parameters for the more nuanced and changing sub-messages developed by communications and country programme staff. The global messages told the world what UNICEF stood for, and allowed the organization major influence in establishing relief priorities in what was a very competitive environment for relief agencies. The sub-messages were what made UNICEF credible to journalists who were looking for the unique details of developments on the ground. Both types of messaging reinforced each other, and between them were responsible for UNICEF’s credibility as a voice in the media.

3. The main messages were simple, clear, and to the point – and there were a small number of them. The messages offered broad points that were easy to comprehend, and for the most part avoided complicated numbers and lengthy explanations full of technical language. “One third of the victims were children” is much easier for most people to grasp than large and constantly changing numbers – and potentially more meaningful.

4. Key staff were accessible to the media, and responded willingly to media inquiries. A number of journalists noted that UNICEF seemed to know what was going on and had a plan to respond, a perception that was largely the result of such accessibility. One journalist noted that one of the most important factors in UNICEF’s media appeal was that their leading spokespeople spoke with apparent passion about the situation.

5. Interaction with both international and national media was most effective when an international communications officer was paired with a national officer. The observation was highlighted by one of the national communications officers who worked

with an international counterpart in the first weeks in Aceh. The pairing allowed for a full information exchange between those who are most conversant with what is happening internationally (international journalists and international staff) and those who know the most about what is happening nationally and locally.

6. UNICEF exercised its role as an authority on and spokesperson for children rather than attempted to promote the organization. Details about what UNICEF was doing were available in press releases and situation reports, but the spokespeople who interacted with the media tended to address the broader concerns of those affected by the tsunami. In some cases the organization addressed concerns that were also relevant to the broader society – such as the need for clean water or rehabilitated schools.

7. The main media messages served as a bridge between existing corporate emergency commitments and realities on the ground. This meant that what UNICEF was telling the world about the disaster and the problems that it was identifying were things that the organization was prepared to address.

8. Media messages were at their most effective when spokespeople were honest and relied upon what they knew. When asked to comment on the performance of the communications staff during the tsunami, the former Executive Director described them as ‘realistic.’ In a small minority of cases – most notably some of the speculation that child trafficking of tsunami children was actually occurring when in truth no one really knew – speculation damaged the credibility of the organization in the eyes of some journalists.

9. When UNICEF communications messages got out in front of the actual relief effort – as they did after the tsunami – they had the potential to motivate the organization and set up an accountability system. That happened to a meaningful extent during the days after the tsunami. But there is always the risk of generating expectations that the organization cannot live up to, a fear that was shared by a number of UNICEF staff at the time.

10. During the aftermath to the tsunami, it was possible to see how the total organization functioned at its best on a global level. The high level of media exposure led to a high level of donor funding, which provided the financial means to exercise leverage for programmes at regional and national levels with governments and other agencies. That dynamic provides the organization with the *opportunity* to be an effective relief organization. Whether it succeeds in being so is another matter.

Appendix 1

List of Interviewees

The majority of interviews took place during the month of August and the first half of September. A few people who played significant roles in the tsunami emergency operation were not available at the time for interviews.

UNICEF

New York Headquarters

Ian Thorpe
Alfred Ironside
Yin Yin Nwe
Dan Toole
Afshan Khan
Lucia Elmi
Sharad Sapra
Steve Cassidy
Tanya Accone
Joe Judd
Ellen Tolmie
Rita Wallace
Gordon Weiss
Alan Court
Jehane Sedky Lavandero
Marixie Mercado
Claudia Hudspeth
Lisa Szarkowski (U.S. Fund)
Marissa Buckanoff (U.S. Fund)

Geneva

Damien Personnaz
Per Stenbeck

Bangkok

Anupama Rao Singh
Richard Bridle
Madeline Eisner
Tani Ruiz
Shantha Bloeman

Sri Lanka

Ted Chaiban
Yasmin Ali Haque
Joanna Van Gerpen
Padmini Ranawera
Viktor Nylund
Aberra Bekele
Surani Abeyesekera
Leanne Mitchell
Phillipe Barragne-Bigot
I.A. Hameed (Galle)
Asadur Rahman (Galle)
Geoffrey Keele

