



# **DISASTER INFORMATION PROVIDERS** IN THE PHILIPPINES



International Development  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation



## Background

This report has been prepared by the International Development Unit of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABCID) based on background research, and discussions held between July and August 2014 with media organisations, disaster management authorities, and local and international non-government organisations. The overall focus of consultations was on community resilience, how citizens get information during disasters and opportunities to improve two-way communication between affected people and support providers via the media.

### **Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)**

As Australia's national broadcaster the ABC functions as Australia's emergency broadcaster. The ABC uses its radio, television and online services to deliver timely, accurate and relevant information to affected communities during fires, floods and other natural disasters and emergencies. The ABC also plays an important role in building community resilience and the ability to prevent, prepare, respond and recover during times of adversity. Local radio (54 stations across the country) has an estimated national penetration rate of 99.4 per cent and is often the only source of vital weather and emergency service information for regional and rural Australians.

This emergency broadcasting role is supported by agreements with all state and territory emergency services. The ABC has formal and informal arrangements allowing emergency agencies and recovery specialists to use the local radio network to deliver emergency warnings. Local radio managers are active members of most state and local emergency management committees.

The ABC provides emergency broadcast training for its local radio staff to ensure that they are adequately prepared for emergency situations. In recent years, local radio has provided emergency broadcasting for fires, cyclones, flooding, storms, tsunami warnings, heatwaves, equine flu outbreaks and locust plagues. The ABC has provided emergency broadcasting in every state and territory, on numerous occasions.

Radio and television broadcasting are very effective methods of communicating important information to large groups of people before, during and after emergency situations. Local radio services are particularly effective, as broadcasters have established relationships with local communities and detailed local knowledge that may assist listeners.

# Acknowledgements

ABCID appreciates the assistance provided by Australian Aid and all organisations that shared information during consultations.

This report is not intended to be an all-encompassing exploration of the many disaster related projects that have been, and are being, conducted in the Philippines. We acknowledge the work of the organisations dedicated to decreasing disaster related risks within the country.

While it was not possible to consult all relevant actors, discussions were held with a range of organisations, in the media, government information, disaster management and humanitarian support sectors to establish an overview of the major challenges facing the delivery of emergency information to citizens.

This report is based on the opinions and perspectives of the participants and does not necessarily reflect the views of ABCID or Australian Aid.

## Acronyms

<b>AAP</b>	Accountability to Affected Populations
<b>ABCID</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>CwC</b>	Communications with Communities
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>DRRM</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
<b>DSWD</b>	Department of Social Welfare and Development
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>NDRRMC</b>	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council
<b>OCD</b>	Office of Civil Defense
<b>PAGASA</b>	Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration
<b>PBS</b>	Philippine Broadcasting System
<b>PNA</b>	Philippine News Agency
<b>PTNI</b>	Philippine Television Network Inc.
<b>PHIVOLCS</b>	Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology
<b>PIA</b>	Philippine Information Agency
<b>PPP</b>	Public-Private Partnership
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



## Country context


The 100 million people living in the Philippines are frequently exposed to natural threats, such as typhoons and erupting volcanoes. Across the country, communities in urban and metropolitan area equally at risk.

Citizens have high expectations of the key actors responsible for disaster preparedness, management and recovery. These actors are government incident monitoring bodies such as the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), the disaster management authority National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) supported by the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) and recovery services coordinated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and humanitarian organisations.

The media is a vital conduit for information about disasters from these actors to communities. Increasingly, the media is also enabling citizens to interact with information providers about disasters. Media personalities and organisations have a strong following across the country.

The response to the aftermath of typhoon Yolanda now sees several humanitarian actors interacting with the Philippines Information Agency (PIA) and local media. International agencies such as United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) are implementing approaches of Communication with Communities (CwC) and Accountability for Affected Populations (AAP) to facilitate two way dialogue with people affected by the disaster. However, there is still work to be done by the media and information providers to improve community preparedness and recovery.

The Philippines has many organisations involved in the monitoring and management of disasters. The approach is to manage incidents at the level of the 42,000 barangays, or villages/suburbs, with escalation to a regional or national level as required. While this engages with citizens at a 'grass roots' level, the performance of this decentralised management approach is dependent on the skills of people who, at a local level, are mostly elected to leadership positions.



Dissemination of information by disaster management organisations includes using short message service (SMS) and an early warning system. Communication by some departments to the public via the media is based on a traditional mix of scheduled bulletins and press releases, with some use of social media. Television and radio play a role in broadcasting information across the country as these platforms reach most areas. However mobile phone technology is becoming a key way for citizens to access information when and where they want it.

