

TOWARD
NEW UNDERSTANDINGS:

JOURNALISTS &
HUMANITARIAN RELIEF
—— COVERAGE ——

FritzInstitute

REUTERS  AlertNet
FOUNDATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On behalf of Fritz Institute (www.fritzinstitute.org) and Reuters Foundation's AlertNet (www.alertnet.org), we surveyed press relations personnel in headquarters and regional offices of humanitarian relief organizations and, in a separate survey, journalists who cover them. Our goal was to determine the dynamics of media coverage of relief efforts. Such efforts tend to occur when, in the words of humanitarian aid organization Oxfam, a crisis situation occurs "that overwhelms the capacity of a society to cope using its resources alone."

This is apparently the largest, most comprehensive survey ever undertaken of this symbiotic relationship. Humanitarian relief organization officials (almost all such organizations are "non-governmental organizations" or "NGOs" for short) say that media coverage of humanitarian relief is an important component of their ability to marshal relief resources and support. Favorable and even neutral coverage can lead to more funding, more cooperation with host governments, and higher staff morale. Journalists depend on relief organizations for orientation in the field and access to populations being helped. Public – and thus journalistic – interest is especially keen in times of war and natural disasters. But interest in educating readers and viewers about many "chronic," long-term relief operations is also strong.

An initial search for documentation of the role the media plays in humanitarian relief, the ways in which relief agencies interact with the press and the societal drivers that lead journalists to cover these stories showed that no large, comprehensive study was available. Hence, we set out to understand the dynamics of the media coverage of humanitarian relief. We were interested in the nature and extent of the coverage, the factors that went into editors' and journalists' decisions to cover a story, and the capabilities of humanitarian agencies to reach out to the media to successfully present and place their stories.

We conducted interviews and received detailed responses from 54 humanitarian relief organization officials, located mainly in organizations' international headquarters and in regional hubs around the world. About half (47%) were from Europe, 20% from Asia and 11% from North America. (Details are in Appendix B)

We used their responses to develop a questionnaire returned by 290 journalists, of whom 106 specifically identified themselves as working outside North America. Responses were received from every continent except Antarctica and more than 40 countries.

As for NGOs, our surveys found:

- Lack of press relations training, particularly in field offices.
- Lack of donor appreciation for the benefits of good press relations, and lack of metrics for determining "how much is enough."

- Lack of an ethic for publicly sharing information (and perhaps glory) with peer organizations.
- Failure to clearly delineate internally what strategies are best for “marketing” (fundraising and long-term image-building) and what work best for press relations, and to separate the budgeting and staffing required to carry out those strategies.
- Failure to take full advantage of Internet-based tools including, but not limited to, the World Wide Web.

As for the media, we found:

- Few journalists specializing in the coverage of humanitarian crisis and relief stories. This is due, of course, to the episodic nature of crises and the physical and psychological demands this type of reporting demands. But the situation limits strategies for improving coverage.
- Lack of resources to finance crisis coverage.
- Lack of specialist knowledge, including local history, social customs, even the legal rights of populations being helped.
- Poor (or non-existent) use of existing information sources such as AlertNet and ReliefWeb.
- Impatience.
- Crisis fatigue.

There are also many things we did not find:

- Conventional wisdom – apparently based on the existence of a few well-known television personalities – is that covering humanitarian operations is a regular full-time beat. Nothing could be further from the truth.
- Celebrities pushing specific causes do attract media coverage, but celebrity-oriented coverage tends to be short-term.
- Conventional wisdom among NGOs is that journalists are ignorant of chronic problems caused by poverty and disease. But journalist respondents, in answering specific questions and in open-ended comments, displayed a good grasp of chronic problems such as poverty and AIDS. They also understood what is at stake worldwide – poverty, hunger and disease are the precursors, as well as the products of war, terrorism, and natural disasters.
- Conventional wisdom is that reporters are neither as knowledgeable nor as courteous as they used to be. While there are plenty of anecdotes circulating among NGOs and other journalists about the antics of various journalists in the field, journalists themselves say the situation is, if anything, improving.

Our data leads us to several key recommendations:

- Establishment of a single organization to produce more detailed information to support journalists. Journalists strongly support the idea. It would also be more efficient. Why should every NGO spend its resources to produce background material (so-called “crisis profiles”), when one well-done, current, and constantly updated crisis profile could be referenced by all?

- Better promotion of existing information sources; most journalists are unaware of those that exist now, such as AlertNet (www.alertnet.org), ReliefWeb (www.reliefweb.int), the European Commission (http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/index_en.htm), various United Nations Web sites, and even sites run by the diplomatic corps of almost all sovereign nations.
- Establishment of a mechanism to offer direct support to journalists interested in covering humanitarian emergencies (including training and finance for travel) on short notice when necessary.
- Establishment of a facility to make photography, audio and video available on request to journalists who can't travel, or to supplement on-the-scene reporting when a media organization cannot afford to send a photographer with a reporter.
- Take advantage of organizations that provide training in press relations to make ongoing training available, especially for NGO field-office and regional office staff.
- Help for NGOs to build better Web sites and other Internet-based tools such as LISTSERVs and newsgroups.
- A mechanism to allow journalists interested in this kind of coverage to gather, exchange ideas, and share a mailing list – without the list becoming saturated with press releases and individual pleas for coverage from NGOs.

The following sections detail our observations and recommendations. Detailed responses to questions we asked journalists are in **Appendix A**. Responses from NGO officials are in **Appendix B**. Details of the survey methodology are in **Appendix C**. To stimulate and aid continued research in this area, raw data from the journalists' survey is also available for the asking (as an Excel or CSV file with code sheet) from ssr3@columbia.edu.

Few journalists who cover disaster relief and humanitarian aid do it full time. Thus, they take conventional news values with them while covering aid issues. That is, steady-state situations are rarely news. The question becomes: "Why should my news organization invest in such stories TODAY when they will be here tomorrow and there are so many stories that MUST be covered today?" Factors such as the number of deaths and other potentially "sensational" aspects of a tragedy weigh heavily in decisions to cover.

Journalists say they need more frequent updating from NGOs and NGOs say they have trouble building lists of journalists to whom they can send information. But neither journalists nor NGO press officers are wildly enthusiastic about a directory of journalists interested in these humanitarian aid stories. Part of the problem is that journalists tend to be assigned to humanitarian aid stories on an almost random basis; they are general assignment reporters, international reporters, or have another beat entirely such as crime, education, or government.

Journalists, ideally, should not base decisions about what is news on the resources available to cover the news. Yet, in the real world, such decisions are regrettably common. In fact money, not reporters' or editors' lack of sensitivity to aid issues, turned out to be the next most important controlling factor. Responses to numerous questions in our survey reveal that news organizations do not feel they can invest more money to send reporters to areas where aid is being administered. Respondents, especially from outside North America, say they need and would welcome funds from other than their news organizations to cover these stories, if the funding is independent of the groups they cover.

There is a serious mismatch between resources and needs with regard to press relations in humanitarian relief organizations at the level of field offices. Press relations specialists at NGOs we surveyed noted repeatedly that field offices tend to be staffed by local nationals and that such personnel are inexperienced in press relations and unfamiliar with what might be at stake when working with a reporter from outside the region. Local aid officers have become somewhat adept at showing donors around, but may have trouble adjusting to the quick turnaround times needed by journalists.

Said one press officer for a large US-based NGO with a small press relations operation: "The natural tendency is that money should go for food. There used to be a natural culture of modesty, and we felt good about it, that there should be little advocacy for the group, that everyone just wanted to do their work. This changed in the 90s with the Balkan conflict. [We] became a huge player... In those days we had no Web site and a five-page annual report."

Funders may want to understand more about what really is happening on the ground and would be wise to allow NGOs to direct a reasonable portion of their donations to public

education through media relations and other effective approaches. But we note that many fine organizations go to great lengths to maximize the percentage of donations allocated for aid; a reduction in that percentage, even if for strategically worthwhile goals, may blur their message with prospective donors, especially prospective individual donors.

Celebrities can call attention to an issue and stimulate some coverage, particularly outside North America, but they are clearly better used for fundraising and even government relations than for gaining sustained media coverage. Journalists say a celebrity can usually provide the reason to cover something only once, in a superficial way.

NGO press officers and journalists disagree on coverage trends. NGO press officers say coverage of humanitarian aid issues is at best holding steady and probably declining, replaced by war coverage. They point to closing or de-emphasis of news bureaus outside Europe and North America. But reporters and editors have the strong impression that coverage is increasing. A look at coverage in English-speaking publications worldwide, tracked by NEXIS, suggests the journalists are right. The number of articles mentioning AIDS in Africa, for instance, jumped steadily from 3,607 in 1998 to 15,349 in 2002 and 19,375 (after President Bush's announced AIDS initiative) in 2003. Reporting on famine in Africa jumped greatly in 2001 and 2002 before falling back slightly in 2003. Perhaps the extra coverage has not increased for most chronic issues as fast as the number of NGOs or NGO activities has increased. No amount of training and sensitizing journalists is likely to substantially increase coverage of major chronic issues beyond the existing trends, although training will certainly help bring new issues to the attention of the world's press faster. Reporters can be trained to see the early warning signs of famine or disease, and to gauge the adequacy of resources available to ameliorate a problem.

NGO officials speak of "crisis fatigue" among journalists, using the same terminology fundraisers use for donors. They note that Iraq has submerged other crises from the public radar in Europe, Muslim countries, and in North America. They tend to describe journalists they deal with as bright, energetic, and at least moderately well versed in the issues at hand. But paradoxically, they also say that the overall quality of reporters has declined – reporters are ill-prepared with regard to the roots of crises they cover. What's more, they say, reporters, increasingly freelancers, are becoming more rude.

The journalists who responded to our survey tend to disagree; they see little change overall but if anything, they say, journalists' competence has improved. Of course, they tend to be speaking for colleagues in their own media organization, or others seen in press conferences. They see an increase in journalists from outside North America and Europe (especially from Asia and Africa), even if they are working for media organizations based in the West. They see an increase in freelance journalists, both for print and for broadcast.

Who is right? When it comes to war and disaster coverage, years of reading published stories with a critical eye reveal many examples of ill-informed coverage. But I doubt if the quality is declining. Television coverage has been more problematical, with what I consider a clear decline in frequency in the United States and mixed trends elsewhere. Radio and magazine coverage seems to have improved in both frequency and quality. Quality of coverage of chronic issues – disease, hunger, and poverty – has clearly improved in every media. Several of the NGO officials we surveyed suggested as much, saying that really big events such as war in Iraq and Afghanistan attract many inexperienced journalists but that the majority of journalists covering most relief operations is perhaps better informed.

For reasons of inertia and marketing, most NGOs do not provide links to Web sites of other NGOs operating in the same areas (or provide other contact information). Few things annoy journalists more, or are more likely to raise their suspicions about NGO motives. Journalists told us they tend to feel that NGOs are “in a crisis together” and should help one another in public ways by acknowledging each others’ existence.

Even small field offices often have Web sites and news about them can be found on headquarters sites even if they don't. But Internet technology is not used to the fullest. Few NGOs use LISTSERVs (automated mailing lists) to update journalists who choose to receive organization news, for instance. Web sites often lack contact information and stock photos journalists need. NGO Web sites are often arranged in ways that make indexing by Web search engines difficult. Yet, because few journalists know of the big sites that reference many humanitarian aid sites in the same place (such as AlertNet and ReliefWeb), search engines are the main mechanism for attracting journalists to an NGO Web site.

KEY FINDINGS

Complete details of responses to the NGO and journalist surveys are in Appendix A (journalists) and Appendix B (NGOs). Some findings deserve more detailed discussion.

What is Humanitarian Aid or Crisis News and What are the Coverage Trends?

Our investigation looked at news of breaking events such as war, earthquake and other natural disasters, as well as coverage of chronic situations such as hunger, poverty and AIDS.

By a three-to-one margin, journalists say that coverage of humanitarian aid operations is up, conflicting somewhat with NGO press officer's beliefs that coverage is static or actually declining, especially for chronic problems such as AIDS in Africa.

The bad news: By a four-to-one margin, journalists say criticism and skepticism in the press about relief organizations has also increased. Among columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers, the gap is 11-to-one (57% versus 5%). Criticism even increased in the wake of the Bam disaster (Appendix A, Question 23).

NGO press officers were nearly unanimous in saying that journalistic organizations jump on disaster coverage but are less willing to cover chronic issues such as poverty, disease and famine. Journalists who responded to our survey, however, say that while it is hard to sell such stories to their editors, such coverage has, if anything, been increasing. Editors responding to our survey agreed. Who's right? While there is evidence to support both points of view, coverage does appear to be increasing. We had that impression when we first gathered bylines of journalists to send the survey to. We went back to NEXIS in a more rigorous way to test the hypothesis against four issues in Africa: AIDS, famine, child mortality and conflict diamonds. Overall, there was a clear increase in coverage.

Some of this could be due to President Bush's call in 2003 for help to fight AIDS in Africa. Some could be due to the substantial amount of new aid money made available by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Some could simply be due to more reporter awareness in general. Dozens of journalists, in free-form comments throughout the survey, mentioned these chronic issues, especially with regard to Africa, without prompting.

There was certainly evidence to support the NGO press officers' point of view, too. Stories on famine in Africa, for instance, doubled from 1999 to 2000 and went back to 1999 levels in 2001, for instance. The conflict diamond story came out of nowhere in 1999, but interest in the issue (which has been partially addressed by diamond dealers) peaked in 2001. There may also be more humanitarian aid groups active now than five years ago, so the stories that are written are spread more widely; that is, each group may be getting less press mention even though press mention overall is increasing. Comments by NGO officials were

sometimes naïve about the role of the press and about how reporters usually have to work on deadline and on budget.

NEXIS Search Terms, in ALL-NWS library	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
AIDS w/10* Africa	3,607	5,904	11,651	12,604	15,349	19,375
Famine w/10 Africa	584	427	977	458	2,336	51,779
Conflict diamonds**	-	13	880	864	528	589
(child or infant) w/3 mortality and Africa	704	1,104	1,043	970	1,756	1,779
Total=	4,895	7,448	14,551	14,896	19,969	23,522

* w/10 and w/3 are NEXIS search terms; w/3 means "within three words of" and w/10 means "within 10 words of," anywhere in the article being searched.

** Diamonds sold to buy weapons and support civil unrest.

Said one NGO official: "There are several difficulties; the field staff is often loath to talk with journalists, so making productive connections can be difficult. Journalists are often interested in what's not going right, or security issues or something flamboyant, and it can be difficult to 'sell' the story of sustainable development success stories."

Said another: "There's not much understanding of basic relief and development realities among many of the reporters we encounter...how we work, what we do, why we are independent of the military, etc. And often, we work in areas of the world that don't interest mainstream US publications."

And another: "Journalists are typically more interested in bombs than humanitarian issues. TV wants a 'visual' and sometimes our story is not so visual. Media is more interested in talking about what is going 'wrong' and not what is going right."

What Journalists Want; What Journalists Write

Around the world, the coverage patterns are almost identical. The oddity is that columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers are slightly more likely than other

respondents to comment on natural disasters (a typically "hard news" issue). Journalists outside North America are slightly more likely to write about armed conflict.

Again, reporters who cover crises do not do it full time. In fact, the average is less than one story in five. Only two of the 265 respondents to this question said they covered crises 100% of the time. Only 10% (27) said crisis stories were more than half their output. Thus, they judge the newsworthiness of humanitarian stories by the norms of all stories. North American respondents to the survey are somewhat less likely to include humanitarian aid, disaster, crisis or war reporting in their mix; the average for them was about one story or column in eight (12%) while the average for respondents outside North America was closer to one in four (22%).

This orientation to breaking news is not surprising; almost half (48%) of all the stories done by all the respondents are categorized by them as breaking news; 31% are categorized as features and 20% as opinion, columns, or editorials. The numbers are almost identical for North American and non-North American respondents. Even among the 60 respondents who classified themselves as columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers, only 27% of their output is in those categories. These respondents also do a substantial amount of what they consider to be breaking news (43% of their output on average).

North Americans want basic but current primers on crisis backgrounds and a directory of NGOs (only 8% know of the ones that already exist, outside of links in Yahoo.) Less than half are interested in an e-mail alert list. North American respondents remain relatively immune to celebrity tie-ins; only 14% were interested in a celebrity interview request engine. But outside North America, 33% were interested (Appendix A, Question 30).

NGO officials say there has been an increase in requests by journalists for "stock footage" video and still images to use in coverage. Many NGOs have started to put still images on their Web sites in response. But the images themselves typically are collected informally. Some NGOs give their field staffers digital cameras and ask that they submit photos.

Journalists most want what most NGOs seem loath to do – to place links on their Web sites to other groups doing similar things or serving in the same areas. Next most popular on the journalists' wish list (and most popular for journalists outside North America) is for NGOs to hold more press conferences. Such meetings are sought more by journalists outside North America (58% mentioned it) than inside (44%). Non-North American journalists, typically with far fewer resources, also ask for training, travel help, and free editorial material such as images and video. The journalistic "culture," especially with respect to taking funds and holding new conferences, is somewhat startling but absolutely in line with other studies.

Cost and Other Barriers to Coverage

Most startling, considering the implications for journalistic ethics and integrity: By a more than two-to-one margin (64% to 28%) those outside North America want independently financed trips to crisis areas.