Indonesia

John Budd
Anton Susanto
Gianfranco Rotigliano
Birgithe Lund-Henriksen
Amanda Melville
Erik Bentzen
David Hipgrave
Ahmer Akhtar
Stephen Woodhouse
Kendartanti Subroto
Frederic Sizaret
Lely Djuhari
Mervyn Fletcher
Edouard Beigbeder
Anna Stechert

Kathmandu

Martin Dawes

Kuala Lumpur

Indra Nadchatram

Delhi

Savita Varde-Naqvi

Vermont

Carol Bellamy

Government, NGO and Media Partners

Indonesia (Jakarta and Aceh)

Agnes Aristiarini (media)
Claudius Boekan (media)
Don Bosco Selamun (media)
Arief Suditomo (media)
Mike Casey (media)
Riyadi Suparno (media)
A'an Suryana (media)
Yon Thayrun (media)

Makmur Sunusi (child welfare)
Budi Atmadi Adiputro (disaster relief)
Sugeng Triutomo (disaster relief)

Eldy Iswani (Dian Desa)
Nasir Djufri (Dian Desa)
Teuku Novizal Aiyub (Tirta Mountala)
Deni Purba (Pusaka Indonesia)
A. Besar (water and sanitation)

Samdsudin Berlian (OCHA)
Katrín Paok (OCHA)
Shree Bhakta Basnet (UNDP)
Imogen Wall (UNDP)
Kevin Byrne (SCF)

Sri Lanka

Amal Jayasinghe (media)
Naimi Wijedasa (media)
Anthony David (media)
Faizal Smith (media)
Dumeetha Luthra (media)

Hiranthá Wijemanna (child protection)
Dias Amarasinghe (education)
Nihal Abeysinghe (health)
Renuka Jayatissa (health)
Chandani Senadheera (psychology)
Priyani Senadheera (health)

Maleec Calyaneratne (SCF)
Julian Chellappah (SCF)
Priyantha Kulatunga (IOM)
Magi Saldin (Christian Children's Fund)
Katherine Messner (One World Foundation)

Appendix Two **Terms of Reference**

Proposed Evaluation:

The Impact of UNICEF's Tsunami Communication on Government Policies and Country Programmes (Joint concept from EAPRO, ROSA, DOC and GRO)

Background

The Asian Tsunami was a natural disaster which caused unparalleled devastation, but also attracted unprecedented media attention and outpouring of generosity.

During the first two to four weeks of the tsunami relief effort, UNICEF was notably prominent in global media coverage. UNICEF messaging on such topics as the number of children killed, the priorities for children who survived, and protecting children from exploitation seemed to drive the global media agenda.

The purpose of this study is to assess what impact this communication prominence had on government policies and UNICEF's country programmes in the tsunami zone, and to draw lessons learned with a view to improving the future use of communication, in support of UNICEF programming and advocacy.

Although this was a unique event, research to better understand the relationship between UNICEF's communication work and movement on the programme and policy side, the organization can more effectively use communication to support programme objectives in the future.

The study would primarily look at the impact of UNICEF's communication work in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Key Questions

Broader Questions to Address:

- Were we better able to influence and persuade and gain greater cooperation from our local and national counterparts as a result of communication and messaging?
- What specific issues and messaging raised in the media influenced the local governments, the national government, UNICEF's development partners including donor agencies and NGOs, and what were the dynamics?
- How does advocacy and communication work hand in hand, and how did it help support, shape and advance the progress of vital UNICEF programmes?

Specific Questions to Address (see below):

The evaluation will look at a series of major communication messages that acted as markers during the first weeks of the tsunami coverage (listed below). The evaluation will draw on specific questions such as: how well we were able to communicate and raise awareness about such issues? Did the use of communication channels and outreach help our offices in enlisting government, NGO support and making them more attentive to issues of children and our corporate commitments? What were the specific strategy components that gave this synergy greater impetus?