Media in the Philippines has been described as 'rowdy, vibrant, diverse and hugely profitable'<sup>1</sup>. The industry is highly competitive and increasingly being made up of conglomerates focused on income and controlling the production and distribution of content on multiple platforms. Internet usage is growing rapidly as basic literacy is almost universal in the Philippines (National Statistics Office).

Commercial and privately owned media attracts larger audiences than government operated stations. In the cities the focus of coverage is mostly about the magnitude of a disaster and any political ramifications, while in provincial areas media tends to engage more in disaster preparedness and delivery of basic information without much commentary.

To get information, media organisations interact with disaster management authorities at a local and national level. A deeper working relationship has been formalised in some cases, with Albay Province held up as an example of how local partnerships involving the media and other actors can support more resilient communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Infoasaid (2012) Philippines: Media & telecoms landscape guide file:///C:/Users/davisa6l/Downloads/Media%20&%20Telecoms%20Landscape%20Guide%20-%20Philippines.pdf

## Major disaster risks

The Philippines is more exposed to tropical storms than any other country in the world. Its location on the Pacific 'rim of fire' also means that volcanic eruptions and earthquakes are a frequent occurrence. About 85% of the Philippines' economy is prone to natural disasters, according to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) study<sup>2</sup>. Over half the country's land area is economically at risk from multiple hazards such as floods, typhoon, and earthquakes according to ADB's Response to Natural Disasters and Disaster Risks report in 2012.

Summarised Table of Natural Disasters in Philippines from 1900 to 2014

		# OF EVENTS	KILLED	TOTAL AFFECTED	DAMAGE (000 US\$)
Drought	Drought	8	8	6553207	64453
Earthquake	Ground movement	27	9924	5798678	583178
	Tsunami	1	32	-	-
Flood	Unspecified	33	1440	7680373	351857
	Coastal flood	11	149	125931	2617
	Flash flood	40	1160	6212229	1015543
	Riverine flood	54	786	14632919	2423726
Landslide	Avalanche	1	6	1200	-
	Landslide	28	2148	313508	33281
	Subsidence	1	287	2838	-
Storm	Unspecified	26	812	3110501	112274
	Convective storm	4	9	24704	5
	Tropical cyclone	290	46835	144369320	18419579
Volcanic activity	Unspecified	1	-	57633	-
	Ash fall	25	2996	1734907	231961

Source: "EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database, [www.em-dat.net](http://www.em-dat.net) - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium"

<sup>2</sup> ADB (2012) Special Evaluation Study: ADB's Response to Natural Disasters and Disaster Risks  
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## Media consumption

In terms of media availability Filipinos are well served. About 1000 radio stations reach 85% of households and 200 television stations reach 60% of households<sup>3</sup>. The most available platform is mobile phone as it reaches 99% of the population and mobile phone penetration is almost 100%. Time spent using mobile devices, especially amongst younger Filipinos, is now greater than time accessing traditional media such as television, radio and print. Although the majority of time is spent engaging in social media, users claim that information gathering accounts for about 15% of their time on mobile devices. (Decisionfuel).

The country has one of the highest SMS usage rates in the world. In recognition of this, the government introduced the Free Mobile Disaster Alerts Act in June 2014 that requires mobile service providers to send out warnings from relevant agencies.

All people consulted for this report were asked where they would personally go to get information during a disaster that affected them. Responses were almost even between internet and social media on a mobile phone, and radio broadcasts on a transistor.

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<sup>3</sup> Infoasaid (2012) Philippines: Media & telecoms landscape guide file:///C:/Users/davisa6l/Downloads/Media%20&%20Telecoms%20Landscape%20Guide%20-%20Philippines.pdf



## Observations on media as disaster information providers

The media industry in the Philippines, particularly broadcasting, is different to most other countries in Asia. Elsewhere, major broadcast stations are either funded or controlled by the government, whereas the Philippines media landscape is dominated by commercial or privately-owned networks.

