

“Where’s My House”?

Improving communication with beneficiaries: an analysis of information flow to tsunami affected populations in Aceh Province

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Executive Summary	Page 2
Key Findings	Page 4
Methodology	Page 6
Current access to information: Radio	Page 7
Current access to information: TV	Page 8
Current access to information: newspapers	Page 10
Current access to information: bulletin boards	Page 11
Using performance in the arts	Page 12
Women and Children	Page 12

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Improving communication with beneficiary populations: an analysis of information flow to tsunami affected populations in Aceh Province

Executive Summary

Key findings:

1/ The need to improve information flow to individual communities

2/ How, When and Where: the demand for practical information

3/ Keeping it simple: why low tech is best

4/ The difficulties of reaching women

This report and the survey which it analyses were developed as an answer to concerns expressed by those working with tsunami affected populations that nothing was known about how communities were accessing information, the effectiveness of the channels available and the extent to which they were actually being used by those working in tsunami relief. The PI group designed a simple qualitative survey which could be taken out into the field on site visits and completed in the course of normal work duties. A total of 82 communities across 12 districts in Aceh were surveyed. This report is the result of that research.

The central lessons of the survey are clear. Firstly, it confirms what was already known: that there is a serious lack of information about reconstruction flowing to affected communities which is having a material impact on their ability to recover from the tsunami. Just 7% of respondents said they felt ‘very informed’ and only 15% said the amount of information they received was ‘sufficient’. Researchers encountered people who did not understand why their Cash for Work projects were ending, who they could talk to about housing or even what BRR was or what it did. Communities themselves recognize that they are seriously incapacitated by such ignorance. To quote one Kepala Desa in Pidie, “We do not receive even five percent of the information we need.” It is equally clear from this research that the information communities are asking for is simple and practical. While there is a huge appetite for general news, most are asking for information about what is being done to help them and how they can access that assistance.

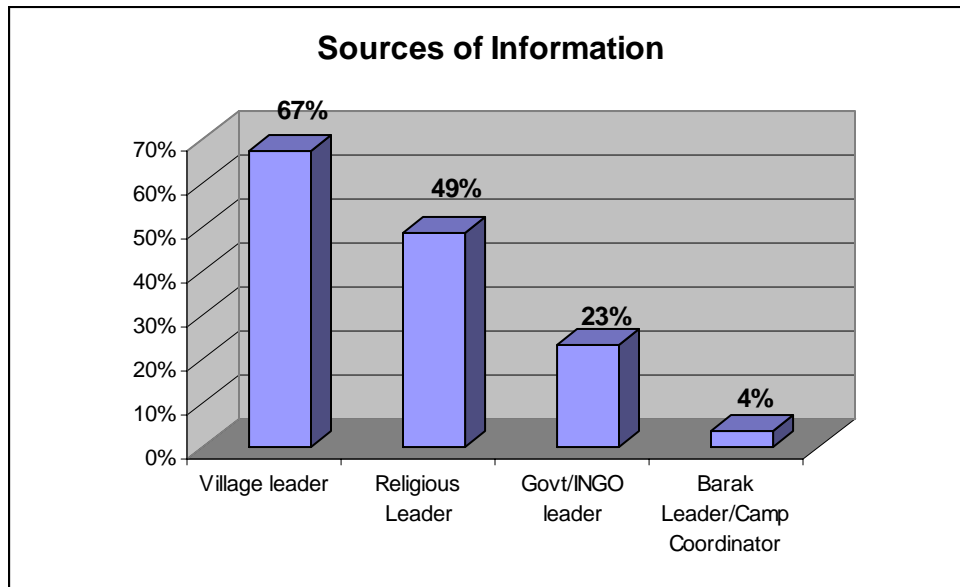
On the positive side, though, another finding of this research is that improving information flow is not necessarily a complex or expensive process. The analysis of the major information channels: TV, radio, bulletin boards and newspapers shows that channels for information flow exist and are being used wherever possible by the community. The fact that 68% of communities have installed their own bulletin boards demonstrates clearly not just the desire for information, but the existence of a cheap, effective, low-tech and above all community led information network that can be easily utilized by everyone. The extensive and popular local radio network provides opportunities for interactive outreach, and there is also the currently hugely underutilized resource of theatre groups, comedians and other performance artists.

