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Disaster Mitigation Communication of the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government in Managing the Recovery of Flood Victims in 2025

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the mitigation communication strategy of the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government in managing the recovery of flood victims in 2025. The disaster had a widespread impact on at least 16,987 households across 11 districts, with the most severe infrastructure damage caused by the breaches of the Sei Belutu Dyke and the Senangkong River Dyke. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, this study dissects the phenomenon through the theoretical frameworks of the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model by Reynolds and Seeger (2005) and the pillars of disaster communication by Haddow and Haddow (2017). The results indicate that the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government successfully integrated the principles of Be First, Be Right, Be Credible, Express Empathy, and Promote Action into every recovery phase. This success was bolstered by leadership commitment through direct on-site disaster inspections and adaptive policies, such as shifting teaching and learning activities to an online system to ensure the safety of school communities. Furthermore, the transparency of logistics distribution and the optimal coordination of public services despite the crisis situation reflected a strong implementation of customer focus and situational awareness. This study concludes that the synchronization of data accuracy, empathetic messaging, and solid media partnerships serves as the key to the effectiveness of government communication in accelerating the post-disaster social and economic recovery of the community in Serdang Bedagai Regency.

Keyword: Mitigation Communication, Flood Disaster, Serdang Bedagai, CERC, Victim Recovery.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The flood disaster that struck Sumatra at the end of 2025 was a significant hydrometeorological crisis, impacting not just one or two districts but spanning three provinces across Sumatra Island. The extensive scope of this flood resulted in infrastructure damage, disruptions to socio-economic activities, and an increase in the psychosocial vulnerability of the affected communities. Under these conditions, successful disaster management relies not only on the speed of physical evacuation but also on the effectiveness of information management capable of addressing public uncertainty as a priority. Without a structured communication strategy, a physical crisis caused by a disaster risks escalating into a social crisis triggered by information distortion and declining public trust in government authorities (Putra & Utama, 2021). Thus, mitigation communication in the recovery phase plays a vital role as a strategic instrument to build resilience and ensure that the rehabilitation process is accurately targeted.

Serdang Bedagai Regency is an area with a complex disaster risk profile, divided into four main vulnerable points. This region faces threats of tidal floods (sea high tides) in areas like Bedagai, high-risk flood zones in Sei Rampah Village, landslide risks in Sipispis and Bintang Bayu Districts, and tornado hazards in Sei Bamban District. The complexity of these threats peaked in 2025 when extreme rainfall induced by Tropical Cyclone Senyar passed over the Sumatra region. The presence of this cyclone became the primary trigger for above-average rainfall intensity that exceeded river capacities, leading to the breach of the Sei Belutu Dyke and the Senangkong River Dyke. The escalation of this disaster had a massive destructive impact on at least 16,987 households (KK) across 11 districts,

causing not only economic losses but also a profound psychosocial burden on the affected communities.

In responding to the crisis, the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government carried out comprehensive emergency response actions, ranging from citizen evacuations to fulfilling basic needs in the form of temporary shelter assistance, clothing, and food. However, the real communication challenge emerged during the post-disaster phase. Authorities were required to conduct image restoration by demonstrating work competence at recovery posts to maintain public compliance (Prastowo, 2022). Consequently, the government had to deliver information regarding aid and rehabilitation transparently to reduce the trauma of uncertainty. Thus, a strategic step was taken through the drafting of the Post-Disaster Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan (R3P) document, which aims to restore environmental conditions and accelerate the rebuilding of affected areas. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of this R3P highly depends on how the government communicates the plan to the public to create synergy between bureaucratic policies and the actual expectations of the community on the ground.

This communication phenomenon amidst a large-scale disaster and broken dyke infrastructure serves as the primary reason the researcher chose this topic as the object of study. In facing disasters, both government and non-government actors are required to synergize in managing crises (Rozak, 2023). The researcher sees an urgency to dissect the communication process, the construction of message meanings, and the comprehensive strategies applied by the government in mobilizing community participation during the recovery period. Based on this background, this study focuses on the title "Mitigation Communication of the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government in Managing the Recovery of Flood Victims in 2025." Through this study, it is expected to discover an effective mitigation communication model to accelerate the recovery of the community and the environment amidst a complex crisis situation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to explain the disaster mitigation communication phenomena carried out by the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government in recovering the victims of the 2025 floods. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore the construction of a reality where communication phenomena are meanings constructed by communication actors (Kriyantono, 2020). This approach was chosen because the researcher aims to capture the social reality and meaning behind recovery policies through narratives and factual descriptions of the interactions between government authorities and affected communities. This allows the researcher to dissect how crisis communication principles are implemented in real-time amidst an emergency situation triggered by Tropical Cyclone Senyar and infrastructure damage.