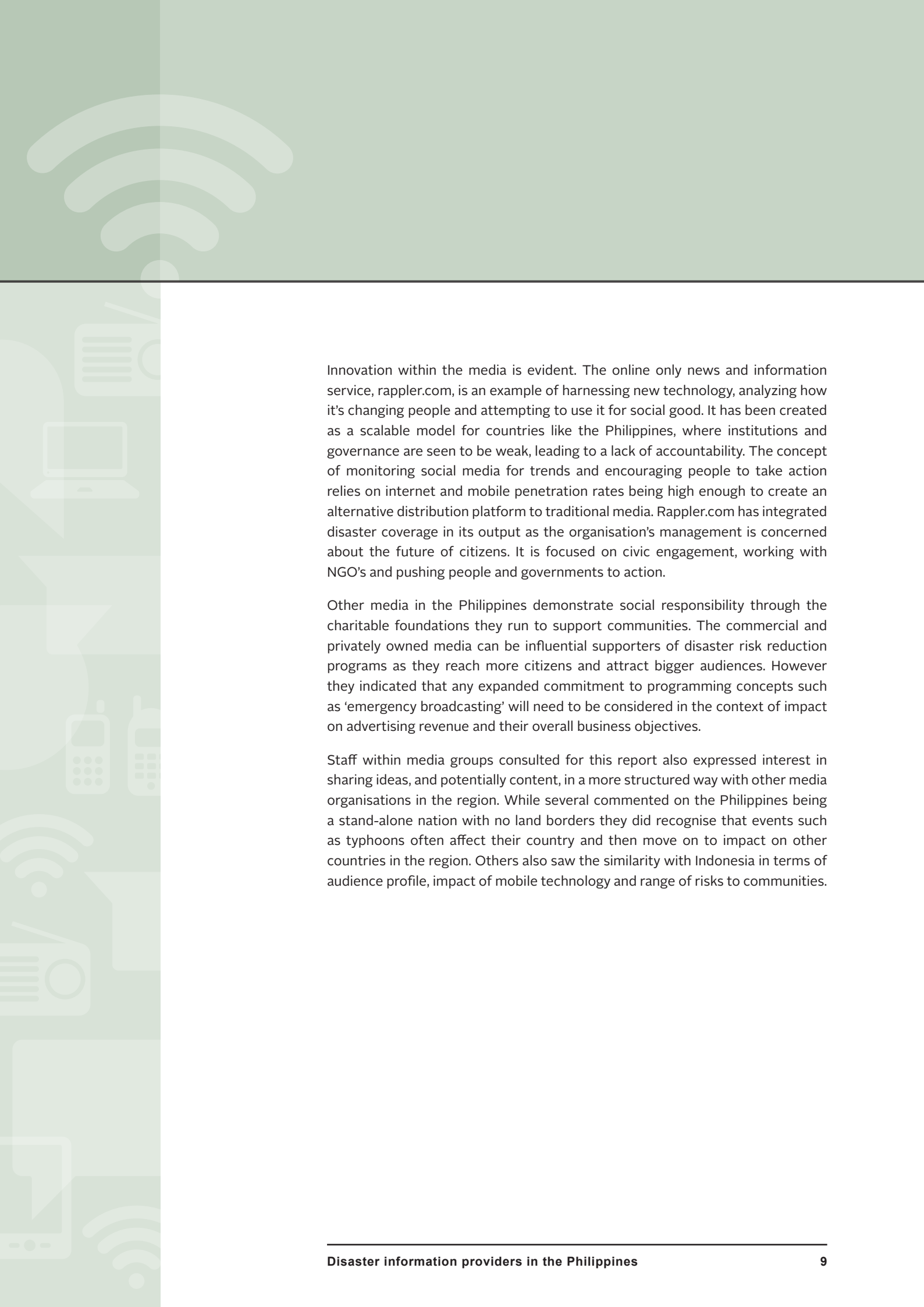
The other element of the Philippines media landscape is government media outlets such as the People's Television Network Inc. (PTNI), Philippine Broadcasting System (PBS), and the Philippine News Agency (PNA). These outlets appear to have a rather conservative approach to programming and presentation. They tend to provide more of a government perspective on disaster information and other media organisations commented that this leads to a degree of cynicism amongst citizens.

In several Asian and Pacific countries, the government funded national broadcaster is 'the home' of disaster coverage. This is because the national broadcaster usually reaches virtually all citizens and is funded to meet a community service obligation. For instance, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has developed an approach called 'emergency broadcasting' which is the provision of timely and accurate information about disasters via delivery platforms that are easily accessed by citizens. Emergency broadcasting goes beyond reporting on an emergency in news and programs to incorporate a planned approach for preparing communities for a major incident, providing essential information during an emergency and engaging with affected communities as they recover.

Amongst 'traditional' media in the Philippines television is most popular, although radio is seen as the more reliable platform to deliver information on disasters as it is accessible across metropolitan and rural areas, can be listened to on battery powered transistors or mobile phones and can facilitate two way interaction with citizens.

The broadcasting industry is dominated by four privately owned companies, ABS-CBN, GMA, TV5 and Manila Broadcasting Company. Each have a range of television, radio and online platforms. A key programming strategy is to aggregate content across all stations in a company group. Convergence between telecommunications and media companies is also emerging as the 'telcos' seek content for online and mobile delivery and the broadcasters seek assured access to the 'pipes' that deliver their content online.