Cost emerged as by far the tallest barrier to coverage – mentioned by 55% of North American journalists and 71% of those from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Lack of timely response from groups at the scene was the second biggest problem, mentioned by a third of all journalists. This ties in strongly with comments from NGO press relations personnel – they push for more help from "headquarters" because they have limited staff time during emergencies and limited knowledge of how the press works. A key need – mentioned by 35% of the non-North Americans and 15% of North Americans – is for more information on NGO Web sites to support a story pitch; 30% of the editors agreed. Outside North America, there is a critical need for photos, audio, and video. A fifth of the respondents sense a lack of coordination between groups at the scene and their own parent organizations.

Thus, we had expected to hear of requests by freelancers for funding to travel into a region, but only one NGO official said she had received such a request in the past three or four years. No one we talked to described as onerous the need to help occasional journalists find guides or "fixers" who handle various travel and translation services. Many reported that they routinely entertain journalists – buy lunch or dinner, for instance, to explain their organization's operations or to provide detailed backgrounding.

We believe that the disconnect between needing money and unwillingness to ask for it can be explained this way: The journalists know that most groups simply don't have the resources, and that it would indeed be unethical to ask. But the journalists specifically consider "independent" funding sources, separate from the groups they wish to cover, as ethical. Many commentators on journalistic ethics would disagree. It is hard to imagine any existing funding sources as truly independent, because their funding would affect the choice of topics to cover. But such arrangements are indeed more common outside Europe and North America, where media organizations have little money to spare.

High Death Toll Makes News

Almost half the respondents (49%) say that a high death toll is the best reason to run a relief story. Among non-North American journalists, the death toll angle is mentioned almost twice as often as any other, by 61% of the respondents. There were sharp differences about what makes a story compelling, throughout the data. Non-North Americans, for instance, are twice as likely to believe children suffering (40% versus 18%),

but North Americans were more likely to mention readers of the same background as those suffering (34% versus 23%) and involvement of aid workers from the readership or viewership area (44% versus 22%). Death toll loomed more important after Bam (51% mentioning) than before (45%); the difference is barely significant. Respondents were allowed to check as many as three responses from a list, or mention their own.

In line with other questions' responses, compelling visuals were mentioned by a third of the respondents.

Lack of journalistic resources and crisis fatigue are the two biggest reasons keeping crisis stories off the news agenda; each was mentioned by more than a quarter of the respondents (and more than a third of respondents outside of North America). Reporters tended to be more in agreement (36% cite lack of resources; 32% crisis fatigue); this is far higher than what editors and columnists say. Respondents consistently put Iraq and Afghanistan in third place, followed closely by "lack of new angles," which actually ranked third outside North America. Only one-in-six (17%) said Iraq made other crises seem small; this was mentioned by only 13% North Americans but 24% of respondents from elsewhere.

It was not surprising to see reporters outside North America more interested in international crisis stories (46% versus 25%) but as with previous studies, there's another way to look at the data. The proportion of respondents from North America interested in both regional (that is, the region they are based in) and international issues totals 55%; for those outside North America, it is 62%. This difference is barely significant. Likewise, reporters outside North America tend to call their reporting national (33%) rather than local (5%). The percentages are just about reversed (10% and 33%) among respondents from North America.

The lesson: Don't depend on the "more international" outlook of non-US reporters and editors to sell a story! The United States is a big country, and a "region" in the United States can be comparable in size to an entire country.

How Journalists Use the Internet

Surprise! Google, Yahoo, and other search engines are important, used by 43% of all respondents and half of those who specifically do crisis reporting. But local media and Web sites of local groups known to already be in the region rank higher – for reporters working for media based outside North America, much higher – when it comes to checking local media.

When we asked NGO officials about the source of "hits" on their Web sites, there was almost no response (two said Google was the largest source of site visitors, one said links

from other sites were most important; three said specific e-mail domains such as AOL were the largest sources). Several had heard about server logs but no one knew how to use them. It is clear that these groups do not use the Web site management tools available to them. Also, many Web sites are not set up with "press" areas that attract the press but not necessarily the public. So the server logs record many "hits" but cannot differentiate between press and non-press visitors to the site.

Few sites are organized so that Google and other search engines can search reliably beyond their home page. The reasons include lack of searchable material on other pages (photos only, for instance), or pages that are framed. A few sites use pages generated by a database system (active server pages, for instance). Only six sites of the 32 studied in depth have an internal search engine. (Google will help sites set up internal engines using Google technology.)

Every site we looked at in detail offered news of projects and an explanation of the organization's mission. But three of the 32 lacked contact names and addresses and eight lacked information on donors that might attract other donors. Only 17 of the 32 described the organization's background or included an archive of reports on current and past projects and only one-third (10 of 32) included an archive of past press releases. Eleven included links to organizations doing similar work and 12 included links to governmental organizations involved in the same area.

Journalists would like to see links to other NGOs operating in the same region on NGO field office Web sites. They rarely do. Field offices have little time and few resources to keep track of these links, and there is a feeling of "competition" among NGOs as they scramble for recognition. Even large headquarters Web sites of multinational NGOs rarely include links to other groups working on the same problems.

Indexing sites, such as AlertNet, are used by only about 8% of experienced crisis reporting journalists in North America and 22% of those based outside North America. Existing Web sites that bring together references to NGOs should not be expected to update as a crisis occurs. All they have to do is reference NGOs by location of their relief efforts. The real issue is probably that journalists, especially North American journalists, do not know these sites exist. When we mentioned AlertNet and Yahoo in the same question, recognition jumped five-fold. So one clear way to gain more recognition is to lobby Yahoo for inclusion on its link lists.

Journalists inside North America are significantly less likely to use a humanitarian NGO's Web site in imaginative ways than are their counterparts outside North America. For example, 51% (versus 62%) search for the press release archive; 42% (versus 58%) want links to other groups doing similar work, 37% (versus 53%) want an archive of news about a group's past activities; 28% (versus 50%) want a multimedia archive.

NGOs should pay attention to all the items listed; even the least popular, donor information, is desired by a quarter of all journalists. And contributors want this information anyway.

Regional press officers are often young international hires or personnel from the region, and not well versed in international press relations. They talk about the need for more formal training. Large international organizations often hire experienced journalists as press officers to staff headquarters operations. They talk about training as well. But no NGO staffer we contacted outside of CARE and the International Red Cross mentioned budgets for such training that go beyond perhaps a few hundred dollars per employee for attending short seminars. Nevertheless, regional press officers described the range of basic services they provide to journalists without special prompting. These include writing and distributing press releases and background reports on regional aid needs, offering photographs for use with journalists' stories and holding press conferences. They displayed good understanding of the need for timeliness in attending to journalists' requests. The phrase "strike while the iron is hot" or its equivalent showed up in the notes of all our interviewers.

Thus it is not entirely surprising that NGO officials were often confused about the role of press officers in regional and field offices. Larger organizations have guidelines for press relations and those guidelines typically ask press officers to "pass media up the line" to home offices. But the process is often ignored, especially if a journalist has been doing stories in the region or specifically with the regional humanitarian aid organization's office. Execution – providing information and on-site visits to journalists – is usually adequate, but fraught with errors. Many respondents described mistakes that led or could have led to unfavorable coverage of their work.

None of the NGO officials we talked to in regional offices claimed journalism experience, but some said the press officer at headquarters did have some journalism experience. Said one press officer: "Our media officer in Johannesburg tries to have all the people in Africa [in our field offices] have monthly phone conferences to go over issues, and to identify country officers who are best at press relations."

When we checked out headquarters, however, it seems that "journalism" can also mean "public relations" in this community, even when the job is specifically press relations and not marketing or fundraising specifically.

All this suggests that credentialing and hiring practices for humanitarian relief organizations is informal relative to the for-profit world. But the old image of field offices staffed by eager, young and inexperienced press relations staffers is not entirely true these days, even if it is the norm.

Said an NGO official: "In field offices you have to be able to handle both news sense and marketing, but it isn't really fair. If you are in [small African country] you want to get as much money out of foundations as possible now, but in the West we know that how we are perceived in the press is of much greater importance [long-term]."

"Africans are real people with real problems. There has to be an understanding of equals. Africans need access to credit. They don't need the handout. That's the paradigm that doesn't work in development, the direct call to money. So we look for stories that appeal to the marketing side this way."

Said another, there's a tendency in some organizations toward "hiring young [women] who want to change the world. Bow around the Lincoln memorial and all hold hands. Marketing thinking, gimmick thinking, and that is what they are expecting from their people."

When we asked NGO officials, they said news of projects and explanation of mission are the most popular features of Web sites (along with a description of the organization's background), but they are also the most common. Those few that have a formal press room and archive of press releases find it popular, interviewees say. Only a smattering of responses on that point turned up in the survey itself. The reason is simple: As noted earlier, few take advantage of server logs to make this determination. As already noted, Web sites of parent organizations are used the most by journalists, 57% (among reporters, 68%). Web sites that index or group crisis intervention groups, such as AlertNet and Yahoo, also rate highly, 43% use them (and 54% of those outside North America). LISTSERVs are also fairly widely used. As with most other usage patterns, there are not many differences among various subsets of journalists. But USENET newsgroups (accessible through most e-mail providers and through Google) are much more popular outside North America (18% use them) than in (10%). If one removes the 10% of the sample that has no experience doing crisis reporting, the numbers above are all increased by about 10% (not 10 percentage points).

How NGOs Communicate with Journalists Apart from the Web

About half the journalists in our survey (48%) report that they are not getting any form of communications from crisis-intervention NGOs. But some of this might be due to the devastating earthquake December 26 in Bam, Iran. In the wake of the earthquake, NGOs actually cut back their flow of routine press releases, due to staffing shortages and the belief that the crisis would sell itself. Relief organizations working elsewhere realized that Bam would be absorbing the press's attention, giving another reason to cut back.

Sending press releases by e-mail has become the norm – 39% of our sample respondents report getting e-mail from crisis NGOs. That's double the next most popular method, fax.

Faxes and press releases by regular mail are dying out worldwide for all PR uses. NGO press officers at headquarters in Europe and North America say they try to follow up by phone, at least to a few journalists, but it appears that NGO press officers are missing that basic and essential ingredient for getting their stories on the journalists' radar screens, due to a lack of staffing. One suggested that perhaps during a crisis, the NGO could hire a public relations firm to help with press outreach. Instead, NGOs seem more likely to hire public relations firms for help with marketing (especially image-building and fund raising).

The "personal touch" is limited to going to academic conferences to meet journalists, holding press conferences and taking people out to lunch or dinner.

Only two of the 54 NGO groups we surveyed do not have a Web site. But sites for two others were not operating for long stretches in September and October 2003 while we were initially surveying. Both were running in January 2004.

English is featured on most (27 of 34 as of January 17, 2004) of the sites we looked at in detail. But we did find seven sites with no English section or only a small partial translation into English.

Most organizations of this type, even regional offices of international groups, have their own domain name, but about one-quarter of their sites were housed only on other sites.

As for NGOs, Web inquiries by journalists, searching on the Web for journalists who write stories on crisis and humanitarian aid issues, personal contact and directories such as Bacon's are the most common methods of building their lists. Oddly enough, no NGO official mentioned trading contacts with other groups. When we pressed, headquarters staffers admitted that there is of course competition among groups for publicity. In December 2003, Bacon's Information absorbed MediaMap, another large directory operation.

Based on our responses and on our research, we offer several detailed suggestions.

NGO Field Staff Training

Good training is always a key goal. But how are training materials to be created? And how might they be delivered to remote sites, and to NGO field-office staffs that suffer high turnover rates? What's more, most field offices are staffed by in-country nationals, personnel not always familiar with the needs of journalists serving media in developed nations.

It is clear that there is much money to be saved by having a single developer for the bulk of the training materials – ideally an international organization that already does course development as part of its operations. Such materials might be digitized and provided on CD-ROM discs, or delivered online. There is certainly a place for in-person training, but much of the training should be done using distance-learning technology. Such technology includes Web-based classes, as well as older, proven methods such as videotaped lectures, local teaching assistants, and telephone hookups.

We're not recommending uniformity in training materials. NGOs will always have to customize their training by region and by situation, as well as to take into account their own policies with regard to press relations. NGOs must clarify their objectives for media coverage. If the aim is for more public and financial support, it makes sense that they would be more deliberate and that headquarters staff would be more active and strategically guide field staff and train or hire with experience.

But common materials, delivered to NGOs for their own use and supplemented by the NGOs' own customized training materials, could save 80% to 90% of the course development cost for individual NGOs and thus make training more affordable and more available.

Other approaches that might be tried include an organization providing paid consultants to check and critique press releases and marketing materials for NGOs.

Bring Journalists Together

There are three core issues that must be addressed:

- Because journalists are typically assigned to cover a crisis on an ad hoc basis and not all NGOs respond to a given crisis, we need a faster, more reliable way to allow NGOs and journalists to find one another quickly when a crisis occurs.
- There is always a need to make coverage more professional and insightful, especially for chronic problems.

- We need an independent mechanism for funding some journalists' expenses for coverage, especially if necessary to aid coverage from countries having media with inadequate resources.

There are three models. One is a freestanding organization such as the Society of Environmental Journalists or the Association of Health Care Journalists. Another would add responsibility for running such a group to the duties of one of the umbrella informational organizations such as AlertNet or perhaps a vastly expanded ReliefWeb. A third would house such a facility at a University-based school of international relations or government.

Because the need is greatest outside North America, any such facility would best be placed outside North America. The key requirement would be a location offering low operating costs and good access to the Internet.

An independent group – an International Society of Humanitarian Aid Journalists, if you will – could attract funding to award reporting fellowships, host conferences and sponsor training while not making awardees and members beholden to the aid groups they cover.

But a facility that is part of an existing group such as AlertNet or ReliefWeb is likely to have lower overhead and more expertise that can be used quickly than any new organization would have. It might also have more credibility with funders due to an existing track record.

Groups such as SEJ (www.sej.org) and AHCJ (<http://www.ahcj.umn.edu/>) are independent but have strong university ties. This gives them credibility without having to pay high university overhead. In North America at state-supported institutions, overhead can be 20% to 40%. Overhead is even higher at private universities.

We believe that the best strategy to start with would be to attract an existing organization to add these functions to its current program:

- Journalist training.
- Journalist quick-reaction fellowship program for funding coverage.
- Communication to journalists via a weekly LISTSERV digest that would include news from NGOs and could publish more frequently during crisis periods.
- A mechanism for journalists to communicate with each other and mentor each other (via blogs or LISTSERV, perhaps).
- Maintenance of Web-based background materials.
- Maintenance of an archive of photos, video, and audio.
- NGO training, as previously discussed.

Better NGO Use of the Internet

The World Wide Web has increased opportunities for international visibility of humanitarian aid organizations. But the potential of Internet technologies has barely begun to be exploited:

- Few humanitarian organization's Web sites have internal search engines.
- Not a single person we talked to among NGO officers had a formal procedure in place to check on a continuing basis whether their Web site is easily found on the various international versions of Google, Yahoo, and other search engines. Several assumed that their Webmasters or other "technical" personnel handled such chores.
- Many cannot be fully searched "from the outside" by search engines such as Google, either because the pages are sparse on text or because they are "framed." Framed pages load faster when bandwidth is low, but cannot easily be found and indexed by search engines.
- Most sites include only the basics – mission statements, organization history, summary news of current projects. Many do not include press contacts.
- Newer Web technologies such as streaming video and blogs (Weblogs; online newsletters by individual or corporate reporters) are virtually ignored.
- Older Internet technologies that predate the Web are sparsely used. These include chat rooms, LISTSERVs and Usenet newsgroups.
- Often missing are press release archives, online video and still images for use in journalists' stories, and links to stories written by journalists.
- Groups often use e-mail to send press releases, but build their distribution lists in a haphazard manner. They use fax and regular mail as well, despite the costs and potential for errors in distribution. E-mail is clearly underutilized, perhaps because address lists are poor.

We propose a mechanism for providing technical aid for Web site creation and maintenance to NGOs, especially to NGO field offices. This aid would include easy-to-use site templates, funding of local Web designers, and housing Web sites on a free or inexpensive server. Such organizations exist (see, for instance, <http://www3.wn.apc.org/africa/projects.htm>) but could use increased visibility.

Define Press Relations Versus Marketing and Fundraising

Only 9 of the 54 NGO respondents in our survey said they had a specific budget for press relations within field and regional offices. The business is remarkably ad hoc, even though a good press relations operation has political and fundraising benefits in addition to increasing opportunities for public education. Said one: "The idea of actually investing money in this... Everyone knows the more we raise visibility the more we can solicit

money. But the programs themselves don't budget [press relations] in their proposals. They want headquarters to do it. Maybe we will try to get a grant for people to start gaining visibility. It is still not a priority for the development department, so there will have to be a cultural change."

Said another: "I went [from the USA] to Liberia for two weeks. There was a small window, lasted a month, and then media interest is gone. The night I arrived I went to the hotel where all the journalists stayed, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and so forth, arranged interviews with everyone in a few days."

Clearly, the field needs metrics developed for defining success. It also needs a more formal mechanism for sharing best practices.