Data collection techniques were conducted through structured interviews with key informants from the government side, specifically the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) of Serdang Bedagai Regency, to obtain primary data regarding evacuation policies and the formulation of the R3P document. Additionally, interviews were conducted with affected community members to explore their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the messages and aid received. Furthermore, the researcher conducted observations by monitoring government activities on the ground, starting from the logistics distribution process at evacuation posts. The researcher collected various official documents such as the Post-Disaster Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan (R3P), data recapitulation records of the 16,987 households from BPBD, as well as photo archives and official news reports related to the 2025 Serdang Bedagai flood management. All collected data were then analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. By combining these various data sources, the researcher endeavors to present a comprehensive overview of the mitigation communication strategy in post-disaster management in Serdang Bedagai Regency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher presents direct findings obtained through structured interviews, observations, and documentation. The focus of the findings includes message delivery patterns from policymakers, operational responses of BPBD on the ground, partner support in fulfilling basic needs, and the experiences of affected communities at evacuation posts.

The use of language that is easily understood by the public, voice intonation that can influence message meaning, and speaking slowly but surely are considered more efficient than speaking quickly because the community can better comprehend what is being conveyed (Hardiyanto & Pulungan, 2019). Based on the results of primary data collection through structured interviews, observations, and documentation, the pure findings from the field are presented below without secondary theoretical interpretation.

a. Conceptual Analysis of the CERC Theory in the 2025 Sergai Flood Case

Field findings indicate that the communication patterns of the Sergai Regional Government and BPBD can be interpreted through CERC principles (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005), particularly regarding speed, accuracy, credibility, empathy, and reinforcing public action. The Serdang Bedagai Regional Government, in handling the 2025 floods that affected 16,987 households in 11 districts, demonstrated a comprehensive and effective crisis communication approach. This success began with fulfilling the Be First and Be Right principles, where the government managed to position itself as the primary source of rapid and accurate information. The speed of delivering factual information by local authorities is the primary key to reducing uncertainty (uncertainty reduction) and preventing the escalation of panic at the grassroots level (Hadi et al., 2019). In line with this, speed in delivering factual information is the main instrument for building credibility (Rudianto, 2015). Without speed, inaccurate information will develop and worsen the psychological impact on victims. Delays in information management by policymakers in the digital era trigger a loss of narrative control in the public sphere (Sari & Lestari, 2023).

In the Be First principle, the 24-hour readiness stated by BPBD, accompanied by condition updates in affected areas, shows efforts to maintain the authority's presence as an information reference. Meanwhile, the Be Right principle is reflected in the delivery of impact data (16,987 households) and situational information (areas starting to recede versus locations still submerged). Findings from BPBD show ongoing efforts in data collection and field information management. The Acting Head of BPBD stated that the number of affected citizens was recorded at 16,987 households, accompanied by information regarding the establishment of 27 posts and the distribution of emergency aid. Field situation information was also updated, noting that some villages had begun to recede, while specific locations, such as Cempedak Lobang, remained flooded. BPBD stated they remained on standby. Updates of this kind function to reduce public uncertainty and prevent the spread of unvalidated information, especially in situations where physical and communication access for affected residents is uneven.

By presenting data on affected areas and infrastructure damage transparently, including the breached conditions of the Sei Belutu and Senangkong River Dykes, the government successfully mitigated potential disinformation and conflicting news within the community. This directly strengthens the Be Credible principle, as the consistency of the information delivered builds public trust in local disaster management authorities. Specific and empathy-based public protection instructions increase community compliance with safety protocols while maintaining social stability during the emergency period (Sutton et al., 2015). This reinforces the perception that basic needs are genuinely being addressed, so communication credibility does not stand solely on statements but gains validation through real responses in the field. In this context, credibility becomes more stable because the community receives signals of consistency between official information and direct experiences at the posts.