Overall, it is clear that there has not been enough of a systematic effort by those working in tsunami relief to keep communities abreast of what is available to them and this lack of information is having a huge impact on their ability to make the right choices about their future. People who do not know how to register for jobs or who to ask about housing or land loss compensation are not in a position to best utilize the services available to them, or to understand the full range of options when making decisions about, for example, whether to move home or stay in a barracks.

This research and this paper are intended to be part of the solution to these problems. The data is presented here as a practical analysis of existing channels for information flow: radio, bulletin boards, TV, newspapers and performance. It explains how these various forms of media are consumed and how best to utilize them in terms of public outreach. Although this a far from comprehensive survey, and more research is needed, the PI Working Group is confident that it illustrates an accurate overview of the current situation, and the main trends in information flow.

Key Findings

1/ The need to improve information flow

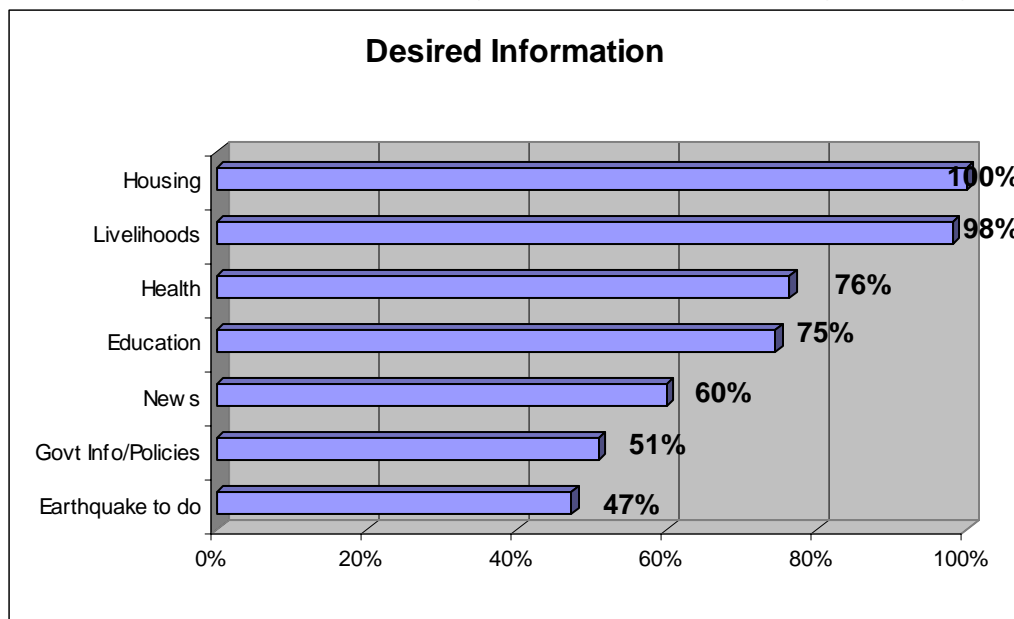


The level of ignorance about basic elements of the tsunami relief effort encountered is a particularly striking finding of this research. Another is the level of responsibility imposed by communities themselves on those working in tsunami relief to provide information. 23% of communities named NGOs and local government directly as the figure or organization to which they turn when they have questions. Another 67% unsurprisingly said they went to their Kepala Desa, but it was clear from conversations researchers had with village heads that they in turn tended to go first to NGOs or to local government figures involved with tsunami relief with any questions raised by their community. There is therefore no doubt that tsunami affected populations are not only in need of improved information, but are looking directly to those working in tsunami relief to provide it. Given the number of people who regard their local imam or religious leader as their primary source of information, it is also clear that a much better understanding of the role of religion in information is needed.

2. How, When and Where: the demand for practical information

While respondents also wanted news and entertainment – life in camps and barracks in particular is very dull – the demand is clearly for more practical information. When offered a number of topics on which information could be provided, from health housing to earthquake preparedness, and asked to rank them according to priority, 100% of respondents who answered the question said that above all, they needed more information about housing. In second place, 98% of respondents asked for information about livelihoods. As many projects in

these areas are already underway, this implies that much more work needs to be done to build outreach into projects from the very start. In particular, it is becoming clear that community consultations, while extremely helpful, are not enough as a method of keeping communities informed. It is very easy for misunderstandings to occur when exchanges are purely verbal, especially when one party is an international working through a translator. Instances of communities feeling they have been made promises that have not been fulfilled – whether or not the NGOs working with them consider that they have even made such promises – abound. This expectation gap is leading to disappointment, resentment and disillusionment, a dangerous situation for all. While not the complete answer, increased communication with communities, especially being honest about timeframes and ensuring that any problems or delays are properly explained to beneficiaries, can go a long way towards alleviating both the sense of disappointment and the stress generated by not knowing what is going on.