SURVEY OF JOURNALISTS

1. What is your experience with coverage of disasters, war, or humanitarian aid crises? Check all that apply.

% of responses in each category; because not all respondents identified themselves in every question, percents across rows may vary	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Cover international crises and natural disasters now	23%	20%	28%	26%	28%	15%
Cover domestic crises and natural disasters now	32%	34%	32%	42%	31%	23%
Covered international crises and natural disasters in the past	33%	32%	41%	34%	40%	25%
Covered domestic crises and natural disasters in the past	45%	44%	52%	49%	43%	47%
Wish to cover international crises and natural disasters	27%	20%	40%	29%	26%	28%
Wish to cover domestic crises and natural disasters	15%	16%	18%	18%	10%	27%
None of the above	12%	17%	4%	4%	12%	23%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60

Respondents indicated moderate to strong experience covering crises and natural disasters. Only 12% of the respondents had not covered crises or disasters or had no wish to. A third had covered international crises and natural disasters in the past and a quarter do so now. A third cover domestic crises and natural disasters now. Almost half (45%) had covered domestic crises and natural disasters in the past. More than a quarter (27%) say they wish to cover international crises and natural disasters; this is almost double the number who wish to cover such issues domestically. We note that after the Bam earthquake disaster on December 26, some potential respondents were busy with coverage.

2. Roughly what percent of your stories, columns or editorials involves humanitarian aid, disaster, crisis or war reporting?

Distribution	All
0%	32
1-5%	81
6-19%	62
20-49%	63
50-100%	27
N=	265

	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Average	17%	12%	22%	17%	18%	13%
Standard Deviation	21%	17%	23%	22%	21%	18%
Max	100%	100%	85%	100%	100%	95%

Reporters who cover crises do not do it full time. In fact, the average is less than one story in five. Only two of the 265 respondents to this question said they covered crises 100% of the time. Only 27 said crisis stories were more than half their output. Thus, they judge the newsworthiness of humanitarian stories by the norms of all stories. North American respondents to the survey are somewhat less likely to include humanitarian aid, disaster, crisis or war reporting in their mix; the average for them was about one story or column in eight (12%) while the average for respondents outside North America was closer to one-in-four (22%).

3. In general, crisis coverage can be defined as feature, opinion/editorial, or breaking news. Approximately what percent of your coverage falls into each category? If you do not do crisis, disaster or humanitarian aid reporting, put a zero in each box (that is, the number 0).

This orientation to breaking news is not surprising; almost half (48%) of all the stories done by all the respondents are categorized by them as breaking news; 31% are categorized as features and 20% as opinion, columns, or editorials. The numbers are almost identical for North American and non-North American respondents. Even among the 60 respondents who classified themselves as columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers, only 25% of the output is in those categories. These respondents also do a substantial amount of what they consider to be breaking news (41% of their output).

All	Features	Breaking News	Opinion, Editorial
Average	31%	48%	20%
Median	20%	50%	15%
Mode	10%	50%	10%
N=	192	199	115
North America			
Average	35%	49%	26%
Median	28%	50%	20%
Mode	10%	50%	10%
N=	104	113	51
Outside North America			
Average	26%	46%	16%
Median	20%	50%	10%
Mode	10%	50%	10%
N=	88	86	64

Of those who cover (that is, did not enter zero):	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Features	31%	34%	29%	31%	31%	25%
Breaking news	47%	49%	47%	50%	47%	41%
Opinion, columns, editorials	18%	19%	16%	13%	16%	25%
N=	273	155	118	90	121	60

4. Education level (highest degree earned):

% of responses in each category; because not all respondents identified themselves in every question, percents across rows may vary	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
BA/BS/BSc (typically, a three- or four-year degree)	57%	63%	50%	56%	51%	70%
MA/MS (typically, a degree beyond the BA or BS)	28%	28%	27%	30%	33%	18%
PhD (or other doctorate level degree)	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	4%
Some college	10%	7%	14%	11%	11%	9%
No college	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%
Other	2%	0%	6%	3%	3%	0%
N=	272%	150%	101%	90%	115%	57%

Respondents to this survey tend to be better educated than journalists as a whole. Some 57% have at least a three- or four-year "first degree," and 28% have a master's. The pattern is similar for respondents from North America and those outside. The total – 86% including doctoral degree holders – is from 5 to 10 percentage points higher than found in previous surveys.

Note that journalism education levels tend not to rise with responsibility. That is, reporters, editors, and columnists tend to have about the same educational levels in surveys done in the past few years. This survey had only one surprise: Opinion writers, editorial writers and columnists tend to have less education (70% with a three- or four-year degree, 18% with a master's) than do reporters and editors. The sample included only 57 such respondents to this question though; there is about one chance in three that it is a result of sampling error.

5. For which type of media outlet do you work most often? Check one.

	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Newspaper	57%	66%	48%	67%	49%	57%
Magazine	12%	11%	13%	11%	11%	17%
TV/Cable	11%	9%	16%	12%	14%	5%
Radio (Broadcast, or Web)	8%	8%	9%	2%	13%	7%
Web	5%	3%	6%	3%	4%	10%
Wire Service	4%	1%	7%	1%	7%	2%
Other	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Blag (your own or your employer's)	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
N=	279	151	106	89	121	60

Almost two-thirds (57%) of respondents work for newspapers, 12% for magazines, 19% for broadcast outlets, 5% for the Web and 4% for wire services. Respondents from outside North America were less likely (48% versus 66%) to write for newspapers and more likely (25% versus 17%) to work for broadcast outlets. They were much more likely (7% versus 1%) to work for a wire service. This in part is due to use of a list of Reuters trainees and fellowship holders for part of the mailing; most work outside North America.

We would have guessed that differences in broadcast are almost certainly due to a hollowing out of radio broadcast personnel in the United States, as radio stations are assembled into large chains. But a close look at the data reveals that TV, not radio, was responsible for the difference. The Web is clearly gaining as a news source. Overall, 5% of respondents work mainly for a web publication; 10% of columnist, opinion writers and editorial writers do. Only two bloggers (authors of Web logs) turned up in our sample.

6. With regard to your reporting or editing (and specifically with regard to crisis coverage if you do it), please estimate the typical reach (readers/viewers, etc.):

	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Under 1,000	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%
1,000 to 10,000	5%	5%	8%	3%	3%	12%
10,001 to 20,000	5%	5%	5%	3%	4%	8%
20,001 to 30,000	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
30,001 to 50,000	8%	5%	10%	6%	9%	8%
50,001 to 100,000	15%	17%	15%	19%	14%	15%
100,001 to 500,000	29%	36%	21%	31%	31%	20%
500,001 to 1,000,000	12%	15%	7%	10%	13%	13%
1,000,001 to 5,000,000	9%	8%	11%	10%	10%	7%
Over 5,000,000	7%	3%	10%	8%	7%	5%
Don't know	5%	2%	8%	7%	3%	7%
N=	280	151	106	90	121	60

Worldwide, the reach of individual journalists is similar. While North America has more news outlets (typically newspapers) in the 100,000 to 500,000 circulation range, there are more really huge, national outlets with circulations over 1 million outside North America. We had expected to find that columnists and opinion writers would have a larger reach than regular reporters and editors, but this is not the case; few are syndicated.

7. Employment Status. Check all that apply.

	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Freelance	13%	14%	12%	18%	4%	28%
Full-time for media organization	81%	82%	87%	84%	91%	67%
Part-time for media organization	5%	4%	6%	2%	4%	10%
Other	3%	2%	5%	2%	3%	3%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60%

Freelancers are quite common – one out of every seven or eight in our sample. Patterns are similar world-wide. Over 80% of respondents work full-time for a media organization.

Almost all of the full-time respondents work for broadcast and newspapers. Web and magazine respondents are more likely to work part-time. Columnists and opinion writers are more likely to work for magazines and Web operations as well, so a greater proportion of them are part-time.

8. What is your gender/sex?

	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Female	46%	49%	42%	52%	42%	44%
Male	54%	50%	58%	47%	58%	56%
Other	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
N=	278	149	106	90	120	59

Female journalists are more likely than all reporters and editors to be interested in covering humanitarian aid work. The sample as a whole is more female than is normal in a survey of North American or non-North American journalists. The general rule, that females are less well represented outside North America than within it, still holds, with a 50-49% male/female split in North America and the 58/42% split outside North America. One respondent self-listed as transgender.

9. In this question, we want to know if you consider yourself primarily a reporter, an editor, or an editorial writer or columnist. That is, are you primarily (Check one):

	ALL	North America	Outside North America
Reporter: Someone who proposes that an emergency (or a specific story angle on an emergency) be covered?	33%	31%	35%
Editor: Someone who makes or participates in a decision on whether the coverage actually happens?	45%	42%	47%
Opinion: Someone who writes a column, opinion pieces, or an editorial.	22%	27%	18%
N=	271	147	103

Opinion writers are significantly more common in the North American sample than in the responses from outside North America. It can be argued that journalistic outlets in Europe are more likely to have a specific "point of view" and that reporters and editors share this

“slant.” But it is also clear that the North American media market is changing, perhaps becoming less impartial as well. There are more editors than reporters in our sample.

10. In which part of the world is the publication for which you do most of your work published or broadcast? Check one.

By where published	ALL	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
United States	57%	55%	55%	64%
Western Europe and the UK	11%	15%	10%	12%
Africa	9%	10%	11%	5%
Asia, Australia, Pacific Central or Eastern	8%	8%	6%	8%
Europe	5%	6%	5%	3%
South America	4%	3%	5%	2%
Other	3%	2%	4%	3%
Central America and Caribbean	1%	0%	4%	0%
Canada	1%	1%	0%	2%
N=	270	88	114	59

Asked where most of their work is published, 155 respondents (57%) said the United States, 44 (16%) said Europe, 24 (9%) listed Africa and 22 (8%) listed Asia, Australia or the Pacific. Only 14 (5%) listed the Americas outside the United States and Canada. In the responses, Canada and Southern Europe (especially Greece, Turkey, Italy) are significantly under-represented. There are fewer opinion writers in Eastern or Central Europe, proportionately, than there are in Western Europe and the United States.

11. In which part of the world are you yourself normally located? Check one.

By where located	ALL	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
United States	58%	55%	57%	66%
Western Europe and the UK	10%	11%	10%	10%
Africa	8%	9%	10%	5%
Asia, Australia, Pacific Central or Eastern	10%	10%	9%	8%
Central or Eastern Europe	6%	7%	4%	7%
South America	3%	3%	3%	2%
Other	2%	3%	3%	2%
Central America and Caribbean	2%	1%	4%	0%
Canada	0%	0%	0%	2%
N=	271	88	116	59

Patterns for where journalists are actually located are almost identical to where their publication or broadcast outlet has its audience. We had hoped to catch a few journalists while actually covering a crisis. We received responses from a few after they returned; in comments they said they were far too busy or unable to get easy access to e-mail.

12. Please identify the primary geographic focus of your crisis, war, or humanitarian aid reporting. Check one.

	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
International	35%	25%	46%	26%	42%	39%
Regional (all or part of a state, multi-state area or province within a country)	24%	31%	16%	30%	20%	20%
Local	21%	33%	5%	24%	16%	27%
National	20%	10%	33%	20%	22%	14%
N=	272	147	105	88	117	59

It was not surprising to see that journalists outside of North America were more interested in international crisis stories (46% versus 25%), but as with previous studies, there's another way to look at the data. Basically, the size of a "region" in North America is comparable to the size of most countries elsewhere. Journalists outside North America tend to call their reporting national (33%) rather than local (5%). The proportion of respondents from North America interested in both regional and international issues totals 55%; for those outside

North America, it is 62%. This difference is significant but small. The percentages are just about reversed (10% and 33%) among respondents from North America.

13. In what languages do you feel comfortable interviewing? Check all that apply.

Interviewing	Count	%
English	267	92.10%
French	32	11%
Spanish (various, including Catalan)	28	9.70%
German	10	3.40%
Other, including:	40	13.80%
Hindi, Urdu, Tamil	8	
Portuguese	7	
Russian	7	
African languages	6	
Chinese	5	
Croatian, Serbian	4	
Italian	4	
Hebrew	3	
Thai	2	
Sri Lankan	2	
Polish	2	
Czech	2	
Arabic	2	
Six others, 1 each.		

The survey itself was distributed in English, but we told respondents that they could reply in any language they wished (12 responded in languages other than English). Thus it is not surprising that English has a huge lead among languages in this table. Nevertheless, it is fairly safe to communicate to journalists worldwide in English if necessary – and French, Spanish and other languages whenever possible.

14. In what languages do you feel comfortable gathering information (mainly by reading)? Check all that apply.

Reading, information-gathering	ALL	%
English	266	92%
Spanish	48	17%
French	47	16%
German	16	6%
Other	32	11%

Virtually the same people who said they were comfortable interviewing in English said they were comfortable reading it; popular wisdom is that journalists who are not necessarily comfortable interviewing in English may be able to read it. That's certainly true, but they may feel even more comfortable in Spanish or French. There was a much bigger bump-up among users of non-European languages in their preference for French, Spanish and German; there was no bump-up for English.

15. Please indicate how many years you have been a professional journalist. Check one.

Years experience in journalism	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
One to five	21%	19%	21%	22%	17%	25%
Six to 10	27%	19%	39%	34%	25%	20%
11 to 15	17%	13%	23%	16%	18%	14%
16 to 20	13%	16%	9%	13%	15%	10%
21 or more	23%	33%	8%	14%	25%	31%
N=	278	104	90	120	59	

North American reporters are significantly more experienced than their counterparts elsewhere. The difference even shows up in this survey, which included a list (covering about a quarter of all non-North Americans asked to complete the survey) that included more experienced personnel. In our sample, 38% of North American respondents have 10 years' experience or less, and 33% have more than 20 years' experience. Among respondents outside North America, 60% have 10 years' experience or less, and only 8% have more than 20 years' experience.

One would expect that columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers would have more experience, especially since they have less education than average. The expectation is false. A quarter of all opinion writers have five years' experience or less; 45% have 10 years' experience or less. At the top end of the experience level, these opinion writers show up as more experienced, however. Editors, on average, have about the same number of years experience as reporters. This fits with what we know about those who cover disasters and humanitarian crises; it is a young person's game, done by those with little or no family responsibilities. It also agrees well with regular surveys of American journalists done by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the University of Indiana.

16. What kinds of crises (if any) have you covered or might be interested in covering? Check as many as apply.

Percentage of all responses; multiple responses allowed	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Natural disaster	28%	30%	25%	26%	28%	31%
Food/water shortages, poverty	25%	25%	23%	25%	24%	23%
Armed conflict (war, civil war, insurgency, post-conflict recovery, peace-building)	24%	21%	28%	25%	25%	21%
Disease	20%	20%	21%	20%	21%	21%
Other	3%	4%	2%	4%	2%	5%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60
Number of responses=	767	411	303	252	341	149

Percent of all journalists responding; multiple responses allowed	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Natural disaster	79%	81%	75%	73%	79%	77%
Food/water shortages, poverty	69%	69%	66%	71%	69%	57%
Armed conflict (war, civil war, insurgency, post-conflict recovery, peace-building)	68%	57%	79%	69%	71%	52%
Disease	58%	55%	60%	57%	58%	52%
Other	9%	11%	5%	10%	5%	12%
N=	271	151	106	90	121	60
Number of responses=	767	411	303	252	341	149

Around the world, the coverage patterns are almost identical. The oddity is that columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers are slightly more likely than other respondents to comment on natural disasters (a typically "hard news" issue). Respondents outside North America are slightly more likely to write about armed conflict. But when we look at multiple responses (first table) compared to actual individual respondents and job descriptions (second table), the gap between opinion writers and their colleagues comes close to disappearing and the gap between North Americans and others with regard to war coverage expands substantially (to 57% vs. 79%).

17. When you search a crisis-intervention organization's Web site, what do you look for? Check all that apply.

As percent of responses	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Contact names, phone numbers, e-mail	16%	18%	13%	17%	15%	17%
News of current projects	14%	14%	14%	14%	14%	15%
Explanation of organization's mission and history	12%	14%	10%	13%	11%	13%
Archive of press releases	11%	11%	12%	11%	10%	14%
Links to other groups doing similar work	9%	9%	11%	9%	10%	9%
Archive of reports on group's activities	9%	8%	10%	9%	9%	7%
Links to governmental organizations	8%	7%	9%	8%	8%	8%
Photos, video, audio for use by journalists	8%	6%	9%	7%	9%	6%
Links to academics	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%	7%
Donor information	5%	6%	4%	5%	5%	5%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60
Total number of responses=	1394	729	561	479	594	274

As percent of respondents	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Contact names, phone numbers, e-mail	77%	87%	71%	90%	74%	77%
News of current projects	69%	73%	75%	76%	70%	68%
Explanation of organization's mission and history	59%	68%	55%	69%	56%	60%
Archive of press releases	53%	51%	62%	61%	47%	63%
Links to other groups doing similar work	46%	42%	58%	47%	50%	42%
Archive of reports on group's activities	42%	37%	53%	48%	46%	33%
Links to governmental organizations	37%	32%	46%	41%	38%	35%
Photos, video, audio for use by journalists	37%	28%	50%	39%	44%	27%
Links to academics	31%	30%	32%	30%	35%	30%
Donor information	24%	28%	24%	27%	35%	32%
Other	4%	6%	4%	6%	25%	2%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60
Total number of responses=	1394	729	561	479	594	275

Contact names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and current news lead the list of journalists' desires. But many other items also rank high.

