

ISSN:1995-1272

Vol.6, No. 2

Winter : 2012

FWU Journal of Social Sciences

Published Biannually



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Role of Community Radio FM-93 Hunza During the Attabad Lake Crisis

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The Attabad lake disaster took place on 4th January, 2010 in Northern Areas of Pakistan near China border when a massive landslide slid the Attabad village into the river Hunza. The debris blocked the water flow in the river and created a large barrier lake. The level of the water in the lake continued to increase at an alarming speed thus causing a great threat to the people of areas. There was a great need to establish communication links with the people of the area for rescue activities. To cope with the situation, Radio Pakistan set-up FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza radio station on emergency basis. The study was carried out to evaluate the role of the community radio station that it played during the crisis situation. Survey method was used to collect the data. The population consisted of all the sixty-five thousand people affected by the crisis while sample size was two hundred subjects. The results showed that 85% subjects agreed with the supportive role of the radio station while 15% did not agree. Therefore, it was concluded that the community radio FM-93 Hunza played an effective role in addressing the issue.

Keywords: massive, landslide, communication skills, community radio station

Community broadcasting is a non-profit service that is owned and managed by a particular community usually through a trust or foundation. Now-a-days the trend has changed and international development organizations such as UNESCO, external donors and national broadcasting organizations are also taking initiatives to launch community radio stations. The main function of the community radio stations is to promote and reflect local culture but its role become more crucial during the disaster situations (Fraser and Estrada, 2001).

A Community radio station works for providing information to a particular community and highlights their issues and paves ways for their solution. The radio station works on participatory basis and not for making profit (Ali, 2009).

On 4th January, 2010 a massive land slide followed by boulder and rocks slid the Attabad village into River Hunza in Northern Areas of Pakistan near China border. The trash of Attabad village also struck and buried another small village named Sarat. During the incident twenty people were killed and one hundred and forty-one houses were destroyed (Hunza Times, 2010).

The land sliding blocked the water flow in the River Hunza and created a large barrier lake. The water level continued to

increase in the lake at an alarming speed and spread up to twenty-three kilometers and the depth reached up to three hundred and seventy feet. There was a great danger of the outburst of the lake resulting in the submergence of the low lying areas. Forty thousand people of low lying thirty-four villages were at risk due to increasing water level and possible chances of the outburst of the lake. Twenty-five thousand population of Upper Hunza (Gojal) was cut-off from the rest of the country due to closure of Karakorum Highway linking Pakistan with China. During the entire situation there was a great need to evacuate the people and move them to some higher and stable areas (Express Tribune, 2010).

A number of research studies have been conducted in different countries of the world which reveal that Media organizations have a potential and power to play a significant role in disaster situations. The operations of the media organizations may vary from pre-disaster information role to post-disaster rehabilitation activities (Saqib Riaz, 2012).

The government and the humanitarian organization adopted comprehensive strategies for rescue, relief and rehabilitation of the affectees. The National Disaster Management Authority immediately dispatched teams that started work in the disaster-hit area (www.ndma.gov.pk).

There was also a great need to alert the people about the dam break scenario and what to do in case of emergency. The entire area was cut-off from rest of the world and the population almost had no access to any kind of media. Keeping in view the gravity of the situation and need for a

rapid source of information for the affectees Radio Pakistan launched FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza community Radio Station at the disaster affected area Karimabad when the lake breach threat was near to its peak.

The Community Radio station FM-93 Baltit Fort was the first ever radio station set up in Hunza. The station was located at an altitude of over nine thousand feet and was the highest broadcasting station in the country. The station was set up near Attabad Lake in a record time of one week on emergency basis. The programmes of the radio station were broadcast in three languages of the region including Shina, Brosheski and Wakhi besides national language Urdu. The transmitter of the radio station was of 2.5 kilowatt strength. The Community Radio Station FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza functioned for three months till 22nd August 2010 when the danger of the outbreak of the lake was over (PBC News, 2010).

The broadcast contents of the station almost covered all the sectors which were needed by the affectees including information about the shelter, food availability, missing people, hospital/medical services, loss of lives, activities of the rescue teams, updates about lake, educational activities, means of transportation, occupational activities, emotional relief, capacity building of the affectees and humanitarian organizations, international relief activates rehabilitation activities, livestock and agriculture and local and international response.

Statement of the Problem

The study investigated the role of community radio FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza in providing information about rescue, relief and rehabilitation activities during the crisis of Attabad Lake and explored whether and to what extent the affected people gratified their social and psychological needs about the crisis situation from the community Radio.

Objectives of the Study

In general, the objective of the study was to explore the role of community radio stations during the crisis situations.

In particular, the aim of the study was to explore the role of the community radio station FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza during the crisis situation of Attabad Lake.

Significance of the Study

The study provided information about the roles of community radio stations during the crisis situations. It also provided guidelines for the broadcasters and the stakeholders to bring the community radio broadcast at par with the real needs of the affectees of any kind of crisis situation.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory provides theoretical framework for the study. The Uses and Gratification approach involves a shift of focus from the purposes of the communicator to the purposes of the receiver. It attempts to determine what functions mass communication is serving for audience members (Severin and Tankard, 1961).

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) outlined the objectives of Uses and Gratification Theory as under:

- 1- To explain how people use media to gratify their needs.
- 2- To understand motives for media behaviour.
- 3- People can articulate their own motives to communicate.

Research Question

- Whether and to what extent the community radio FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza gratified the social and psychological needs of the affectees of Attabad Lake?
- Whether and to what extent Community Radio played its role in creating awareness about environmental issues among the affectees of Attabad Lake?

Method

Research Design

Survey Method was used to ascertain the role of community radio FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza that it played during the crisis of Attabad Lake.