3: Keeping It Simple: why low tech is best

In terms of how organizations go about improving their outreach, the PI survey holds some key lessons. One is that penetration by mass media, particularly television, is low (TV ownership runs at 3% which, even allowing for the fact that many sets are watched communally, is very low). Mass media is in any case unsuitable for the very localized information that people are demanding - much more appropriate are community-based channels, such as bulletin boards. Projects such as proposals to connect the entire province to a wireless internet provider are interesting, but are obviously going to take far too long to implement to be able to impact on the current information gap. Rather than developing new, complex channels of information, the emphasis needs to be on understanding and using the channels already available. Many organizations, for example, seem to be making the assumption that as a developing country, Indonesia has

low literacy rates. In fact, the opposite is true. Not only are literacy rates extremely high, but there is little differential between men and women at over 90% for both genders. It is also clear that the dearth of information provided means that communities will read carefully every word of anything provided to them. Again, although well produced newsletters are an option, something simple like an A4 word document on a bulletin board can be just as effective and is also a lot quicker and easier to produce.

4/The difficulties of reaching women

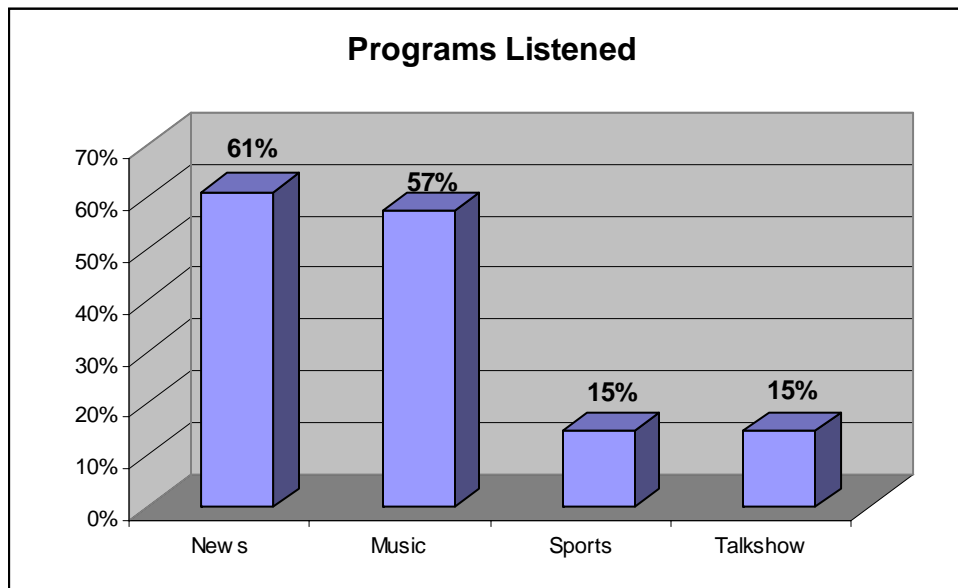
This is a difficult aspect to quantify, but it is clear from the research that media consumption in Aceh is male dominated and information supply to women presents a particularly difficult problem. 43% of respondents said that men would veto women when choosing which programme to watch or listen to, and many communal copies of newspapers were found to be in coffee shops, which have an almost exclusively male clientele. Women often rely on men for information, particularly their husbands, who will simply not pass on what they don't consider relevant. Effective strategies for reaching women urgently need to be improved, especially for information regarding childcare, sanitation and education. Equally, all outreach should consider that most public information is just as relevant to women as to men, but may not be getting through if only mass media is used.

Methodology

Each questionnaire was designed to cover a single community, and was completed wherever possible on the basis of a group discussion with the community in question. Efforts were made to reach host communities and early return centres as well as barracks and spontaneous camps. Some international PIs worked through a translator, others used local staff and Bahasa translations of the questionnaire. The questions were largely designed to be qualitative: they allowed for multiple answers ("which radio stations can you pick up", for example) and in some cases were open ended.