Journalists from outside North America are significantly more likely to use a humanitarian NGO's Web site in imaginative ways than are their counterparts from North America. For example: 62% (versus 51%) search for the press release archive; 58% (versus 42%) want links to other groups doing similar work, 53% (versus 37%) want an archive of a group's activities; 50% (versus 28%) want a multimedia archive.

NGOs should pay attention to all the items listed; even the least popular, donor information, is desired by a quarter of all journalists. And contributors want this information anyway.

18. Aside from a group's Web site, do you use any of the following online resources for crisis intervention reporting? Check all that apply.

As might be expected (see tables below), Web sites of parent organizations are used by the most respondents, 57% (among reporters, 68%). Web sites that index or group crisis intervention groups, such as AlertNet and Yahoo, also rate highly; 43% use them (and 54% of those outside North America). LISTSERVs are also fairly widely used. As with most other usage patterns, there are not many differences among various subsets of journalists. But USENET newsgroups (accessible through most e-mail providers and through Google) are much more popular outside North America (18% use them) than in (10%). If one removes the 10% of the sample that has no experience doing crisis reporting, the numbers above are all increased by about 10% (not 10 percentage points).

% of all respondents using (multiple responses allowed)	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Web sites of parent organizations such as CARE or the International Red Cross	57%	62%	58%	68%	60%	50%
Web sites that index crisis-intervention groups, such as Yahoo or AlertNet	43%	40%	54%	49%	45%	40%
LISTSERVs (automated mailing lists, which send messages to those who ask to be put on the list)	21%	22%	21%	28%	19%	20%
Usenet newsgroups (or similar "forums" offered on the Web)	12%	10%	18%	14%	12%	10%
No experience doing crisis reporting	10%	10%	9%	7%	12%	15%
Chat room(s)	3%	4%	3%	1%	4%	2%
Other	6%	8%	3%	4%	6%	7%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60
Number of responses =	441	235	176	154	190	86

% respondents who do crisis reporting who use:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Web sites of parent organizations such as CARE or the International Red Cross	63%	68%	65%	73%	67%	59%
Web sites that index crisis-intervention groups, such as Yahoo or AlertNet	48%	45%	59%	52%	50%	47%
LISTSERVs (automated mailing lists, which send messages to those who ask to be put on the list)	23%	24%	23%	30%	21%	24%
Usenet newsgroups (or similar "forums" offered on the Web)	14%	11%	20%	15%	14%	12%
Chat room(s)	3%	4%	3%	1%	5%	2%
Other	6%	9%	3%	5%	7%	8%
N=	261	136	96	84	107	51

19. In a breaking crisis, how do you find organizations working at the scene?

% of all respondents:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Check sites of organizations already known to you, in the crisis region	52%	53%	56%	49%	61%	52%
Check media in the region	49%	44%	60%	57%	53%	42%
Google or other search engine	43%	43%	46%	43%	46%	43%
Check headquarters sites first such as those of International Red Cross or CARE	41%	44%	40%	47%	45%	35%
Check government sites in crisis region	35%	34%	42%	40%	36%	33%
No experience doing crisis reporting	12%	16%	8%	10%	14%	15%
Check indexing sites first, such as AlertNet and ReliefWeb	11%	7%	20%	8%	13%	12%
Other	4%	6%	3%	6%	3%	5%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60

% respondents who do crisis reporting who use:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers
Web sites of parent organizations such as CARE or the International Red Cross	63%	68%	65%	73%	67%	59%
Web sites that index crisis-intervention groups, such as Yahoo or AlertNet	48%	45%	59%	52%	50%	47%
LISTSERVs (automated mailing lists, which send messages to those who ask to be put on the list)	23%	24%	23%	30%	21%	24%
Usenet newsgroups (or similar "forums" offered on the Web)	14%	11%	20%	15%	14%	12%
Chat room(s)	3%	4%	3%	1%	5%	2%
Other	6%	9%	3%	5%	7%	8%
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Check sites of organizations already known to you, in the crisis region	52%	53%	56%	49%	61%	52%
Check media in the region	49%	44%	60%	57%	53%	42%
Google or other search engine	43%	43%	46%	43%	46%	43%
Check headquarters sites first such as those of International Red Cross or CARE	41%	44%	40%	47%	45%	35%
Check government sites in crisis region	35%	34%	42%	40%	36%	33%
No experience doing crisis reporting	12%	16%	8%	10%	14%	15%
Check indexing sites first, such as AlertNet and ReliefWeb	11%	7%	20%	8%	13%	12%
Other	4%	6%	3%	6%	3%	5%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60

About half the respondents in our survey (48%) report that they are not getting any form of communications from crisis-intervention NGOs. But some of this might be due to the devastating earthquake December 26 in Bam, Iran. In the wake of the earthquake, NGOs actually cut back their flow of routine press releases, due to staffing shortages and the belief that the crisis would sell itself. Relief organizations working elsewhere realized that Bam would be absorbing the press's attention, giving another reason to cut back. Sending press releases by e-mail has become the norm – 39% of our sample respondents report getting e-mail from crisis NGOs. That's double the next most popular method, fax. Faxes and press releases by regular mail worldwide are dying out for all PR uses.

21. How else might crisis-intervention organizations help you? Check all that apply.

% of all respondents mention:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Maintain Web links with other organizations (that is, links on other useful Web sites likely to be seen by journalists)	50%	54%	50%	52%	55%	50%	50%	51%
Hold news conferences	46%	44%	58%	57%	46%	40%	49%	45%
Participate in academic conferences likely to be attended by journalists	41%	40%	49%	38%	50%	35%	43%	41%
Provide free editorial material (images, video, articles)	39%	30%	57%	38%	45%	40%	45%	37%
Run journalism training	38%	25%	61%	44%	39%	35%	41%	37%
Run seminars	37%	31%	50%	42%	39%	33%	41%	35%
Provide transport into the field for journalists	37%	32%	49%	48%	36%	28%	40%	35%
Provide teaching material for journalists or journalism schools	33%	28%	47%	37%	39%	25%	31%	35%
Provide transport from journalists' home country to country of crisis	31%	21%	49%	42%	27%	30%	33%	30%
"Wine and dine" journalists and/or their editors/publishers	6%	4%	8%	9%	7%	3%	7%	6%
Other	3%	4%	2%	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60	96	194

Journalists most want what most NGOs are loath to do: place links on their Web sites to other groups doing similar things or serving in the same areas. Next most popular on the journalists' wish list (and most popular for journalists outside North America) is for NGOs to hold more press conferences. Such meetings are sought more by journalists outside North America (58% mentioned it) than inside (44%). Non-North American journalists, typically with far fewer resources, also ask for training, travel help, and free editorial material such as images and video. The journalistic "culture," especially with respect to taking funds and holding new conferences, is somewhat startling but absolutely in line with other studies.

22. What do you consider to be the most difficult barrier to your crisis reporting or to crisis reporting by others in your media organization?

% of respondents mentioning::	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Cost of sending reporters or photographers	58%	55%	71%	66%	58%	57%	57%	58%
Lack of timely response from groups at the scene	34%	35%	41%	42%	31%	35%	33%	35%
Inability to link up with groups doing crisis intervention work at the scene	27%	23%	33%	30%	27%	27%	31%	25%
Inadequate information on Web to support story pitches (lack of statistics, success stories, etc.)	22%	15%	35%	19%	30%	15%	24%	21%
Lack of coordination between groups at the scene and their own parent/umbrella organizations	21%	20%	25%	22%	23%	18%	17%	24%
Inadequate supplementary material to include with finished stories (photos, audio, video, etc.)	12%	6%	22%	7%	17%	10%	11%	12%
Other	9%	10%	8%	9%	11%	7%	7%	9%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60	96	194

Cost emerged as by far the tallest barrier to coverage – mentioned by 55% of North American journalists and 71% of those from elsewhere. Lack of timely response from groups at the scene was the second biggest problem, mentioned by one-third of all journalists. This ties in strongly with comments from NGO press relations personnel – they push for more help from "headquarters" because they have limited staff time during emergencies and limited knowledge of how the press works. A key need – mentioned by 35% of non-North Americans and 15% of North Americans – is for more information on NGO Web sites to support a story pitch; 30% of the editors agreed. Outside North America there is a critical need for photos, audio, and video. A fifth of the respondents sense a lack of coordination between groups at the scene and their own parent organizations.

23. Do you sense any trend in the past five years in how you or your colleagues cover crises, or in press criticism or skepticism about crisis-intervention or humanitarian aid organizations' work?

% of respondents offering an opinion:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Yes, more coverage	59%	53%	66%	61%	59%	55%	50%	63%
Yes, less coverage	19%	24%	11%	27%	16%	17%	29%	15%
No real change	22%	24%	23%	12%	25%	28%	21%	22%
N=	155	76	71	49	73	29	52	103

% of respondents offering an opinion:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Yes, more criticism and skepticism by press	54%	47%	56%	65%	48%	57%	46%	58%
Yes, less criticism and skepticism by press	13%	13%	13%	16%	16%	5%	23%	9%
No real change in past five years	33%	40%	31%	19%	36%	38%	31%	33%
N=	104	45	52	31	50	21	35	69

By a three-to-one margin, respondents say coverage of humanitarian aid operations is up, conflicting somewhat with NGO press officer opinion. Also by a three-to-one margin, respondents say criticism and skepticism in the press about relief organizations has also increased. Among columnists, editorial writers and opinion writers, the gap is 11-to-one (57% versus 5%). Criticism even increased in the wake of the Bam disaster.

24. In your experience, what makes a crisis story MOST compelling for your editors? Check no more than three.

% of respondents mentioning:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
High death toll	49%	46%	61%	58%	49%	42%	45%	51%
Involvement of aid workers from your region	32%	44%	22%	32%	36%	32%	29%	34%
General humanitarian concerns	30%	26%	34%	29%	31%	27%	32%	28%
Availability of material that helps tell a compelling story (photos, video, audio, interviews by phone or e-mail, etc.)	28%	24%	34%	30%	34%	18%	25%	29%
Readers/viewers/listeners of same background as those suffering	27%	34%	23%	36%	26%	22%	27%	27%
Children suffering	25%	18%	40%	28%	25%	25%	26%	25%
Foreign policy implications for editors' country	20%	17%	22%	26%	21%	15%	21%	20%
Coverage by the competition	14%	14%	16%	19%	12%	15%	16%	13%
Involvement of a celebrity	7%	4%	11%	4%	9%	7%	9%	5%
Other	5%	8%	1%	3%	7%	7%	4%	6%
N=	290	151	106	90	12	60	96	194

Almost half the respondents (49%) say that a high death toll is the best reason to run a relief story. Among non-North American journalists, the death toll angle is mentioned almost twice as often as any other, by 61% of the respondents. There were sharp differences about what makes a story compelling, throughout the data. Non-North Americans, for instance, are twice as likely to select children suffering (40% versus 18%), but North Americans were more likely to mention readers of the same background as those suffering (34% versus 23%) and involvement of aid workers from the readership or viewership area (44% versus 22%). Death toll loomed more important after Bam (51% mentioning) than before (45%); the difference is barely significant. Respondents were allowed to check as many as three responses from a list, or mention their own.

In line with other questions' responses, compelling visuals were mentioned by a third of the respondents.

25. With the exception of Iraq, is it getting harder to get onto and stay on the news agenda (that is, to get crisis stories published/aired) than in the past year or two? And if so, why?

% of those responding:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Yes, lack of journalistic resources (staff layoffs, budget cuts, etc.)	28%	26%	36%	36%	26%	25%	28%	28%
Yes, fatigue, many older crises continue long-term	26%	21%	35%	32%	26%	18%	23%	27%
Yes, concentration on Iraq, Afghanistan	22%	23%	23%	26%	23%	18%	24%	21%
Yes, lack of new angles in older crises	21%	16%	31%	27%	20%	17%	19%	22%
Yes, crises outside of Iraq seem small and less newsworthy by comparison	17%	13%	24%	19%	21%	10%	16%	18%
No, no difference	25%	30%	20%	19%	25%	37%	30%	22%
Other	5%	7%	2%	8%	3%	5%	6%	4%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60	96	194

Lack of journalistic resources and crisis fatigue are the two biggest reasons keeping crisis stories off the news agenda; each was mentioned by more than a quarter of the respondents (and more than a third of respondents outside of North America). Reporters tended to be more in agreement (36% cite lack of resources; 32% crisis fatigue); this is far higher than what editors and columnists say. Respondents consistently put Iraq and Afghanistan in third place, followed closely by "lack of new angles," which actually ranked third outside North America. Only one-in-six (17%) said Iraq made other crises seem small; this was mentioned by only 13% of North Americans but 24% of respondents from elsewhere.

26. Has there been an increase in demand by your editors (or you, if you are an editor) for photography, audio or videos showing work in the field in the past few years?

% of those responding:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Yes	54%	47%	65%	48%	58%	56%	58%	51%
No	46%	53%	35%	52%	42%	44%	42%	49%
N=	259	137	102	83	117	52	88	171

There were sharp disagreements among various types of respondents about whether demand for imagery and audio has increased in the past few years. Comments suggest the responses are quite specific to the particular media organization. Demand has risen more sharply outside North America.

27. Do you see any recent trends in your reporting colleagues' behavior with regard to courtesy, knowledge base, or approach to stories? Check all that apply.

% of respondents answering:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Yes, more knowledgeable	30%	17%	50%	32%	36%	20%	27%	32%
Yes, less knowledgeable	20%	23%	18%	20%	18%	28%	27%	16%
Yes, more courteous	11%	7%	18%	13%	9%	15%	5%	14%
Yes, less courteous	12%	11%	14%	13%	11%	15%	16%	10%
No	34%	46%	23%	37%	33%	38%	35%	34%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60	96	194

There were big differences between respondents from North America and those from outside North America. In general, the latter were much more likely to describe the trend as being toward knowledgeable, courteous behavior. Half the respondents from outside North America said their colleagues have become more knowledgeable; only 17% of North Americas said so.

28. Respondents were asked to comment on this point as well.

Selected comments:

Hey, I was probably rude and stupid too when I first started in this business.

Feedback from some of my editors tells me that some reporters take shortcuts that shortchange readers by providing inaccurate and incomplete information.

All of my crisis reporting has been on a local level: fires, shootings, peripheral work on 9-11 in New York, car wrecks, etc. Years of doing this have led me to question our profession's approach to EMTs, firefighters, hospital staff, police, etc.

"Knowledgeable" and "courteous" reporters will depend on the situation. In general, the local media based in that community will do better on both counts than the regional/national media.

Most of the above questions concern larger news organizations that deal with crisis coverage. We are a weekly paper, whose main concern is local community news.

Many papers using less knowledgeable, less educated and less experienced freelancers and reporters.

I believe that the media do not understand the powerful impact that they can have on a disaster or crisis and that HOW they cover an event can impact the outcome.

Lack of funds to pay journalists seems to result in papers hiring less educated, less skilled colleagues.

I don't understand the courtesy part of that question. My staff is generally well behaved.

Generally speaking, reporters tend to rotate in and out of beats. So they are always in the position of learning. Even if a reporter is assigned to cover a particular disaster or humanitarian crisis, there are always others to help.

I try to help them understand that things are not always as they seem e.g. there are lots of disasters in America but no-one rushes to help them. Why? Why not? We're all together in this thing called life.

Some of my colleagues have received training by Reuters, other organizations, local institutions and organizations. Some have become more experienced.

I work in a local radio station in Scotland where our international news comes to us from IRN. This may explain why some of my answers seem to be contradictory. We have disaster/crisis stories in our news but I've never worked in the field. We will interview locals.

I think with technological advances, reporting in crisis zones has become slightly easier, allowing reporters to understand the people they are reporting on better and gives them time to understand the cultures they come across.

Journalists don't have deep knowledge about one issue. They know a little bit about many things, what result in a superficial coverage and don't allow them to find new focus.

My colleagues likely pick up any news that is easy for them to translate and release on air, except that news is a must. Besides scripts from news provided by agencies, my colleagues hardly search for more information from other online sources.

There is always a high turnover of journalists working on these stories. Sometimes they are changed before you can notice any real change and it is hard to study the behavior and attitudes of news people in the field.

29. What is the most newsworthy humanitarian crisis worldwide that you feel is being underreported, and why?

A selection of responses:

Africa	Indigenous Peoples	Religious Persecution
Child Labor	Iran, not Just Bam	Russia Environment
Climate Change	Iraqi Civilians	Rwanda
Colombia	Kashmir	SARS
Congo	Kosovo	Slavery
Cuba	Latin America	Somalia
Degradation, Family Values	Liberia	Sri Lanka
Earmarked US Aid Spending	Malaria, Other Curable	Sudan
Eurocentrism	Diseases	Teenage Violence
Floods In Asia	Mexico	Urban Poverty and
Globalization	Migration Due To Failed	Violence in US
Haiti	Economies	Venezuela Human Rights
Health Care for USA	North Korea	Violence Against Women
Hope	Other than Middle East	and Children
Hunger and Extreme Poverty	and Afghanistan	Zimbabwe
Outside Africa	Palestinians	

30. Which of the following might you find useful for your reporting or for your publication or broadcast outlet's reporting? Check all that apply.