Humanitarian aspects in the recovery process are reflected through the Express Empathy and Promote Action principles. The Serdang Bedagai Regional Government showed real concern through strategic policies, such as shifting Teaching and Learning Activities (KBM) to an online system in affected schools to ensure the safety of teachers and students without severing access rights to education.

The meaning of empathy was also reinforced by collaboration with strategic partners, such as the distribution of ready-to-eat nutritious food aid from SPPG MBG to areas with severe damage. An interview conducted with the Regional Coordinator of SPPG Serdang Bedagai (November 29, 2025) indicated a redirection of nutritious food distribution, which was originally intended for school children, to become aid for flood-affected communities since schools were closed. On that day, distribution reportedly continued with approximately 5,500 packages for several districts, namely Pantai Cermin, Perbaungan, Teluk Mengkudu, Sei Rampah, and Sei Bamban. The informant expressed SPPG's commitment to providing maximum assistance while hoping for weather conditions to improve soon.

The Express Empathy and Promote Action dimensions were reflected in the Vice Regent's message, which prioritized safety, extended invitations for mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and encouraged residents to follow officers' directions. However, findings at the posts indicated that empathy and calls to action need to be accompanied by service mechanisms that reach hard-to-access areas. Complaints regarding the distance of medical posts and the limited number of boats indicated that at several points, the "services available" message was not fully parallel with easy service access for affected communities in isolated locations. This means that the effectiveness of CERC principles in the recovery phase is highly influenced by operational capacity to ensure public messages can be realized evenly.

b. Empirical Testing of Haddow & Haddow's Pillars of Disaster Communication

Based on the four pillars of Haddow and Haddow (2017), research findings demonstrate a combination of achievements and gaps that need to be addressed in post-disaster recovery communication.

The first pillar, customer focus, is reflected in the government's ability to map out the specific needs of the 16,987 households across 11 districts. The government realized that residents living around the Sei Belutu Dyke and the Senangkong River Dyke experienced the most severe impacts compared to other areas that only faced minor overflows.

This difference in impact scale was responded to with differentiated aid schemes based on vulnerability levels and geographical conditions. The government established 27 posts as a macro-response to evacuees' needs. However, field findings revealed that more specific needs had not been fully or equally addressed. Informants mentioned that medical posts were available but far away, while exit access depended on a limited number of boats. Complaints regarding distant medical service access, limited boats, and non-food needs (blankets, mosquito protection) showed varying needs based on location, accessibility, and the condition of vulnerable groups (particularly children).

These conditions generated hopes for medical teams that could monitor and visit their areas more directly. This indicates the importance of more precise needs segmentation and the creation of rapid feedback loops from hard-to-reach posts. In practice, the needs of disaster victims vary; differences in damage levels and service access demand that logistics assistance should not be a "one size fits all" approach (Aksi et al., 2020). Errors in reading the vulnerability profiles of victims risk lowering community resilience post-disaster (Kusumasari, 2014).

The second pillar, leadership commitment, was demonstrated tangibly through the active involvement of regional leaders. The presence of the Vice Regent of Serdang Bedagai in directly inspecting disaster locations represented the government's commitment to ensuring emergency services ran optimally amidst the crisis. This commitment was not only symbolic but also administrative; the government ensured public services were maintained by instructing government offices not heavily affected to continue their functions normally. Meanwhile, directly affected work units maximized efforts to maintain possible administrative processes, ensuring that bureaucracy was not paralyzed by the disaster. The physical presence of a leader is not merely a symbol but a communication anchor that functions to minimize uncertainty amidst a community experiencing a crisis (Rudianto, 2018).

The regional leader's involvement was channelled through instructional messages and the coordination of healthcare workers' preparedness. This is crucial because leadership that is communicatively present can lower public uncertainty and strengthen the legitimacy of recovery policies. Success was also noted in operational invitations that could be carried out by the community, such as following officers' directions, utilizing posts, or taking specific safety steps. Through the

transparency of the logistics distribution carried out, the government not only pushed for action in the physical recovery of the community but also ensured that the 16,987 affected households felt the state's presence in every phase of post-disaster mitigation, while continuously broadcasting vigilance alerts against potential follow-up floods.