Innovation within the media is evident. The online only news and information service, [rappler.com](http://rappler.com), is an example of harnessing new technology, analyzing how it's changing people and attempting to use it for social good. It has been created as a scalable model for countries like the Philippines, where institutions and governance are seen to be weak, leading to a lack of accountability. The concept of monitoring social media for trends and encouraging people to take action relies on internet and mobile penetration rates being high enough to create an alternative distribution platform to traditional media. Rappler.com has integrated disaster coverage in its output as the organisation's management is concerned about the future of citizens. It is focused on civic engagement, working with NGO's and pushing people and governments to action.

Other media in the Philippines demonstrate social responsibility through the charitable foundations they run to support communities. The commercial and privately owned media can be influential supporters of disaster risk reduction programs as they reach more citizens and attract bigger audiences. However they indicated that any expanded commitment to programming concepts such as 'emergency broadcasting' will need to be considered in the context of impact on advertising revenue and their overall business objectives.

Staff within media groups consulted for this report also expressed interest in sharing ideas, and potentially content, in a more structured way with other media organisations in the region. While several commented on the Philippines being a stand-alone nation with no land borders they did recognise that events such as typhoons often affect their country and then move on to impact on other countries in the region. Others also saw the similarity with Indonesia in terms of audience profile, impact of mobile technology and range of risks to communities.



## Media coverage of disasters

All major networks produce news and information programming and this content stream is where coverage of disasters features. Media are often first responders to incidents as they chase 'the story'. At times this has put staff at risk and created logistical challenges to send reports from areas with damaged infrastructure.

Given the number and increasing severity of disasters in the Philippines, media staff are exposed to traumatic scenes on a regular basis. Some of the organisations consulted recognise the potential impact on staff.

Disaster managers and support agencies consulted for this report commented on the differing approaches taken by national, compared with local media, in relation to disasters. It is the experience that national media, based in Manila, have a sharper focus on the severity of the event and questioning the responsiveness of management agencies and the government. On the other hand, provincial media tend to produce more content about how citizens can prepare for a disaster, and then to report on the facts around the event rather than the politics. Local media are also generally seen by humanitarian agencies to be more engaged with citizens after a disaster. Information providers want all levels of media to broaden their coverage to include preparedness and depth of factual reporting.



## Observations on disaster managers as information providers

The country has a comprehensive range of actors to monitor and manage hazards.

A group of 'surveillance agencies' monitor hazards ranging from the weather to volcanoes and epidemics. These agencies provide warnings and advisories to the Operations Centre run by the Office of Civil Defense (OCD).

The Operations Centre forwards warnings to local disaster management councils that are responsible for informing citizens and managing incidents. In turn the local councils provide situation reports back to the OCD Ops Centre. The Ops Centre also sends alerts and situation reports to media, and resource agencies that provide community support services.