% of respondents mentioning:	ALL	North America	Outside North America	Reporters	Editors	Columnists, Editorial Writers	Pre-Bam	Post-Bam
Crisis profiles: Basic primers on a crisis background, with key facts and current status	60%	66%	60%	70%	59%	60%	57%	62%
A directory showing which NGOs are doing what, to aid you in tracking down interviewees	55%	58%	58%	59%	50%	67%	57%	54%
A regular e-mail service (weekly or monthly) giving a roundup of the latest emergencies, a diary of crisis-related media events, and early warning of possible future emergencies	51%	48%	62%	61%	51%	45%	52%	51%
Independently financed (non-NGO, non-governmental) trips, perhaps handled by independent foundations on a fellowship basis, to visit crises	42%	28%	64%	49%	40%	42%	39%	43%
A personalized e-mail service alerting you to new material from emergency relief organizations (situation reports, photos, etc.) in the areas of your interest	41%	37%	49%	50%	41%	38%	45%	40%
A request engine that would automatically circulate your request for photos, videos, etc. to NGOs active in a particular area	35%	31%	42%	41%	35%	32%	36%	35%
An interview request engine specifically for interviews with celebrities involved with specific crises	22%	14%	33%	29%	18%	25%	24%	21%
Other	2%	4%	1%	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%
N=	290	151	106	90	121	60	96	194

An independent organization to fund trips into crisis areas topped the wish list for those outside North America. Up-to-date "crisis profiles" with the latest news were mentioned most by respondents from North America.

31. Finally, is there anything else you'd like to say?

There were 99 responses to this final question. Here's a selection:

NGOs do great work. But we don't want a polemic when we call them. We want a specific response to a specific question. We want numbers. We want background.

It would be useful to provide training for journalists, divided into two different groups: "technical" training for reporters and training for editors to increase their involvement in these subjects and thus encourage their willingness to publish stories.

For local/regional media the most useful thing would be building links with individuals who work for aid organizations in the field but are from their area. It's not just that the local angle is always news for us, it would bring the story of a disaster closer.

Certain crises enjoy more coverage for various reasons, mostly political, like Iraq, whereas others like poverty or natural disasters in Africa are not considered worth sustaining because there is no high visibility and there is no agenda.

As the editor of a small newsweekly, I have few resources. Nonetheless, I have a keen interest in global issues such as environmental degradation, terrorism, human rights, and issues pertaining to women and children. I am always looking for stories about that.

Humanitarian organizations and human rights groups need to start doing simple things like answering phones, updating Web sites, maintaining statistics, things like that. Frankly, most reporters don't care about the history of Amnesty International, for example.

High turnover in media has resulted in much reporting done by less experienced and less informed reporters who often don't ask some key questions or don't provide adequate context.

The Internet has helped increase general knowledge and email has increased coverage...

As a feature writer who focuses on local people, this survey is not that connected to what I do. I have done a story about a Zimbabwean university researcher beginning AIDS work in his home country. Have also written about the stress of the war on local populations.

You don't understand how journalists work, and you overestimate the role that NGOs and aid organizations play in coverage of a disaster. The great majority of our crisis intervention/war coverage is from wire services - principally NY Times, LA Times, Washington Post, Knight Ridder, and AP. So we have little or no contact with the reporters.

Please understand, I am affiliated with National Public Radio, which does the majority of the international crises reporting (with the exception of something with a local angle). My first answers were in response to what our station airs...

What I note is a lack of credible news coverage that goes beyond what has been handed out at press conferences. That is important in making an assessment as an editorial writer.

It seems that as we are pressed, with fewer journalists reporting more and more news, we have become more courteous and helpful with each other... but also less knowledgeable about the stories we are writing because its always "hurry, hurry to the next crisis."

A stunning number of "journalists" initiate coverage of their stories lacking adequate awareness/knowledge coupled with astonishingly low critical thinking skills.

I think that lack of etiquette and common courtesy, both among ourselves and to the public, is a huge problem among journalists. I think it shows most often in negligence, such as not bothering to return calls or respond to e-mails.

Many of the "international correspondents" practice "parachute journalism." They arrive, talk to a few diplomats, usually from their own country, and report back as fact slanted stories, citing "diplomatic sources." The story angles are exaggerated and are usually wrong.

It's a dog-eat-dog environment. 24-hour news has made it worse. Quality is suffering at the expense of budget cuts, dependence on agencies and simple competition.

The desire to learn is strong, but where to get the knowledge remains a headache.

There is a general lack of preparation. Courtesy, in general, becomes a commodity when there is a blank page or 30 seconds on air.

In Germany, the number of journalists specialized on Third-World-themes has declined. So, too often, journalists with a small knowledge have to cover crises. The result is a sensational orientated reporting, which doesn't ask for the reasons for the crises.

The gap between the developed and developing world is so huge now, my British colleagues cannot empathize with the lost cause of the Third World.

Most often, the same approach to writing stories is being used - primarily focusing on the death toll or the damage.

We always want to know more about the background, the scenario and the human story. Greed and graft changes the angle of the stories and it varies from individual to individual, and that results in twisting of the facts and masses continue to suffer.

There is no shortage of information for journalists but finding accurate, neutral information can be tricky. I tend to stick to trusted sources either on the ground or from a trusted news or crisis intervention organization.

I think here in Brazil many journalists are trying to get exclusive interviews with people related to humanitarian crisis. In the last past years, Brazil's coverage of international crises only were covered through news agency material.

In the Philippines, I think that covering a crisis story or conflict were centered more on the perpetrators than on the victims. The bulk of the presentation of the story gets its juice on violence than the real issue and a lot of times it can be so frustrating.

Hey, you guys completely forgot about gov't/military imposing censorship or making life harder in general for reporters, particularly in countries like Venezuela. However, there is a lot of fatigue, so issues tend to get dropped quickly without any follow up.

Crisis reporting is mostly done by media in Western, developed countries who can afford to send reporters and photographers to Africa. But the readers of the rest of the developing world have no idea what is happening in Africa - except through TV appeals.

I wish if it is possible, to give us, we, African journalists, the opportunity to run seminars or training about war or humanitarian crisis reporting. The most conflicts still are covered by Western journalists.

Forging close ties between relief agencies and the media will make information exchange and flow a lot easier. If what I have seen between Relief Web and Reuters could be replicated with a number of news organizations, we can pretty much lessen the burden.

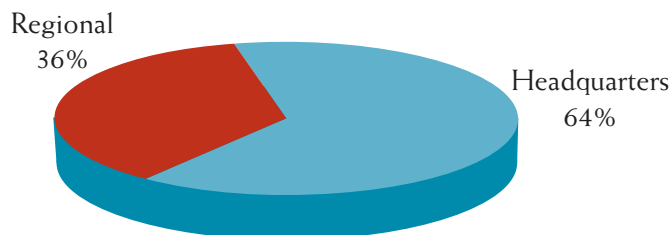
The reporters here at Guatemala, have limited resources, we would like to be in touch with colleagues around the world so we can cover these kinds of events.

In the face of so much worldwide suffering, it's hard to find 'fresh' ways of covering humanitarian crises without leaving our readers jaded. And for a regional paper like ours, our primary role is to report on events in our local area.

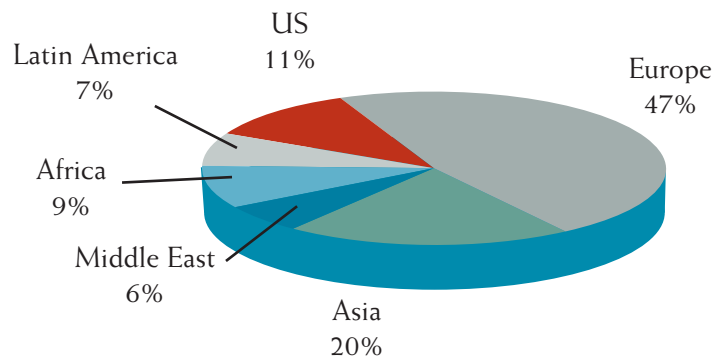
SURVEY OF AID ORGANIZATION PERSONNEL WITH PRESS RELATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES

Press officers and other NGO officials were surveyed by e-mail and telephone. About two-thirds of the 54 interviewed were members of headquarters staff, often working at the national office of a multinational relief organization. One-third were staff members in regional offices. Eleven percent were from North America; 47% were working in Europe.

Type of NGO contact



NGO sample, by region



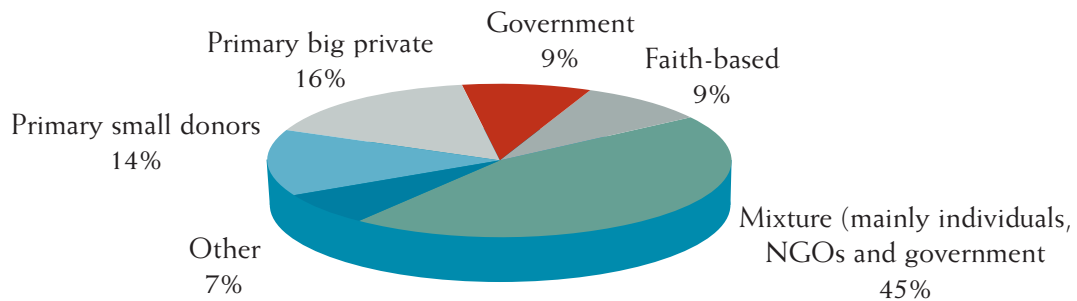
Information for the first 10 questions was gathered by looking at organizations' Web sites (especially Web sites of field offices, where available) as well as by personal interviewing of NGO press officers.

- 1. Do you consider your organization's funding driven by small contributors or more as a group that channels funds provided by big (private, faith-based or governmental) contributors? Choices were: Primarily small; primarily relying on big private donors or corporations; primarily relying on governmental sources (not necessarily the funding of the organization's home-country government); primarily relying on faith-based funding; mixture; other.**

Almost half the organizations in our sample use a mixture of funding sources, including: individuals, other NGOs (typically foundations) and government support. The mix varies,

even among local chapters and offices of international organizations such as CARE and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Funding is a sensitive issue; only 23 groups of the 43 that agreed to supply information went into any detail on this point with our interviewers.

Sources of funding (43 respondents)



Primarily small donors	6	14%
Primarily big private	7	16%
Government	4	9%
Faith-based	4	9%
Mixture (mainly individuals, NGOs and government)	19	44%
Other	3	7%

One comment: "Does [my group] need a high profile? Yes, because we don't have a tremendous amount of unrestricted funds. We get funds from foundations and from governments but when it comes to regular people, they don't know who we are."

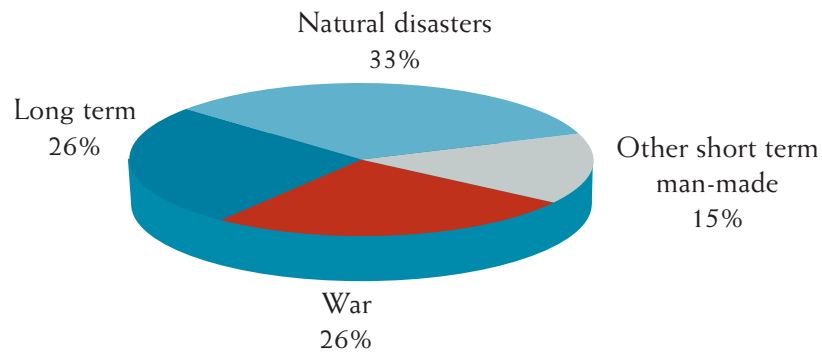
2. In a crisis, does your organization typically act directly, or through local groups? (Check as many as apply.) Choices were: directly; through local government; through local humanitarian organizations; through local individuals only; other.

Twenty-four of the 54 mentions were for "direct" action. Most of those who said they act directly in a crisis – bringing their own staff and resources to bear – also said they act through local government and local humanitarian groups.

3. What kinds of crises do you specialize in? Check as many as apply. Choices were: War, long-term, natural disasters; other short-term man-made.

About half of the NGO respondents we talked to or checked the Web sites for in this survey specialize in long-term issues such as war, famine and poverty, rather than short-term man-made problems such as natural disasters specifically. But they also said that their organization overall might have a different focus most years. The fact is, 2003 was an unusual year, with Iraq and other Middle Eastern conflict added to ongoing poverty concerns.

**What types of crises do you specialize in?
(55 organizations; 88 answers)**



War	23	26%
Natural disasters	29	33%
Other short term man-made	13	15%
Long term	23	26%
Other	0	0%
Total	88	

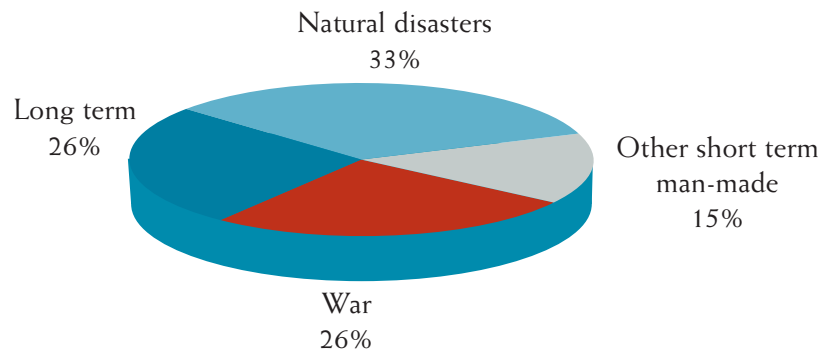
4. Does your organization have a Web site? Choices were Yes, No, and under construction or planned.

Only two of the groups we surveyed do not have a Web site. But sites for two others were not operating for long stretches in September and October 2003 while we were initially surveying. Both were running in January 2004.

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5. What languages does the site feature? List:

English	
(or English and another language)	27
Spanish only	2
Danish only	1
Dutch only	1
Norwegian only	0
Japanese only	0
Belgian (Flemish) only	1
German only	1
Italian only	1

English is featured on most (27 of 34 as of January 17, 2004) of the sites we looked at in detail. But we did find seven sites with no English section, or only a small partial translation into English.

6. Is the site a standalone (that is, can it be reached through a second-level domain name, something like crisis.org)? Choices were Yes and No.

Most organizations of this type, even regional offices of international groups, have their own domain name, but about one-quarter were housed only on other sites.

Standalone	21
Secondary only	6

7. If not, do you use a section of another organization's Web site? (For example, a third-level domain name would be crisis.dogoodersite.org.)

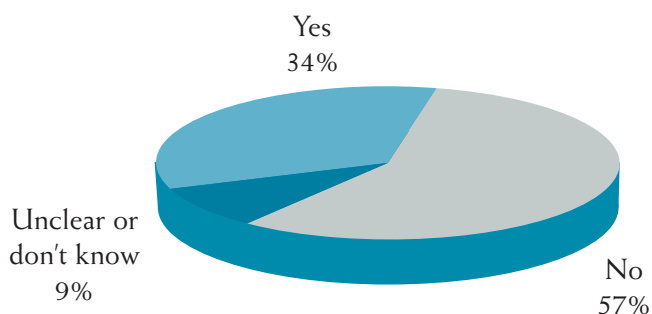
We ultimately found 16 such sites, and there surely are more. These are organizations who typically are listed on third-party sites such as AlertNet, and various foundation sites, but which do NOT have a site with a domain name of their own. Many are regional offices of large international groups.

8. Can all parts of your Web site be searched through Google or other search engines? Choices were Yes, No, and Don't know.

Few sites are organized so that Google and other search engines can search reliably beyond their home page. The reasons include lack of searchable material on other pages (photos only, for instance), pages that are framed (When a page is inside a frame, it can scroll or be

updated while other material on the screen - perhaps a menu or organization logo - stays the same). Framed pages are efficient, in that framing reduces the amount of new material that has to be sent to someone viewing the site. Such pages are often more efficient to maintain as well because standard items like menus do not have to be updated throughout the site. A few sites use pages generated by a database system (active server pages, for instance). Only six sites of the 32 studied in depth have an internal search engine. (Google will help sites set up internal engines using Google technology.)

Can all parts of your Web site be searched through Google or other search engines?