Major communication messages that will form the core of the evaluation are the following:

- One-third of all victims of the tsunami were children
- Hundreds of schools damaged, Getting children back to school quickly is critical
- Biggest threat now is standing water (waterborne diseases)
- Tsunami children are vulnerable to trafficking & exploitation
- Children must be reunited with their families
- Tsunami generation (keeping children alive, caring for separated children, ensuring children protected from exploitation, getting children back to school)
- Building back better (need for ongoing reconstruction and long-term development)

Proposed elements of the evaluation:

- A timeline of UNICEF's major communication outputs during the 6 months following the Tsunami but with emphasis on the initial 6 weeks.
- A review of progress in UNICEF's programmes and advocacy on the issues related to the key messages outlined above, and the linkages with the national and local policy environment.
- An analysis of how media messaging and specific programme actions and advocacy were decided upon, and the degree to which they created synergies.
 - How well we were able to communicate and raise awareness about programme and policy issues and about the situation of children and women?
 - What specific issues and messaging raised in the local/international media influenced the local governments, the national government, and UNICEF's development partners including donor agencies and NGOs? How were they influenced in terms of policy setting and action, and what were the dynamics?
 - Did the use of communication channels and outreach help our offices in enlisting government, NGO and other stakeholders' support and making them more attentive to issues of children and our corporate commitments?
 - What were the specific strategy components that gave this synergy greater impetus?

- A discussion of the media environment in this particular case and an analysis of the degree to which the lessons it taught us can be duplicated in other instances.
 - What was the role the international media/local media played in influencing policy in affected countries?

- A summary of observations and attitudes among UNICEF staff and key partners, including governments, NGOs and media, with regards to UNICEF's prominence in the media, and the level of influence this had on their advocacy and actions.
 - Were we better able to influence and persuade and gain greater cooperation from our local and national counterparts as a result of communication and messaging?
 - What made UNICEF a prominent voice? What was done well? What could have been done better? What was the impact on partners on the ground? Was there any negative impact?
 - Was the large interest generated with private donors, celebrities and corporations a factor in helping UNICEF advocate with governments?

- Conclusions, including the identification of lessons learned and possible communication strategies to pursue in the future in support of programme and policy objectives.
 - How does advocacy and communication work hand in hand, and how did it help support, shape and advance the progress of vital UNICEF programmes?

Proposed work activities:

Gather and analyze documentation

- In-depth look at UNICEF messaging and outputs (including print, video, multi-media etc.). What was put out? From where? Who were the audiences? What did it achieve? Were there any opportunities missed?
- Professional analysis of news clips related to UNICEF and tsunami and other media output.
- Research in detail the in-country policy debates and actions relating to UNICEF's key messages.

Document experiences from key on-the-ground players

- Consultant to work with UNICEF to develop questionnaire and identify key informants.
- Consultant to travel to main affected countries (Indonesia and Sri Lanka) to conduct key-informant interviews of UNICEF staff, selected media, government, bilateral and multilateral and NGO counterparts.

Analyze findings

- Based on field visits and documentation, analyze linkages between UNICEF communication outputs and the actions of UNICEF, government and other counterparts.

Identify communication strategies that worked and those that were counterproductive in terms of advocacy and promoting specific UNICEF goals.

- Identify specific examples of UNICEF messaging influencing debate and leading to policy/legislative changes or action.
- Identify and distinguish between the shorter-term and longer-term impact of the communication work.

Some issues to focus on:

- The role the international media played in influencing policy in affected countries, through influencing national media, NGOs, or gov't institutions.
- How should findings inform/broaden UNICEF's communication strategy and programmatic response?
- Was the large interest generated with private donors, celebrities and corporations a factor in helping UNICEF advocate with governments.

Present findings

- Present conclusions to UNICEF core group
- Incorporate changes/UNICEF feedback

Write report

- Compile report on the role that communications played with key recommendations on effective communication strategies that can serve as a blueprint for influencing policies/debates/advocacy and that can enhance programme delivery in the future.

UNICEF follow-up

- Distribute report.
- Implement recommendations and monitor implementation.

Profile of consultant

Experienced evaluator/researcher (especially in questionnaire design and interviewing).
Knowledge of UNICEF/UN humanitarian development work.
Knowledge of communication theory and practice an asset.

Time frame: *4 Months, beginning July 2005, completed by beginning November 2005.*