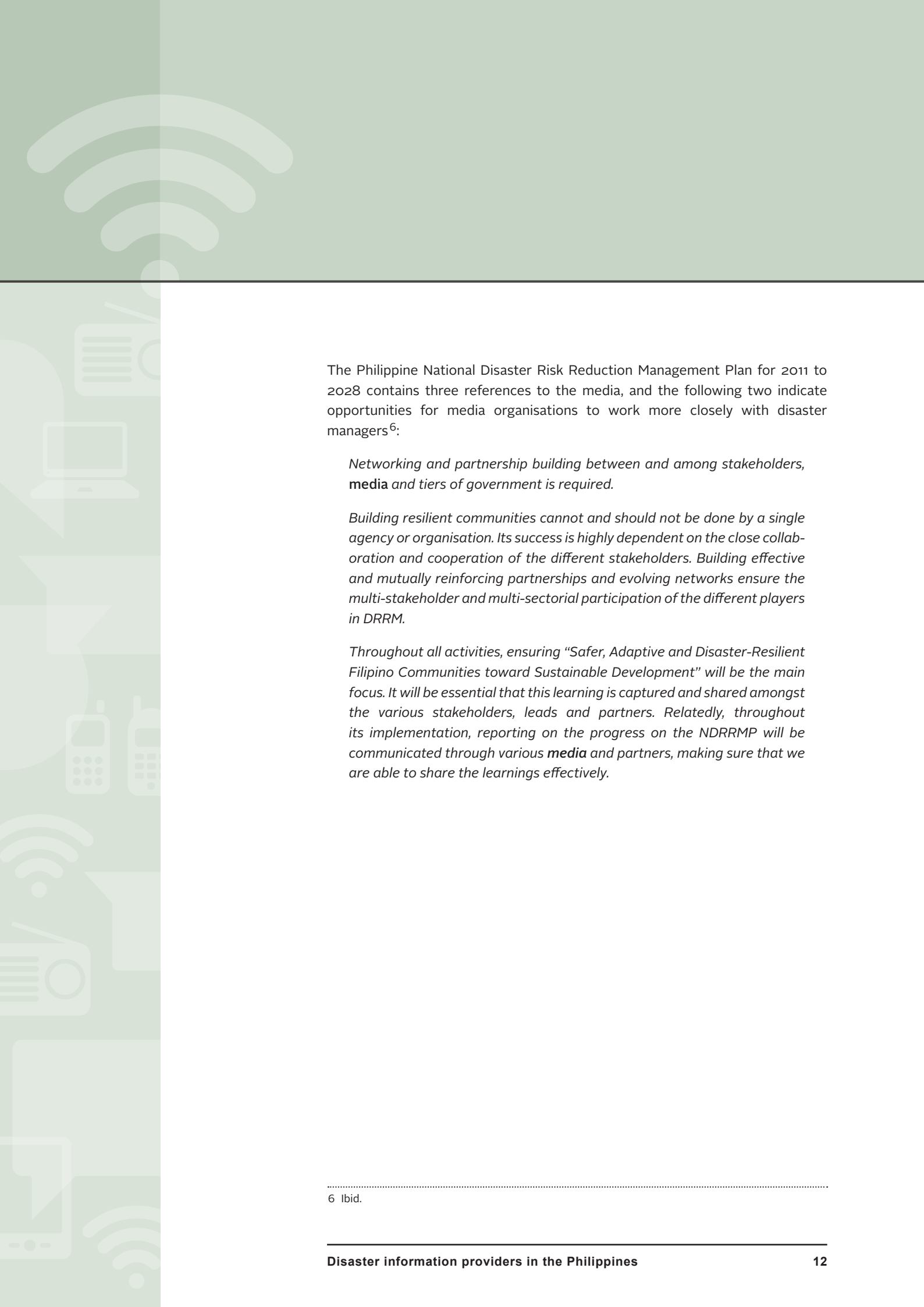
The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) is kept informed by high level situation reports on incidents. The Council is made up of all government departments and is empowered to make policy and monitor application of the NDRRM Plan. It also provides advice to the President of the Philippines.

The approach to disaster preparedness and management is legislated for in the Republic Act 101211 or Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010<sup>4</sup>. The Act lists several policies of the State including '*to promote the involvement and participation of all sectors and all stakeholders...*' however the only specific mention of media is in policy (o) '*Enhance and implement a program where humanitarian aid workers, communities, health professionals, government aid agencies, donors and the media are educated and trained on how they can actively support breastfeeding before and during a disaster and/or an emergency*<sup>5</sup>.'

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4 Republic of Philippines (2010) Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act  
<http://www.ifrc.org/docs/idr/878EN.pdf>

5 Ibid.



The Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan for 2011 to 2028 contains three references to the media, and the following two indicate opportunities for media organisations to work more closely with disaster managers<sup>6</sup>:

*Networking and partnership building between and among stakeholders, **media** and tiers of government is required.*

*Building resilient communities cannot and should not be done by a single agency or organisation. Its success is highly dependent on the close collaboration and cooperation of the different stakeholders. Building effective and mutually reinforcing partnerships and evolving networks ensure the multi-stakeholder and multi-sectorial participation of the different players in DRRM.*

*Throughout all activities, ensuring “Safer, Adaptive and Disaster-Resilient Filipino Communities toward Sustainable Development” will be the main focus. It will be essential that this learning is captured and shared amongst the various stakeholders, leads and partners. Relatedly, throughout its implementation, reporting on the progress on the NDRRMP will be communicated through various **media** and partners, making sure that we are able to share the learnings effectively.*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Observations on international actors

Many international humanitarian agencies are actively involved in disaster risk management but engagement with media as a key actor appears limited, despite its mass communication role in the three phases of disaster. The focus is more on managing the media's pursuit of information while seeking profile for the agency.



### Summary

There are opportunities to increase community resilience, improve how citizens get information during disasters and enhance two-way communication between affected people and support providers via the media. This can be achieved by improving the strategic connection between all information providers, and remembering that disaster prevention is as important as response and recovery phases.

The media is a vital conduit of information during a disaster, with affected citizens increasingly using it to communicate with information providers and disaster response agencies. This places a greater need on media and disaster managers to improve their relationships and to create more structured information flows, using social media and radio as the primary communication tools.



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