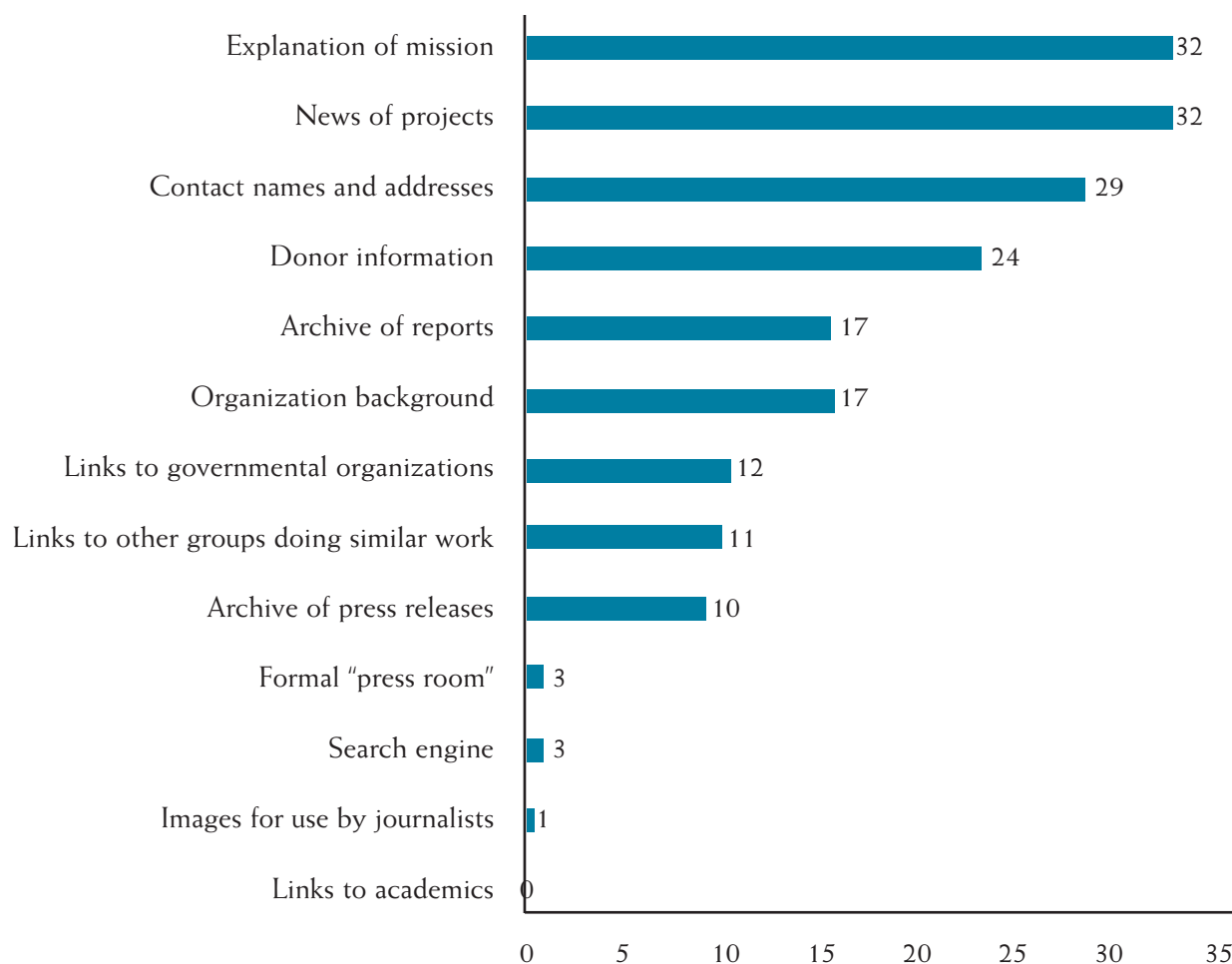


Yes	11
No	18
Unclear or don't know	3
Total	32

9. Your Web site includes:

Every site we looked at in detail offered news of projects and an explanation of the organization's mission. But three of the 32 lacked contact names and addresses and 8 lacked information on donors that might attract other donors. Only 17 of the 32 described the organization's background, or included an archive of reports on current and past projects and only a third (10 of 32) included an archive of past press releases. Eleven included links to organizations doing similar work and 12 included links to governmental organizations involved in the same area.

Web sites include (32 sites examined)



Said one respondent at headquarters: "It is a huge problem. I do all the publications, the annual report, the Web site. The VP of communications also lends a hand."

10. Does your organization have an online presence aside from the Web, such as: chat rooms, LISTSERVs, Usenet or e-mail?

Fifteen of the organizations have an online presence aside from the Web. These can include chat rooms, LISTSERVs, Usenet and e-mail. Fifteen did not. Two respondents had no idea; their Web sites did not mention availability.

SPECIFIC SURVEY RESPONSES

Information in this section was gathered by sending a survey form via e-mail to press officers, mainly in field offices, and also by follow-up interviewing. About half the interviews were conducted by phone and half by e-mail.

1. In a crisis, who handles press relations - headquarters or staff on the site of the crisis? Check as many as apply.

Headquarters staff does much of the press relations function, among those who responded to this question or who were willing to discuss the situation in an interview. Among the small group of 18 responders (from 13 different international organizations but all from different regional or headquarters offices), local staffers said they handle mainly trip details and the coordination of local coverage, but typically after discussion with headquarters. Once a journalist is on the scene, however, relations are often quite informal. Several respondents noted that although their title and job description might include press relations, in an immediate new, growing crisis (the kind journalists would probably consider most newsworthy), their duties expand and there isn't much time for coordination or niceties. Do journalists take advantage? A few respondents said the issues typically involved journalists' personal safety, transportation problems, and possible violations of privacy. One said "journalists take orders in the field when they know we're serious."

HQ staff only	16
HQ staff usually*	1
Own local staff*	1
Local NGOs	1

* Answers from same respondent

We realize that our sample for this question is small and did not involve groups in war zones or groups who were handling an immediate, enlarging acute problem such as a disease outbreak. All were handling chronic humanitarian aid missions.

Typical comments:

Generally, if we have a media officer based where the crisis is, [he or she is] responsible for generating news stories and liaising with the media who are on location. [Our] member agencies then deal with the media in their own countries. [Our international headquarters] also has a half-post for a coordinating media officer whose responsibility it is to ensure media officers around the world [our regional offices] coordinate actions and share information. This post is currently filled by somebody in [our organization's] Netherlands office.

[We have] recently hired a permanent overseas communications officer who will head to the site of an emergency, and handle press issues, in coordination with headquarters.

We use an expat media officer who goes to the site of crisis.

Many comments were a variation on this one: "Press relations will also be handled by staff on the ground, but overall coordination will rest with head office."

[We] keep international staffs small and hire mostly nationals so there is no one on the ground to take this role. They don't have the time to say to reporters, "Why don't you come along with me and I'll show you the clinics we set up today."

[We] spend very little money on PR. There's no field-based staff for media relations or external affairs. Rarely, we have scraped together money for crisis settings in Pakistan, briefly in Liberia and Iraq, Afghanistan in 2002. We're responsive to queries but do not stimulate coverage.

We have six or eight people in Afghanistan, dedicated to stimulating coverage.

2. How many separate crisis actions did your organization (that is, the organization you work on directly; not the parent organization if there is one) handle since January 1, 2002?

What is a crisis, anyway? Only 8 respondents described being involved in separate crises since January 2002. Two of them described seven separate crises, in fact. Respondents from three other organizations described their involvement as continuous in as many as three crises at the same time. It appears that some responders consider the basic mission as "normal" and only a local worsening (say, in a specific town or village) as a "crisis," however. One respondent said she did not consider such localized worsened conditions newsworthy, saying that reporting on such situations could make it appear that an entire region is also sliding toward a disaster.

Note: responses were 7, 7, 5, 4, 3, 3, 1, 1 crises; these were all regional staff.

3. What is your organization's overall staffing level for press relations?

Staffing is thin for press relations – a smattering of full-time professionals and support staff. There are full-timers who handle the press part-time. This is consistent with responses that suggest most press inquiries are handled "by headquarters" and consistent with responses that suggest press budgets are minimal. It may also be that budgets do not account for someone handling three tasks, one of which is press relations in a regional office or in the

field. There was an undertone in the interviews, that funders typically want publicity but do not want to pay for it, at least not as an identifiable budget item.

Nevertheless, responses indicate that officials in local offices have at least a good understanding of journalists' needs – an understanding learned in the field and on the job. Also, some large organizations reported large staffs. One respondent reported 21 full-time press relations personnel and another 15. The next highest total was six; no one else was over two among the 11 respondents.

4. Does your organization have a specific budget for media relations? Yes, No or Don't Know.

Only 9 of the respondents said they had a specific budget for press relations within field offices. Most respondents left this blank and didn't want to talk in detail with our callers about this. Looking at notes, it seems that there are also a few unpaid press services -- either volunteers or full-timers who work without pay as interns.

Yes	9
No	3
Don't know	2

Said one: "The idea of actually investing money in this... Everyone knows the more we raise visibility the more we can solicit money. But the programs themselves don't budget [press relations] in their proposals. They want headquarters to do it. Maybe we will try to get a grant for people to start gaining visibility. It is still not a priority for the development department, so there will have to be a cultural change."

Said another: "I went [from the USA] to Liberia for two weeks. There was a small window, lasted a month, then media interest is gone. The night I arrived I went to the hotel where all the journalists stayed, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and so forth, arranged interviews with everyone in a few days."

5. Of this, roughly what percent is devoted to media relations specifically concerning crisis work (include overhead as well as direct expenses but do not include the work you might do for general fundraising or advocacy): 100- virtually all; 75-more than 75%; 50-more than 50%; 25-more than 25% (0=other).

Not a single respondent answered this question in our first round of questions, so we pressed. Ultimately, we garnered nine responses (one at 75%, one at 50%, three at 25%, two at 10%, one at 5%, and one at zero percent).

Said one: "For me it is frustrating because I have to wear too many hats here. I've been stuck writing donor newsletters rather than press outreach."

**6. Do you have at least one full-time chief press officer?
Yes or No, describe number.**

Respondents confused press officers locally with those in headquarters, but it is clear that few have a full-time press officer in local offices.

Yes	8
No	2
Number	1 to 6 at HQ, 8 regional in one organization

Many say this has caused problems. "In the field, the sense of time, of urgency, slows down. For development officers and donors we put on a bit of an act, meet-and-great things. But for press relations, they have to turn around on a dime and change their ideas, methods, to be straightforward and cut to the chase. Sometimes this sounds like a criticism, but I'm not criticizing the field offices."

Said another respondent, "In field offices you have to be able to handle both news sense and marketing but it isn't really fair. If you are in [small African country] you want to get as much money out of foundations as possible now, but in the West we know that how we are perceived in the press is of much greater importance [long-term]."

"Africans are real people with real problems. There has to be an understanding of equals. Africans need access to credit. They don't need the handout. That's the paradigm that doesn't work in development, the direct call to money. So we look for stories that appeal to the marketing side this way."

Said another: "Hiring young [women] who want to change the world. Bow around the Lincoln memorial and all hold hands. Marketing thinking, gimmick thinking, and that is what they are expecting from their people."

7. If not, what is the FTE (full-time equivalent) of the designated chief press officer's interaction with the press or spent in other duties?

The FTE concept just isn't used in a formal way to describe many of the respondents' specific duty, although it is used by a few to describe work devoted to a specific funder's project. Typically the "press officer" in a small organization also does fundraising and maintains the Web site. No one mentioned policy issue formulation as requiring a specific

amount of time, suggesting such duties are not large compared to everyday continuing staff work.

Said one press officer: "Press relations takes time. Is the project still great? It might have been a year ago. We don't want to say projects are flawless. But we do want to put our best foot forward."

Said another: "There are a lot of qualifiers from everybody. Iraq is no longer a program story; we won't be there long-term. So it is a news story. From a marketing point of view we are not trying to get donor money for it, or USAID money, either. But PR isn't driven by that. I'm working on a briefing for the United States Senate on rehabilitation of Iraqi schools, spend more money on education, not bombs."

8. Did the chief press officer have journalism or related experience such as in public relations before becoming press officer?

None of the respondents we talked to in regional offices claimed journalism experience, but some said the press officer at headquarters did have some journalism experience. Said one press officer: "Our media officers in Johannesburg tries to have all the people in Africa [in our field offices] have monthly phone conferences to go over issues, and to identify country officers who are best at press relations."

When we checked out headquarters, however, it seems that "journalism" can also mean "public relations" in this community, even when the job is specifically press relations and not marketing or fundraising specifically.

Nevertheless, when we talked to press relations officers at headquarters near the end of the survey process, all but two had actual journalism experience (often in radio or wire services). They also gave specific names of personnel in their regional hubs (offices specifically handling a number of field operations) and in field offices (handling specific crises or long-term aid missions) who did indeed have journalism backgrounds.

It suggests that credentialing and hiring practices for humanitarian relief organizations is informal, relative to the for-profit world. But the old image, of field offices staffed by eager, young and inexperienced press relations staffers, is not entirely true these days, even if it is the norm. See also the next question.

9. Describe the functions and experience levels of other members of your press relations staff involved with crisis communications:

The 9 reasonably detailed responses to this question indicate some press experience in a few instances. But the survey did not ask specifically whether the people they were talking about are at headquarters or in the field.

Some specific quotes:

[My organization] has a team of professionals qualified and trained in communications, who are involved in capturing, documenting and sharing information and experiences at various levels. The experience level is in the range of fresh to people with 10 years experience.

As there is only myself in the field, I can only account for my experience before joining [my organization] five years ago. I have a master's degree from Boston University in journalism and international relations, five years experience as a TV journalist, and one year as a press officer in Brussels before starting to work in crisis communications. Worked three years in HQ in [Europe], mostly responding to emergency situations and disasters before being posted in [Africa], where I have worked for two years. I am responsible for media relations, writing press releases, Web site stories, producing informational material, video news releases and developing advocacy campaigns, Q&As as a information tool for [my organization's] leaders, and so forth.

Much of the communication in crisis isn't done by press staff. It's often done in the field by someone involved in a disaster, someone who just happens to answer the phone. They may or may not have had media training. They may or may not think to call in the communications person in their own organization.

From a headquarters staffer: [My organization's] press officers are highly experienced in emergency situations like Kosovo, Afghanistan, Gujarat and Iraq. They work with international news media on the ground and in home countries [in this case, the USA]. They write messages, press releases, take photos/video, arrange interviews for senior staff as well as serving as spokespeople themselves when needed, write op-eds and letters to the editors, conduct media training.

[Press officers in my organization have] a mix of campaigning, journalism, broadcasting and press office experience.

The newly acquired overseas communications officer has extensive experience with communications, limited experience with television producing, broad experience with

organizational management in the financial field. Two of the part-time staffers are PR professionals, one part-timer is new to press relations.

Two very seasoned journalists/correspondents from internationally recognized media organizations [work abroad for us]. One is a specialist in TV (former international correspondent) the other has worked for internationally renowned print media organizations. Their functions are as spokespersons, media relations and creating original media assets (articles, documentaries, photos) that can be used to raise awareness of humanitarian issues

The Head of Communications and the press officer both are responsible for media relations, especially in a crisis to handle the number of requests. In other times, only the press officer handles the media relations. The head of communication is also responsible for fundraising, general PR and advertising. He has been working with our organization for ten years, before he worked for a PR agency. The press officer has been on this job for three years. Before that she worked as a TV journalist. Sometimes, in a crisis the third officer in our team – usually responsible for fundraising – handles some of the press relations as well. She has been with our organization for four years, before she worked for a PR agency and more than ten years as fundraiser for another organization

I have no experience – have only been in this newly created position since Dec. 1, 2003. So far involvement has been in form of issuing press releases, handling Web site development and maintenance, resources (pictures and case studies) and in-house [data processing.]

10. Describe the relationship between your top press relations staff and top officials in the organization. Responses were: reports directly to top officials; reports only when aid initiatives are discussed/voted upon; reports only when funding decisions are made; other.

We have 9 responses indicating that press relations staff report directly to top officials, including two suggesting that direct reporting happens only when aid initiatives are being discussed or funding decisions are being made. Four said there was no interaction between top press relations officials and top officials in the organization. These are headquarters people exclusively. Respondents in local offices described hearing from headquarters staff about such meetings and functions, but said they, themselves, rarely if ever get to headquarters.

The natural tension between “development” offices (fundraising) and press relations was obvious in some of the responses, but cooperation was evident as well, in others.

One UK-based group and one French organization claimed particularly good knowledge of media relations and cited examples of press “coups” for themselves.

11. Do you have a specific budget for sending your media personnel for training or outside courses? Yes, No, Don't know.

More than half responding to this question in the survey (8 of 13) say there are training budgets. But when we called others to expand the number of responses, no one knew of any amounts or policies for spending. The typical descriptions (looking at interviewer notes) seem to be occasional funding for attendance at specific training operations run for a few hours to a week in retreat settings by NGOs specializing in these kinds of things, or at headquarters annually, quarterly, or on some other regular basis. Some large aid organizations with many field offices try to do a weekly or monthly conference call to discuss emerging issues.

Several members of headquarters staffs in the United States, interviewed in the final weeks of this study, said they were thinking about applications for grants specifically for press officer training.

The American Red Cross has an old manual that may be updated, but relies on its intranet.

12. Which three areas of your Web site are most popular, based on your server logs or anecdotal evidence? Check no more than 3.

News of projects and explanation of mission are the most popular features of Web sites (along with a description of the organization's background), but they are also the most common. Those few that have a formal press room and archive of press releases find it popular, interviewers say. Only a smattering of responses on that point turned up in the survey itself. The reason is simple: Few take advantage of server logs to make this determination. The 23 responses below are from 13 respondents (they could check as many as three items).

News of projects	8
Explanation of mission	5
Organization background	4
Names and addresses	0
Search engine	0
Links to other groups doing similar work	0
Links to governmental organizations	0
Links to academics	0
Archive of press releases	3
Archive of reports	0
Images for use by journalists	0
Formal "press room"	1
Don't know	2

13. Rank by how journalists find your site with most popular visitor origin ranking 1. This requires that you use a web server log; if you don't have such data, leave blank.

There was almost no response (Two said Google was the largest source of site visitors, one said links from other sites were most important; three said specific e-mail domains such as AOL were the largest sources). Several had heard about server logs but no one knew how to use them. It is clear that these groups do not use the Web site management tools available to them. Also, many Web sites are not set up with "press" areas that attract the press but not necessarily the public. So the server logs record many "hits" but cannot differentiate between press and non-press visitors to the site.