As no one in the group is a qualified statistician, no claims are made for the scientific validity of these results. The aim was always to produce a qualitative study. What were sought were general indicators as to the movement of information: the pros and cons of the mediums available as channels for public information messages, the ways in which information was transferred within communities, how communities themselves felt about the information available to them – or lack of it – and perhaps most importantly, what those working in tsunami relief could do to improve the situation. 82 communities across 12 districts of the province were covered; the majority of communities surveyed were in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar and these results are consequently heavily weighted toward these areas. Nias and Simeulue were unfortunately not reached.

Current Access to Information: Radios



Prior to the tsunami, radios were the least popular mass market medium in Aceh. Only 23% of respondents said they used to rely on radio, compared to 74% for TV and 37% for newspapers. Today that picture is very different. The destruction of the infrastructure needed for television in the tsunami (electricity, satellite dishes the TV sets themselves) and the plethora of local radio stations means that many have turned to radio. Partly due to the very localized nature of the NGO radio distributions that have taken place, radio ownership in tsunami affected communities varies hugely from none (mostly outside Banda Aceh) to over three quarters of residents (76.9%), although there are plans for a more comprehensive distribution in early September by UNDP. On average, nearly one in ten people (9.2%) own a radio and many listen for several hours a day. Most radios are owned by individuals (63%) and are listened to in private houses/tents/rooms with the rest being communal. The biggest audience is in the evening (66% said they listen at this time), followed by the morning (52%) – i.e. during time at home and not at work. It is important to note that the main audience for radio broadcasts is men, and it certainly appears to be men who make the choice as to what station is selected.

When people listen, they tend to choose their local station. Stations that scored highly in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar were local broadcasters Baiturrahman (60%) and Prima (42%). In Meulaboh, the most popular were local stations Dalka FM and Matahari were named by 45% and 40% respectively, making Dalka the top station in Meulaboh. The only province-wide station, state-owned broadcaster RRI, picked up its biggest audience among those in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar (it was mentioned by 72% of respondents) but in Meulaboh was mentioned by just 9%. There is a clear gap in Calang and Aceh Jaya, which has no radio station at all at present.

To get something on air, the best method is usually to approach the local station directly and ask them to host a programme or develop an outreach strategy for a given project: they are open to ideas and usually happy to prepare a programme or public information spots or host a talkshow for a fee. Talkshows in particular are an excellent way of providing an interactive service as the listening audience can be invited to call in and put their questions directly to representatives of organizations. The picture in terms of audience response to talkshows, however is mixed – only 15% of those surveyed said they specifically would tune in to listen. Against this, however, is the anecdotal experience of organizations that have sponsored talkshows who report an excellent response from the audience in terms of numbers of people calling in with questions. The quality of response in these cases was directly linked to the calibre of the person available for questions: government officials, for example, will be deluged. More creative ways of presenting information, especially those involving music, are certainly worth consideration.

Paying for airtime or media services is also an excellent way to inject money back into local media services: aside from RRI radio stations here are commercial operations and are consequently struggling as the impact of the tsunami on local business has meant there is little demand for the advertising space they used to sell. Radio Dalka, for example, reports that payment for NGO programming is at present providing enough funding to cover all their daily operational costs and thus is effectively keeping them on air.

Current Access to Information: TV

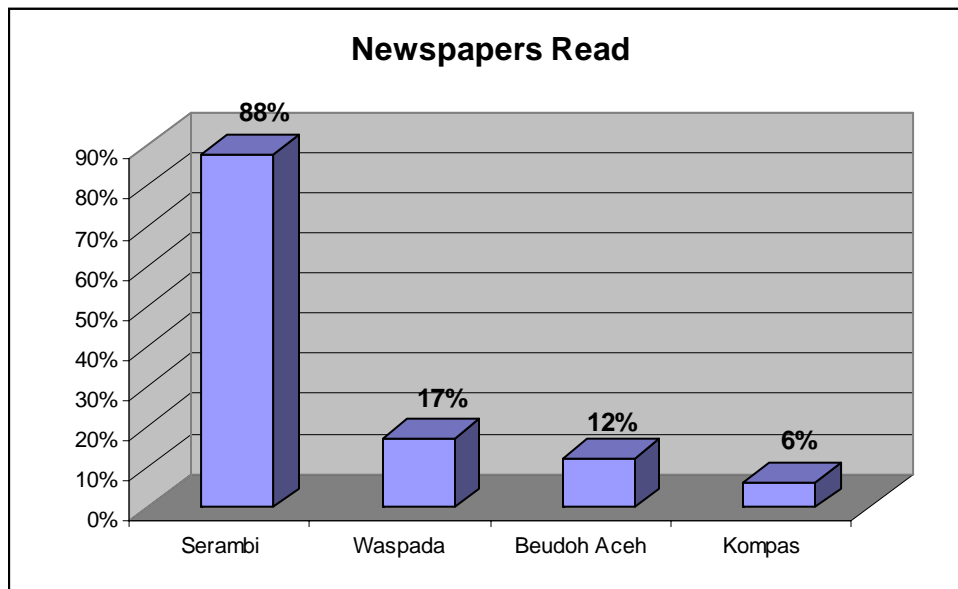
It is clear that prior to the tsunami, TV was by far the most popular medium in Aceh, with 74% of respondents naming TV as their main source of information before the tsunami. The complex infrastructure required for television, however, suffered badly in the disaster, as electricity supplies, TV sets themselves and satellite receivers were destroyed. TV ownership among tsunami affected populations is now just 3%. However, this does not mean that TV should be discounted. A large percentage of TVs are owned by the community – 43% of viewing takes place in communal areas. When visiting communities, PI officers reported several cases where communities themselves had collected the necessary funds – around two million rupiah – to buy a community television. Anecdotal evidence talking to IDPs also suggest that the purchase of a TV is regarded as a priority by many, and that a set is one of the first things bought if there is spare money. This says much about the value that communities place on having television.