Before the start of the survey a list of the affectees of the Attabad Lake who were declared IDPs was collected from the local administration of Hunza.

The IDPs were settled in two shelter homes in Hunza at Aliabad and Altit (Fakharuddin, 2011). Since these people represented all the affectees therefore, survey was carried out in these two shelter homes.

Population Size

The population of the survey consisted of all the affectees of the Attabad Lake including people living on the upstream and down stream of the lake and those directly affected by the land sliding. The population size was sixty-five thousand people (www.ndma.gov.pk).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The judgment sampling technique was used for collecting the sample for the study. The list of the affectees obtained from the district administration of Hunza was used as Sampling Frame. The researchers selected 200 people as sample size and it consisted of 50% male and 50 % female subjects. The respondents were selected very carefully among the residents of Shelter homes made for the affectees of the Lake. The judgment technique was used in the

selection of respondents in such a way that the results could be generalized for the whole population.

Research Instrument

Survey research is considered the best way to measure media effects on society. Many media researchers use this technique frequently to investigate the effects of media on society at large or some specific groups of the society including children and women. According to Kerlinger (2000) survey research involves the studying of large and small populations selecting and studying samples chosen from the populations to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of sociological and psychological variables. It is a method of obtaining information about a population from a sample of individuals. Surveys can provide a quick, inexpensive and accurate means of obtaining information from a large group of people. Questionnaire and interviews are considered best instrument for survey research.

In this study questionnaire and interviews were used as research instruments. The questionnaire was designed keeping in view the demands of the affectees and the role of the community radio for gathering the data. The same questionnaire was used for interview where needed. The questionnaire of the study consisted on a number of questions about the uses of Radio and its effectiveness during disaster situation. Normally these types of questions are included in the studies of this kind.

Table1
Results of Survey study regarding Role of Community Radio in Disaster Situation

Role of Community Radio FM-93 Hunza during Attabad Lake Crisis(%) (%)	Agreed	Disagreed
Information about shelter	89	11
Information about food availability	86	14
Information about missing people	86	14
Information about medical services	89	11
Information about safety measures	89	11
Information about loss of lives	89	11
Information about rescue activities	87	13
Updates about the lake	90	10
Information about educational activities	83	17
Information about the means of transportation	86	14
Broadcast for emotional relief	81	19
Information about environmental issues	84	16
Information about international relief activities	87	13
Information about rehabilitation activities	86	14
Information about livestock	67	33
Information about agriculture	76	24
Capacity building of the community	90	10
Role for international response	86	14
Participatory role o the radio station	85	15
Participation of the affectees in the radio programmes	85	15
Participation of the rescue agencies in the radio programmes	88	12
Participation of the rehabilitation agencies in radio programmes	83	17
Role of the radio station in reducing the loss of lives	85	15
Role of the radio station in reducing the loss of property	84	16
Overall picture	85	15

Results and Discussions

It was a descriptive study and the result obtained from the survey were tabulated and the count values were converted into percentages for easy description. The decimal points of the percentage values were rounded off. Microsoft Excel software was used for calculations and tabulation purpose. As per results a great majority of the respondents stated that the Radio FM-93 played a significant role for spreading information and updates about the disaster situation.

The overall results show that 85% affectees agreed that radio station FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza played and effective role in addressing the Attabad lake crisis while 15% disagreed. One of the possible reasons for the support of Community Radio among the respondents may be the only availability of this media to them. Because of the pretty much low rate of literacy and geographical problems, the newspaper reading habit in the Northern areas of Pakistan is very less (Saqib Riaz, 2003). Furthermore, Television is also very limited because of signals problem and non-availability of electricity in most of the Northern areas of Pakistan. Perhaps, Radio is the only media available to these people. It might be the reason of their highly positive opinion about its role in the disaster situation.

Conclusions

From the study the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1) For most of the people, the community radio FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza played an effective role in addressing the Attabad lake crisis.
- 2) For a great majority of the affectees of the Ataabad Lake Radio broadcast is the best way to communicate with the affectees during the disaster situations when the affected community is disconnected from the rest of the world.
- 3) For most of the people launching of the community radio FM-93 Baltit Fort Hunza was the best decision to meet the communication demands of the affectees and the relief organizations.

Recommendations

Different forms of media like television, newspaper, and internet etc. are mostly not accessible to the affectees during the disaster situations because they are cut-off from the rest of the world like the case discussed. When a disaster hits a certain area the media infrastructures in that area are also equally damaged and affected.

The only medium through which maximum people can be accessed during disasters is radio because its transmitter could be easily installed in a short period of time and the

radio sets are portable and there is no need of wiring or electricity to operate it.

Keeping in view the study, some recommendations are made for decision makers and stakeholders for future strategies to address the disaster hit communities in a better way.

- 1) During the disaster situations the government stakeholders and the humanitarian organizations must give due considerations to the communication demands of the affectees.
- 2) To meet the communication demands FM-Radio transmitters must be installed on emergency basis in the disaster hit areas.
- 3) The government media regulating authorities should relax the regulations regarding launching of radio stations during disaster conditions and facilitate the organization that intends to set up radio stations during disasters.
- 4) The radio stations must be launched by or in collaboration with the public or private sector broadcasting organizations because they have experience in the field and the objectives must be purely humanitarian relief.
- 5) The staff deputed for such stations must be well aware of the geography, local norms and culture of that particular area.
- 6) Government of Pakistan should pay particular concentration to strengthen the existing infrastructure of the FM Radio Hunza Baltit.

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Received: September 17, 2012
Revision Received: October 31, 2012

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***Key words** The authors must provide the preferred **key words** for the study.*

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