14. Characterize journalists who contact you, by media type and deadline. Check all that apply.

Those 11 who responded to this question in the survey itself generally listed journalists from all types of media. When pressed, they said newspaper and wire service calls were most frequent among international journalists and radio most frequent among locals. That matched the patterns reported by eight others we reached directly, except that they tended to put radio and magazines on an equal footing with newspapers and wire services, even for international journalists. BBC, CNN International (NOT the version viewed in the US), NPR and Canadian media were most praised.

An informal look at media stories (using Google News and Nexis), suggests that the resulting newspaper and wire stories tend to be features longer than 1,000 words, and that magazine articles, while not large in number, tend to be detail-rich and (as you might expect) longer than newspaper features.

One interesting comment: I have just started here [in Southeast Asia, in a major media center] and my observation is that journalists DO NOT contact us. We don't seem to have a history of being seen as a source of news or features or even comment on humanitarian issues. When I contact journalists they are interested and some have picked up material I've given them. But part of my job is encouraging them to contact me with what they need. [My organization] has a huge network of people in the field – helping in every situation – and so it should be a wonderful resource for news organizations.

15. How does your organization build or add to its release list?

Web inquiries by journalists, searching on the Web for journalists who write stories on crisis and humanitarian aid issues, personal contact and directories such as Bacon's are the

most common methods. Oddly enough, no one mentioned trading contacts with other groups. When we pressed, headquarters staffers admitted that there is of course competition among groups for publicity. In December 2003, Bacon's Directories absorbed MediaMap, another large directory operation.

Some comments, covering the range of methods, showed efforts that should be vastly increased in this important area:

When I arrived in the job I took an old mailing list and phoned everyone on it to update contact names and details. When I see a new name on CNN or in the Bangkok Post, I add the name to the list. I also have a directory from the Foreign Correspondents' Club.

Use of media clipping services and personal contacts with journalists.

If we come across a new contact, either because they contact us or I see they've covered the topic, or through media searches I add them to our database, so their data is captured for the future. The database is a work in progress.

By contacting foreign desks; meeting reporters on the ground during emergencies and picking their brains for contacts; direct calls from reporters seeking interviews and information; mediamaponline.com; press officers scanning newspapers, etc., for who is writing what type of story.

We use Bacon's media service; we data-bank our current contacts and we Google search for topics of interest to us and data-bank reporters/shows/producers/publications from that.

Bacon's online. We can type in Istanbul and find out what media members are there.

Ad hoc.

By maintaining a record of press contacts and queries and using local directories.

**16. What, if anything, do you do to make your organization known to journalists?
Check as many as apply:**

Sending press releases by mail and e-mail are the favored approaches. The "personal touch" is also there -- going to academic conferences to meet journalists, holding press conferences and taking people out to lunch or dinner. Many said on the survey responses that they provide free trips into the field for journalists, but when called insisted that this involves only local transport -- not paying to fly a writer across the globe. Providing still images is also

common, but follow-up interviewing suggests that video, audio and full “white paper” articles are rare.

The 63 responses below are from 44 groups. Respondents could check off as many methods as they wished. We had expected three or four per respondent, but the average was only about 1.5 per respondent. This suggests regional press officers are not particularly well trained and have limited resources. They find a few good ways to do things, and don’t change. In the corporate world, e-mailed press releases are universal. Among the humanitarian aid NGO groups we approached, e-mail was used by only 9 in 44, or about 20%. The reason: Lack of reliable e-mail connections in the field, lack of current email addresses.

Send press releases by e-mail	9
Send press releases by mail	3
Send press releases by fax	5
Maintain Web links with other organizations (that is, links on other useful Websites likely to be seen by journalists)	5
Run seminars	2
Run journalism training	0
Participate in academic conferences likely to be attended by journalists	5
Hold news conferences	8
"Wine and dine" journalists and/or their editors/publishers	7
Provide teaching material for journalists or journalism schools	1
Provide free editorial material (images, video, articles)	11
Provide transport into the field for journalists	8

17. What do you consider to be the most difficult barrier to explaining your organization's story to journalists?

Selected comments:

There are several difficulties; the field staff is often loath to talk with journalists, so making productive connections can be difficult. Journalists are often interested in what’s not going right or security issues or something flamboyant, and it can be difficult to ‘sell’ the story of sustainable development success stories.

There's not much understanding of basic relief and development realities among many of the reporters we encounter...how we work, what we do, why we are independent of the military, etc. And often, we work in areas of the world which don't interest mainstream US publications.

Journalists are typically more interested in bombs than humanitarian issues. TV wants a "visual" and sometimes our story is not so visual. Media is more interested in talking about what is going "wrong" and not what is going right.

Working in an international network with local partners on the spot. Our country's journalists – like in many other countries – are mainly interested in aid workers from the country they are reporting for. Local aid workers in the countries we are working in are not interesting to them (also because they don't speak the right language). But for our organization these local workers guarantee the quality of our work, as they know the conditions in the respective countries very well and will stay even after the crisis is over.

The conservative politics of New Zealand media.

A perceived lack of public interest in the developing world and related issues, on the part of media organizations. We believe that assumption is incorrect. However, this translates into a lack of space and coverage for the issues.

18. To the general public?

Selected comments:

Respondent: [My organization] is hugely known, but complexity of [its] work is not always understood. [There is] a lack of interest in some of the parts of the world where we operate, a belief that the US [is] already sending massive foreign aid, [with] resulting 'compassion fatigue,' etc.

When stories capture the creativity of the programs and concentrate on the personal stories of people whose lives have been transformed, I believe the general public is interested and would be open to more information on humanitarian work.

Public is burnt out on humanitarian crisis after Balkans, Afghanistan and now Iraq. No one wanted to hear about Liberia and everyone is tired of Iraq.

We are dealing with a very fatigued and jaded audience. America is the worst—people there don't care what happens outside their own country.

Explaining what kind of work we do exactly: not only humanitarian aid in crises, but also social work for children, handicapped people, sick and old people, which is just as important. It is a lot more difficult to raise funds for these working areas.

Remoteness from the main issues the public deals with – unemployment and so forth.

We try to remedy this with our own (limited) publications and Web site, but these can only hope to have a limited impact.

19. What do you consider a press relations success? Relate a real or hypothetical example such as "appearing on BBC World."

There was a tendency among our respondents (18 provided comments) to aim high; they defined success as getting a mention in the New York Times or on CNN or BBC. But when we talked to higher-level officials at headquarters of large international organizations, several described the luxury of being able to work with reporters for smaller outlets now, in the hopes that some will move on to larger media in the future and provide some access.

Public relations consultants have been increasingly active among humanitarian aid NGOs, but more on the marketing and fundraising side than in press relations. Where they have been active in press relations, they have tended to focus on the publications they know best – national and international media, and business magazines – and on the techniques that have served them best in corporate PR, especially glorifying the CEO as a spokesperson. These trends may be serving to continue to tilt the NGO world toward major media.

Best comments:

When readers or viewers approach [my organization] for more detail.

Appearing in a debate program/interview in radio after publishing a policy document.

Interviews in top news media such as *The New York Times*, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, *Washington Post*, National Public Radio and appearing in magazine features [in publications] like *Time* and *Newsweek*.

Having op-eds published in *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Blanket global coverage (this is not hyperbole – we achieved it at Cancun WTO summit).

Any time we get an effective, accurate piece written or aired on either a major mainstream news entity or an outlet that targets an audience we would consider crucial to our branding/fundraising/growth, that's a success.

Appearing on the major international and American news programs—CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC.

If you can get on a long-format program you have really hit the jackpot.

Appearing in the most important national news shows, appearing in the most important national papers.

Being quoted in development-related news stories as a respected and relevant opinion-holder OR shaping the story so that it reflects a humanitarian or development perspective.

During the Afghan Crisis we were contacted almost on a daily basis by all the major UK – sometimes US, sometimes Japanese, sometimes New Zealand – media outlets, print and broadcast. They saw us as a point of reference and a good interview source.

20. What do you consider a press relations failure?

Thirty respondents talked and wrote at length about PR failures. Most were one-time disasters. What agonized them the most was being misquoted, or being identified in an article that mis-reported a situation. Respondents with marketing and fundraising responsibilities, as well as press relations functions, said they worried about anything that adversely affected fundraising. But the most constant theme was more mundane: A desire to see the work of beleaguered field office personnel be recognized with some press attention.

Some comments:

When a media person fails to understand the value of information or experience he is being shared.

No one attending a press conference.

Being mentioned in a negative story on NGOs.

No coverage.

It's a press relations failure for us when we spend a good deal of time or energy explaining programs and analyzing a region's history and potential, and end up with a piece that concentrates on where the latest bombs went off.

It's a press failure for us if only a portion of our story is told, leaving a misimpression that might alienate donors or governments in countries where we work. It becomes harder, then, to convince field people to welcome and work with and spend time with journalists.

Spending weeks and lots of resources preparing for an international media team to come film your program and then having them cancel at the last second because something sexier came along (e.g., a bomb).

Organizing a field trip with journalists and afterwards not appearing in their paper.

Our view being misrepresented in a media piece OR a story misrepresenting the real situation [especially with us mentioned].

Failing to capture any national media attention, in a crisis.

We have a wonderful regional person but [his nationality] is not allowed to travel into [the country the reporter wanted to see]. So he found someone to take a reporter there. This person had a great reputation, guiding donor representatives. But the reporter ended up focusing on witchcraft; the guide is a believer. I had a good relation with the reporter so he didn't identify my group with witchcraft.

21. Do you sense a trend in press interest in your organization's work? Yes, No.

Seven out of the 11 responders to the initial survey itself said yes, they sense a trend – some positive and some negative. Over-the-phone interviews added to the picture, with six follow-ups being all positive. The reason, we think, is good press response to the earthquake disaster in the Iranian city of Bam, which happened after the first 11 responses were tallied.

Key comments:

Interesting part is that the interest is growing at both local and international level.

Increasing interest.

Journalists are interested in our emergency response. They like conflict type stories. But emergency response is only 20% of our organization's work. The big point is in long term development, which is the more important story but draws much lower media interest.

It remains extremely high. We are working on sharpening the messaging.

I think there's a great interest in what NGOs do because more journalists are running across us in topical areas of the world such as Afghanistan and Iraq; also because 'reconstruction' issues in topical countries such as these involve NGOs, so we are more visible and seen more often as 'players' on the world scene.

We had great success in getting coverage during the Iraq war and immediately after the war ended. This has put us "on the map" with journalists who did not know us before. Now we get contacted by the media for updates on our work and for "background" on the situation.

22. Do you sense a trend in press criticism or skepticism about your organization's work?

Three said yes, 8 said no in the initial survey. This set us to looking for responses from groups that might be particularly vulnerable to adverse comments, such as faith-based organizations, or groups involved in family planning. We didn't find many instances of perceived problems among the NGO officials themselves. Why? Maybe because reporters in the field tend to write favorable pieces; they are overwhelmed by the problems and in awe of the people trying to solve those problems. Commentators and reporters who do unfavorable stories without going into the field (and even without contacting the target NGOs) may not be noticed by the NGOs themselves.

Comments overall are interesting:

There are always stories around crises regarding [whether aid does] more harm than good. The big focus of [our organization's] PR and marketing is on education, to raise awareness among a specific target group we call "skeptical progressives" who want to believe the world can be better but aren't convinced this is possible. [Our] goal is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty. If reporters would focus more on "solutions" type stories rather than conflict and strife, then we have a greater chance to change the mindset of skeptical progressives.

Sites like www.ngowatch.org show a right-wing trend of growing criticism of NGOs.

That seems to vary quite a lot depending on the organization (the *New York Post* will come at things quite differently than NPR). I do think there's a growing skepticism about the US government, the military, etc., and we are often seen through that same lens...because some of our funding comes from the United States government. There does, however, seem to be a lot of respect for our information and perspectives as a result of long-term commitments to areas such as Afghanistan. We are often seen as credible and impartial sources of information.

Not skepticism, but they are still not as interested in humanitarian work as they are in military conflict.

23. Are good press relations or coverage important to your organization's fundraising success? Choices were: Very important, somewhat important, important, moderately important, not important.

Most of this issue is covered in earlier questions. The raw data looked like this before we started calling:

Very important	9
Somewhat important	0
Important	1
Moderately important	1
Not important	1

As we talked to regional and headquarters staff, it became clear that regional staff in field offices tended to be removed from fundraising issues. The money comes from Europe and North America, and these personnel aren't close to it. But staff in regional hubs (large organizations sometimes have separate offices to cover activities in an entire region such as Africa, or India, or Central Europe) and at international headquarters were well aware of marketing pressures. Six such people specifically interviewed on this topic all rated good press relations as very important to fundraising success.

One comment:

PR is an integral part of raising awareness of our organization, which leads to increased fundraising opportunities. When we were on CNN and other major media outlets during the Iraq war we saw a definite increase in private donor activity

24. Are good press relations or coverage important to your organization's ability to carry out its mission(s)? Choices were: Very important, somewhat important, important, moderately important, not important.

Despite budget issues, all but one of the 18 respondents said good press relations or coverage is "very important." One said it was "important." Respondents, of course, were all press personnel.

Some comments:

Good news that reflects our vision and mission helps influence policy makers and people to donate and to take individual action – for example, by contacting their local government representatives to vote yes for HIV/AIDS funding and the like. Media drives private

donations as well as increases our visibility with major donor agencies and governments (USAID, etc.) and money is what allows us to run our missions.

Media drives private donations as well as increases our visibility with major donor agencies and governments (USAID, ECHO...) and money is what allows us to run our missions.

Without public funds our mission could not be carried out.

25. In your experience, what makes a crisis story compelling for the press?

Many examples have already been noted. Some respondents to this question were quite cynical, others were willing to stretch (hunger everywhere, it seems, can now be pitched as a precursor to terrorism).

This comment came from a Norwegian NGO press officer, suggesting that Norwegians are not all that different from North Americans: "Interesting part is that the interest is growing at both local and international level. Most important is to have a connection to Norway, for example a Norwegian on the ground."

Several noted that aid workers face danger from war, terrorism and disease, and that this can be compelling for a story.

Some comments:

When there is a potential health crisis faced by local communities, reporters also are interested in stats and in interviewing staff who are working in the thick of it."

Human interest. A crisis story is compelling for the press when it involves mass migration of people, ongoing violence, or significant death. It is compelling when there are visuals: refugee camps, etc. It is less compelling when it is a story of chronic deprivation, or when the story is far from our comfort zone (i.e. Rwanda, Congo).

The US has to be involved in the crisis in some manner—military or otherwise—for US media to take much interest. Having a strong "personality" to drive the story is key—a beneficiary with a compelling story who can speak English really helps.

It can't be too complex—you need to boil it down to something very understandable. You need to make sure the audience can relate to the crisis in some way—e.g., how it affects families or kids. It can't be too "foreign" or exotic or it loses appeal.

If you can show how it impacts the US it is very helpful—e.g., how poverty feeds terrorism and thus a mission to alleviate poverty and build local economies can be key to preventing terrorism in the future.

It has to have some relation to the national interest in the country the press is working in (country of crisis has to be close or has to have special relations to the country the press is working in; crisis has to have some relation to current international politics; crisis has to be an extraordinary one. e. g. very heavy earthquake.

Floods in South-East Asia are not compelling any more.

Said one from New Zealand, who sounded remarkably like those complaining about American coverage: "A New Zealand connection OR white/English speaking victims."

Human tragedy, obvious human need. Innocent people suffering needlessly. And, to be a little cynical, a lack of competing major news stories. Ease of media access is also necessary.

26. Is it getting harder to get onto the news agenda (that is, to get the press's attention) than in the past year or two? Yes or No.

The respondents split roughly down the middle (3 yes, 6 no to start; a total of 6 yes and 7 no by mid-January, after Bam) but those who said interest is increasing were actually stronger in their comments. It is also clear that groups involved in crises borne of war feel more acceptable to news outlets these days.

A few comments:

Getting on the news agenda depends on whether or not we are involved in something that is making headline news. We have a large presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan and, as such, have "profited" for want of a better word, from the ongoing interest in these crises. However, even then, it is hard to get the media to focus on the humanitarian angle. It's always been easy getting coverage around crisis and there is growing interest around our advocacy work but it is still very difficult to generate stories around "good news" success stories.

Afghanistan and Iraq have made it easier to get the press's attention in relation to the wars, security, etc; but in terms of the larger humanitarian issues, the broader scope of developmental work (microfinance, HIV/AIDS pandemic, women's education), we are still hit and miss. We certainly have very little luck when we're pitching stories about Kyrgyzstan or Ingushetia or some other far-flung place that has no immediate connection to US interests.

After Afghanistan interest has dried up in humanitarian aid initiatives. Also, now the US military and private contractors (such as Bechtel) are getting more money for humanitarian aid than NGOs we are competing with them for media attention on humanitarian issues.

27. Has there been an increase in demand for photography or videos showing your organization at work in the field? Yes or No.

Six say the demand has increased, four say it has not, but we only have detailed comments from these 10 in the field. Headquarters staffers phoned later all said demand had increased, and that they were trying to get more images, at least still images, on their Web sites. Respondents noted that, in general, national media such as ABC and CNN will shoot their own footage. Said one: "Local TV stations in the United States, when interviewing staff, always request if we have footage and photos we can share to complement their story or interview."

Images are a particular problem in war zones. Said one: "In Iraq this is particularly true as the security situation has curtailed media team movement. Much of the country is "off-limits" for media due to insecurity so we are able to provide images and video they can't get on their own."