In terms of what people watch, the picture is not clear. As with radios, most said they watch for news (62%) closely followed by entertainment (50%). Drama series were also popular (44%) – again illustrating that sources of entertainment

are highly valued in IDP communities, and thus the psychosocial role that media has to play. The most popular station is the state-owned national station TVRI (mentioned by 56%), a close second is Jakarta-based Metro (55%) and SCTV (43%). RCTI also picks up a reasonable audience (34%) and 6.9% say they have access to international stations. This ranking of preference is fairly consistent across the province.

For public information purposes, TV presents something of a dilemma. On the one hand, it is very popular, especially among children who like watching cartoons and are hard to reach through other forms of mass media. It also seems clear that the importance of TV is only going to grow as returning communities invest in television sets, and that it has an important psychosocial role in providing entertainment. On the other hand, it is difficult to utilize for PI purposes. All stations bar one are exclusively national, which makes them unsuitable for Aceh-specific PI materials. The one local station, the Aceh branch of TVRI, could potentially be used for messages that need to be distributed across the province (its remit) but at present its capacity is very limited (their studio was destroyed by the tsunami) and they are only on air between 3.30pm and 5pm, a time when only 24% of respondents said they were watching any TV at all, let alone TVRI. As with radio, by far the most popular time is in the evening (72%). Any PI campaign that utilizes TVRI or any other TV services, therefore, should probably do so only as part of a much wider campaign (e.g. earthquake response, vaccination project) which will also utilize other forms of media and will thus use TV to reinforce existing messages. Relying solely on TV as an outreach medium is unlikely to be successful.

Current Access to Information: Newspapers



Although Acehese culture is primarily visual (hence the popularity of TV), this is actually a province with extremely high literacy rates among both men and women (over 90% in both cases) and newspapers play a key role in information dissemination. The dearth of information is also a factor – in the words of one Kepala Desa, “we read every word because there is nothing else to do.” The most important by far is Serambi, named by 88% of those who said they read newspapers. Serambi has been publishing in Aceh for many years, and even though its printing facilities and office were destroyed on December 26th they began publishing again a matter of weeks after the tsunami. Second in importance, but far behind Serambi on 17%, is the Medan-based daily Waspada.

As with all newspapers, the main issues with Serambi revolve around distribution. The printing facilities have not been restored in Banda Aceh so they print in Lhoksemawe and truck the finished copies from there. The distribution network along the Eastern coastline of Sumatra is consequently excellent and the paper reaches Aceh in time for morning distribution, but does not arrive in Meulaboh until the afternoon and difficulties with road transportation mean hardly any arrive in Calang. The dependence on a road network for distribution also means that penetration into rural areas can be weak. 90% of respondents to the PI survey did say that they had access as a community to newspapers, but that figure should be treated with caution as it probably also reflects the difficulties those conducting the survey also had in reaching remote areas. It is particularly important, therefore, for those considering publishing supplements in partnership with Serambi to plan to print extra copies and seek alternative distribution networks – i.e. with other relief commodities such as food – to ensure they reach the widest possible area.