The Situational Awareness pillar was also visible from BPBD's data collection, which included impact figures and updates on affected locations (receding vs. flooded), serving as the basis for operational communication and aid distribution. By maintaining administrative functions and data collection at the agency level, the Serdang Bedagai Regional Government was able to map out affected locations precisely. Sustainable disaster management must be based on participatory risk mapping (Rudianto, 2018). This data-driven situational awareness became the key to ensuring that aid distribution could be allocated evenly and accurately to the tens of thousands of households in need.

Lastly, this field data accuracy became the primary asset in building media partnerships. Valid and up-to-date information allowed the government to provide accurate statements to the media and the public, enabling crisis communication to be managed transparently and preventing panic arising from confusing information. Strategic partnerships with local mass media constructed positive narratives to counter hoaxes (Utami & Nurjannah, 2022). The rapid and widespread dissemination of disaster information has been facilitated by technology, allowing the community to respond to disasters in a short time (Nuzuli, 2024). In the contemporary era, the optimization of digital platforms and local social media by volunteers is highly functional in accelerating the independent mapping of emergency logistics needs (Wahyuni et al., 2022). Information reaching the media on time enhances a broader reach of information, thereby assisting coordination in responding to disasters.

Findings at the posts confirmed that communication partnerships should not stop at outward information distribution; partnerships also need to strengthen the inward flow of information from affected citizens, for instance through volunteers, post coordinators, or reporting channels so that specific needs can be responded to in real-time. Thus, effective recovery communication demands the integration of field data, service coordination, and adaptive needs-response mechanisms.

Observation and interview findings at the evacuation posts showed diverse experiences among affected citizens. One informant stated they had slept for several nights in a mushala (prayer room) functioned as a post, under conditions where the surrounding environment was flooded and water levels continued to rise. Another informant compared the 2025 flood event to the 2021 flood and assessed the current event as more severe, thereby limiting community activities and forcing them to wait until the water receded. Aside from health service needs, informants at the posts also conveyed non-food needs, such as blankets due to cold nighttime temperatures, and complaints about numerous mosquitoes affecting children's health conditions. Nevertheless, several informants assessed that the food supply was relatively secure because volunteers were still active in distributing aid to evacuation posts.

Overall, the research findings show that the post-disaster recovery communication of the Sergai Regional Government tended to move on two interconnected pathways: the data-based information management pathway by BPBD and the social support reinforcement pathway through leadership messages and partner involvement. From a CERC perspective, efforts to maintain information speed and accuracy (Be First – Be Right) along with verifiable action consistency (Be Credible) were visible through impact data collection, regional condition updates, the establishment of posts, and the reinforcement of aid distribution. However, when linked to Haddow & Haddow's pillars, the effectiveness of recovery communication is determined not only by the outward flow of information to the public but also by the accuracy of needs segmentation (Customer Focus) and the strength of field feedback mechanisms so that responses can reach difficult-to-access areas more evenly. The performance of post-disaster recovery communication can be rated as quite strong at the macro level (situational information and basic needs fulfillment), but still requires reinforcement at the micro-operational level, especially to ensure that access to health services and the fulfillment of specific non-food needs for vulnerable groups run as quickly and precisely as the messages delivered to the public.

4. CONCLUSION

1. Post-disaster recovery communication by the Sergai Regional Government demonstrated efforts to separate situational information functions and recovery service functions relatively clearly, particularly through impact data collection, updates on affected regional conditions, and operational support in the form of establishing 27 posts for 16,987 affected households across 11 districts. This pattern strengthens the government's role as an information reference in the recovery phase.

2. Messages from regional leaders that placed community safety as a priority, accompanied by instructions for health service readiness, indicate the implementation of empathy and call-to-action dimensions in post-disaster crisis communication. Partner support (e.g., the redirection and distribution of food aid) also reinforced consistency between delivered information and actions on the ground, thereby helping to maintain the stability of public trust at evacuation posts.

3. Although food needs fulfillment was assessed as relatively secure, the study still found gaps in health service access aspects in hard-to-reach areas (the distance of medical posts and boat limitations), as well as delays in fulfilling certain non-food needs (such as blankets and mosquito protection), particularly for vulnerable groups. These findings underscore the need to strengthen feedback mechanisms from posts and isolated areas so that needs segmentation and service responses can occur more rapidly and evenly during the recovery phase.

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