Said another: "Most high profile media like ABC News, etc., will shoot their own footage. Local TV stations in the US, when interviewing staff, always request if we have footage and photos we can share to complement their story/interview. We also put pictures and video on our Web site."

But respondents didn't see this as a trend – just business as usual.

28. If so, how has your organization responded? Possible responses: Digital cameras for the staff; make photos available on organization Web site; syndicating NGO photography; other.

Several said their organizations put still images and video on their Web site. But we found no current broadcast-quality video on any aid group's site. Also, no one seems to be thinking deeply about the issue; there were no free-form comments, either.

No one is syndicating NGO photography. The most popular response: Supply digital cameras to the staff!

Digital cameras for the staff	9
Make photos available on organization Web site	7
Syndicating NGO photography	0
Other	0

29. Should there be a standard way to handle photography, perhaps by syndicating your organization's photos or video through a nonprofit third party? Yes/No.

In keeping with answers to the previous question, there were few responses here. The initial response, however, at five in favor and only one opposed, stimulated us to press for more responses in follow-up telephone interviews.

Respondents haven't thought about the issue despite their detection of the demand. Said one: "[I] really don't know the best answer. We really want to build relations with media and the best way to do this is to work with them directly. But it definitely would be easier and less time consuming if we [could] offer our resources via syndication. A non-profit humanitarian aid stock photo house would be awesome."

30. How many journalists have you or your staff dealt with in the past 90 days?

Responses ranged from 4 to over 100. **Comments showed the diversity.**

From Indochina: Dozens, but all in the context of introducing myself or chatting at the Foreign Correspondents' Club. On Monday I run my first press conference so that should all change.

Couldn't put a number on it but we've had a few press releases, policy briefs and a fundraising appeal launch that all generated varying degrees of coverage. Generally happy with the results, given our resources, though there's always room to improve.

Lots, over 100, but in some cases we get interviewed on a story and other times they are seeking general info about the situation and contact with other organizations on the ground.

Impossible to say. Cancun alone meant thousands and possibly in the 10s of thousands. Press work is not solely carried out by press staff.

In past 30 days (since I started) – probably about 20.

31a. (For those who are not AlertNet members) have you considered signing on with an umbrella organization such as AlertNet that provides an entry point for journalists to link with NGOs? Yes or No.

In the questionnaire phase, only one said her group had considered this. No one could be prompted on this issue during phone interviews.

31b. (For AlertNet members and for those who are not members but have considered joining) what services might AlertNet provide that it is not providing now?

Direct access and "easy" access were among the comments we received.

Said one: The service is quite comprehensive, but perhaps more detailed member profiles or allowing members to use news stories etc. on their own sites.

"AlertNet could provide a service that evaluates the content on the Web that is targeted and focused for journalists not just for the marketing side, have a website that offers them the kind of information that is useful for them, not marketing. A service to evaluate the NGO's websites."

Rate the Web sites, their value to journalists.

Kaiser is doing media training in Africa for AIDS.

32. Do you believe that the creation of an international registry of journalists specializing in disaster coverage is a good idea? Yes or No, followed by a prompt for reasons.

Despite difficulty groups have had building their own mailing and contact lists, respondents were opposed to this idea, 13 to 10. The comments were thoughtful.

Some examples in opposition:

Good idea but difficult in that these reporters will be drowning in press officers contacting them.

There's the Groucho Marx principle – the ones on it will be the ones you don't want, the ones you want won't be on it.

Do any journalists specialize in disasters? Certainly none in Ireland, so it would not work here. Even in larger media markets, disasters are usually covered by the correspondent in the country/region in which it occurs. But a register of those whom specialize in development issues and coverage would be quite worthwhile.

In Iraq, before the war they were in Kuwait and then they moved to Jordan because it is easier to get in and out, so when there is disaster, get there on the ground, find out, call the

foreign editors, getting on the phone immediately. In Iran we immediately got to all the radio stations, talking about what action we are doing, also people from here to talking about the preparations. You don't necessarily need the list, they should build the list themselves. Iran, Paris bureau of AP handled the story, not the editor in Washington DC.

Plant seeds by getting a list, but everybody who has access to that inundate the reporters with non-stories, marginal stuff.

Some comments in favor:

Would give more credibility to issues around disasters, reconstruction, development etc – making it easier more mainstream press to give more space/time to these issues.

Anything that would encourage greater communication between reporters with an expertise in disaster coverage and NGOs on the ground should be useful, and it might lead to increased training opportunities for both the NGOs and the journalists.

It would help us to contact the right media people when we are in a crisis. It would allow us to move quickly, rather than having to show up at the location and spend a week trying to find out who from the press is in town and where they are staying.

You need to know what editor in what bureau is compiling the stories, for fast-breaking stories, and ask them, pitch them.

But the headquarters personnel we contacted were emphatic: Unless the registry could be built almost instantaneously in time of crisis, it would be of limited use. Another twist: a registry of editors responsible for sending reporters might be worthwhile. Again, it would have to be kept up-to-date. Perhaps the organization running it would use it only to query the editors about who they might be sending into a given situation. The list would not be published by the organization, to spare the editors a barrage of press releases.

33. Does your organization's reaction to journalists differ, between those from major international news organizations and those from smaller organizations, local press, and international freelancers? How?

Respondents admitted that they (like public relations people everywhere) favor "big media," but that they try to give attention to everyone.

Some comments:

Our top priority is to get the most visibility so yes our reaction to journalists working for media that reaches the most people is more forthcoming. We do try to work with everyone, though, but during emergencies we get a lot of interview requests and it's difficult to free up staff time to meet all interview requests.

We probably tend to concentrate harder on accommodating major news organizations than smaller ones. We also work hard to serve local journalists who are seen and read in our headquarters' area, since that tends to result in fundraising.

We are probably less likely to spend a lot of time with freelancers, as that hasn't had a good cost-benefit ratio for us in the past, given that we have a very small communications staff.

In most cases the major international news gets priority and special treatment (e.g., facilitation of transportation to field sites). However, local media from where we are headquartered get high priority as a lot of our private donor money comes from our HQ area.

Basically, I will focus my energy on the media outlets that have the most "eyeballs" and have a track record of telling a good humanitarian story.

In a crisis we have to set our priorities; whom we can serve with interviews, field trips etc. Of course, TV stations and newspapers that reach a higher number of recipients are, in situations like that, more important to us. In the general intercourse with the media the size of the medium might play a subconscious role when journalists are served but we try to treat all with the same attention.

To the best of our ability we try and treat all in the same manner. But invariably, the bigger hitters will get a better reception as they are in a position to guarantee coverage.

We genuinely do try to attend to all queries as best we can.

34. Do you see any recent trends in journalist behavior with regard to courtesy, knowledge base, approach to stories? Explain.

Respondents generally found journalists' behavior adequate, except for complaints about short-term interest in stories. But for that, respondents correctly blame editors and news directors, not the journalists themselves. The nuances in comments deserve repeating:

Most journalists we work with already know [us].

We have a press officer based in Johannesburg and in the past had one based in Nairobi, both cities have international press corps. There is such a huge variety out there among journalists that it's difficult to characterize. Courtesy is generally good; knowledge is extremely variable, approach to stories is too often tied to security issues and what's not going well (Iraq especially).

It would be great if there were more writers who specialized in relief/development, so that they had a depth of experience to draw from when they report on our agency or issues.

In Afghanistan and Iraq I was dismayed to meet many journalists who were clueless about the region, the religion and the culture and who came with preconceived ideas of what the story was (that were dead wrong in most cases) and who never "opened their eyes" to what the real story was.

Fox is the worst, but since it is now the number one news show in the United States the others have stooped to their level. Even the BBC has slipped a bit. It is a very disturbing trend. Also in conflict areas such as Iraq, it seems they are sending young, inexperienced journalists who are willing to take the risk.

[In Iraq] I met a lot of journalists who typically worked a local beat (e.g., education in their hometown) but were sent for the first time overseas. They just didn't have the depth or understanding to get the story.

Professionalism is lacking more and more. Budgets are tight, crews have been cut down in size (no soundmen for lots of TV coverage these days) so everyone is overworked and as a result tempers are short and patience is thin. In conflict areas this can pose a real issue.

Approach to stories has gotten overly simplified. No one wants to discuss complex issues. Everything is being so dumbed-down it is hard to get your point across.

Generally, they're quite good, but some do expect you to know everything about everything.

It is a double-edged sword, hate to keep using NYT, but for the first three years never had an NYT call, but last few months 5 calls, so there is a double-edged sword. There's an education aspect, amount of money Bush is putting in, but less money at state level for minority health and public health and this is your basic donor. Really important not to get out how to get money but how there is a return on that money. Agriculture, microenterprise that will stop poverty and injustice. Highlight the stories painting African with one brush the depression story.

35. Could you talk about press relations strategies you have tried, and how well they may have worked?

[My organization] developed a media kit on minimum relief standards that provided journalists with a ready set of questions and answers they should look for to assess disaster relief. The kit was very well received by the media.

Journalists do like human interest stories of aid workers on the ground where they are from, why they do what they do, background, family life etc. They like to speak with aid workers and organizations with the most experience. It seems to work reasonably well to seek out seasoned, talented reporters and offer them some information, insight, access.

Having b-roll [stock video footage] or photos helps.

Understanding what journalists need is important, which is why our primary press staff is comprised of former journalists with substantial experience. I go to hot spots and stay in the hotels where the media stays. It is expensive but has proven to be worth it. I see the media folks at the hotel café over meals, bump into them in the elevator and lobby. I am also just down the hallway and available to "go live" anytime, night or day in a moments notice.

One really dumb thing I did when I arrived was to send big files on my mailing list. Fortunately a journalist sent me an email to tell me about my blunder and also to say many other PR people do the same thing. (I felt terrible.) I thanked him.

No, haven't been here long enough [and my organization's headquarters] is very much at the stage where this is a path it is setting out on. There hasn't been a strong press relations strategy in the past.

Journalists do like human interest stories of aid workers on the ground where they are from, why they do what they do, background, family life, etc. they like to speak with aid workers and organizations with the most experience.

It seems to work reasonably well to seek out seasoned, talented reporters and offer them some information, insight, access.

Understanding what journalists need is important, which is why our primary press staff is comprised of former journalists with substantial experience.

36. Are there any other insights you'd like to share with us?

[My group's] experience with local and small media suggests that they need to be sensitized, trained and given easy access to crisis related information. This could be true-at a different scale and level – for international media as well.

President as media focus. PR firms like this, want to be close to president of the organization; they want to make them into focus as Mr. Humanitarian. Great idea but should happen naturally out of the work you are doing, rather than pitching how great an organization you are.

Keep plugging away. If you get shot down by one reporter, another working for the same media group might still be interested in what you have to offer.

In emergencies, most major news organizations send a team of reporters assigned to cover different beats. Best way to find them is go identify what hotels they stay at and go there every night with a stack of press releases and back-up story ideas that you are ready to pitch.

Always have a plan B, C and D.

Stop thinking for big papers, use the radio local stations, look for the alternatives, they are the people who will run big orgs in the future. Used to say all the time NYT, NYT.

I wish our agency, or NGOs in general, had more funding to host journalists in the field, to coordinate on advocacy, and to partner with major journalistic entities (Pew, Poynter, etc.) to offer seminars in which journalists and NGOs could swap thoughts and suggestions.

METHODOLOGY

A literature search in the spring and summer of 2003 revealed many articles and even several how-to books exploring the issue of relations between journalists and humanitarian aid organizations. The few controlled studies of those relations cover such issues as what journalists consider is news and how press relations officers might be trained.

But published studies had numerous shortcomings. None was based on a large sample. Few covered journalists outside the United States. And most concentrated on the few journalists who report on humanitarian aid issues full-time or even most of the time.

We resolved to sample a substantial number of journalists and to ask questions beyond the obvious and the anecdotal. To do that, we conducted a survey in two parts:

First, we surveyed press officers at humanitarian aid and crisis response organizations. Although we did survey some top press officers at the headquarters of major international organizations, we concentrated on press officers working in field offices and regional hubs outside Europe and North America. We eventually reached 54 of them, from an initial list of 93. Some were interviewed by phone, others by e-mail. We started with a detailed e-mailed survey, but only half our respondents answered substantially the entire survey. This phase was conducted starting October 15, 2003 and was complete by December 1, although some interviewing and surveying continued until mid-January 2004.

We used responses from this survey of humanitarian aid officials to build our survey questionnaire for journalists. The respondents were recruited from three lists. Using Google News and NEXIS, which track mainly newspaper, wire service and magazine articles written in English, we compiled a list of journalists whose names appeared in bylines for articles on humanitarian aid activities and disaster or war relief. We matched that list against names and e-mail addresses compiled by MediaMap. This yielded 1,103 names. We then used MediaMap compilations to add the names and e-mail addresses of editors, broadcast journalists, and other print journalists, especially from the non-English-speaking world. Finally, we added more than 1,500 journalists who had won Reuters Fellowships or participated in Reuters-sponsored training, and for whom e-mail addresses were available.

The list ultimately totaled about 17,000 names, of which about 3,000 were connected to stale e-mail addresses. Approximately 6,000 were from outside North America. We held back 800 names for possible use in a supplementary survey to check for non-response bias. Ultimately, we decided that non-response bias would not affect the reported results. Respondents' demographics (age, sex, publication size, etc.) are quite similar to those of journalists as a whole, although somewhat younger. Also, the "universe" of journalists covering humanitarian aid is constantly changing.

Each journalist on the list was sent a recruitment letter (Appendix D), explaining the survey's purpose and possible risks imposed on respondents by sending personal information via the Internet. The letter included a link to an online survey questionnaire with 31 questions.

This is a long questionnaire; typically online surveys have fewer than 20 questions and usually fewer than 10.

We received 290 responses from December 15 to January 21. Respondents' job titles and responsibilities closely resemble the initial sample. Our initial response rate from outside North America was, however, lower. We brought the response rate up by re-sending the recruitment letter. The final response rate for all parts of the world reflects the original sample.

In a survey of this size, responses based on the full 290-person sample would be expected to be within 6% of the responses expected if the entire universe of journalists were polled, 95% of the time, and within 4% nine times out of 10. Differences reported in the summary tables within the sample are generally significant at the 95% confidence level if they are greater than 3%.

We deliberately did not ask respondents to supply their names or e-mail addresses. Thus, it is impossible to know exactly who responded.

RECRUITMENT LETTER

E-Mail subject line: Crisis and humanitarian aid reporting survey

Dear writers, editors, producers and news directors:

Do you or your publication or broadcast outlet cover or comment on natural disasters, disease, war and other conflicts, or post-conflict emergencies? Have you tried to cover such crises (particularly internationally), only to run into problems? Do you expect to cover such crises in the future? If so, let us try to help you.

On behalf of Fritz Institute (www.fritzinstitute.org) and Reuters Foundation's AlertNet (www.alertnet.org), I've been talking to humanitarian relief organizations, to determine how they try to "get the word out" when, in the words of Oxfam, a crisis situation occurs "that overwhelms the capacity of a society to cope using its resources alone." There are dozens of such crises occurring RIGHT NOW. Few have been covered by the international media in any sustained way, if at all.

Now I'd like to ask you to fill out a short survey that will help us figure out why. Is it a matter of too small a news hole, or lack of journalists' knowledge, or perhaps the inability of crisis-intervention organizations to explain their situations and provide supporting documentation and imagery? What about reader interest?

We've tried to be respectful of your time – the questionnaire has 31 questions, almost all quite short, and should only take about 15 to 18 minutes to complete online.

Previous research by others has failed to offer enough advice to bridge the gap between journalists and crisis-oriented humanitarian relief organizations. Thus, journalists tend to call upon the same organizations repeatedly, while ignoring smaller regional groups that might be particularly active in a given area. Journalists often have trouble getting through to a specific crisis location, while paying little attention to umbrella organizations that could serve as guides. And of course, war in Iraq has pre-empted crisis coverage elsewhere.

Your answers could, in a small way, help facilitate coverage and alleviate suffering worldwide. They will help us create a guide for journalists and for crisis-intervention organizations.

This survey is exempt from federal requirements as reviewed by Columbia University's Institutional Review Board, because we will not be capturing the names or e-mail addresses

of respondents. That is, your responses will be anonymous, even to me (contact Matthew Stafford, mds35@columbia.edu, at the IRB if you have any questions or concerns about this). After I analyze the responses, I may be contacting journalists in a separate, small list for a follow-up survey, to check for non-response bias. That is, I need to make sure that the opinions of those who responded match the opinions of journalists generally.

We have been asked by the IRB, which operates under rules required by the federal government, to identify any possible risks to you in responding to this survey. Although we do not specifically ask for sensitive information, it is possible for you to supply some in open-ended responses. It is possible, in some cases, for your employer to read your Web responses. The survey web site does set a cookie (if you allow it to be set) that expires in 72 hours, so that you can leave the survey and come back to it at the same spot.

Please click here to complete the survey: XXXXXXXXXX

Remember, we are interested in your responses even if you do not currently cover crises.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if you would like to receive a full copy of the new survey results and guide when they are released in a few months. My phone number at Columbia University is 1-212-854-7328. My personal e-mail is ssr3@columbia.edu.

Sincerely,

Steven S. Ross
Associate Professor, Professional Practice
Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