Another common problem with newspapers is that because they need to be bought, their audience is self-selecting and often does not include the bottom strata of society – who are of course frequently those that public information needs to reach. It is significant that of the 90% who said they had access to a newspaper, only 49% said they bought the paper themselves. The rest read communally owned copies in coffee shops or are dependent on the free distribution of Serambi being organized and funded by, among others UNFPA. The differential between these figures illustrates how important both for tsunami affected communities and those seeking to help them that such distribution continues, as without it many who currently depend on it as their only source of information will be bereft.

As an outreach tool, Serambi is proving extremely effective. It is now widely used as a place to advertise jobs or requests for project proposals, and as the vehicle for the production of both the BRR and the World Bank newsletter to IDPs. Placing adverts or advertorials about aid work is now a common practice. But there are important drawbacks. One, as previously mentioned, if the free distribution stops too soon (i.e. before people both access an outlet to purchase it and afford the daily price) its usefulness will be drastically reduced. Another is that its audience is overwhelmingly male. It is men who tend to buy and read newspapers, and the typical location for communally owned papers – or the sharing of those purchased by some community members – is the local coffee shop, almost always a completely male dominated area.

Current Access to Information: bulletin boards

Bulletin boards are a classic low-tech, cost-effective solution to the problem of community information flow. They are easy to install, involve no overheads and are easy to access both for the community and those working in tsunami relief. They have, however, been seriously under-utilised in Aceh. Of those communities surveyed, 68% reported that they have a bulletin board, almost always put in place by the community involved – although agencies such as Oxfam and Mercy Corp have also installed boards in projects in which they work. These range from the ad-hoc dedication of a mosque wall or the side of a barrack as an area for posters and community notices, to purpose built wooden boards. The majority of users (64%) consider them useful, but complain that the information is infrequently updated. Some boards observed by PI officers in the field had hardly anything displayed, and that which was there was months out of date. The problem, therefore, lies not so much with the communities – who have provided the boards and thus expressed their desire for a community based information centre – but with the aid community, including the government, failing to utilize them. Given the strong indications from this research that improving the flow of information to individual communities is absolutely key, the current

neglect of this system is hard to understand. In addition to those boards already in communities, BRR will shortly launch a pilot project to distribute white and black boards in tsunami affected communities in Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar and Calang, which will enable both communities and those working with them to simply write messages – a simple way to update information on projects or announce a new service. If successful, these boards will be distributed across the province.

Using performance and the arts in information dissemination.

Acehnese culture is visual, and performances of all descriptions are particularly popular. When asked which were the most popular forms of traditional performance, approximately 43% of respondents said music. Dance came a close second, referenced by around 36% of those surveyed, and storytelling, poetry, plays and Islamic readings were also mentioned. The popularity of such forms of entertainment, already high, is exacerbated by the lack of entertainment in IDP camps and barracks, meaning that any such performances are extremely well received. Performances can be used to aid public outreach in many ways. The fact that a performance draws a community together in one place means that before or after, materials such as leaflets can be distributed. And of course messages can be built into stories and theatre. Despite there being a number of groups in Aceh who can provide these kind of services, there seems to be little or no exploitation of performance as a means of public information dissemination so far in Aceh.

Women and Children

The difficulties of supplying women with the information they need is one of the key issues identified by this survey. It is clear that mass media is largely consumed by men: the way newspapers are mostly shared in all-male coffee shop environments, and the previously quoted statistic that 43% of respondents said that men can and will veto the choice of material listened to on the radio or watched on the TV. If the hand on the remote or dial is male, then those looking to communicate with women need to consider other strategies. Relying on community networks is also not necessarily reliable: when PI officers working on this survey asked kepala desas about how women stayed informed, several responded by saying that women weren't interested in information, they only wanted to cook and look after children. It should not be assumed, therefore, that information passed to a kepala desa for distribution to a community necessarily reaches women. Women very often rely on their husbands for information, which again requires the husband to take such a responsibility seriously – unfortunately not always the case. Organisations working in this area therefore need to consider carefully how to improve information flow to women and look for new

and innovative ways to reach women directly through channels that cannot be controlled or blocked by men.

This chain of information transfer from kepala desa to men and then to women is also key to the question of communicating with children, since many children receive much of their information from their parents (52% of respondents referenced mothers as a source of information, a further 45% mentioned fathers). But children do also have other sources of information, ironically often far more than their mothers: school (52%) and friends (26%) were also referenced. In terms of mass media, 73% of respondents said children watched cartoons.