

WISE GIVING™

GUIDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE BBB WISE GIVING ALLIANCE : FALL 2008



HELP!
GIVING FOR
DISASTER RELIEF



A Publication of the
BBB Wise Giving Alliance

The *Wise Giving Guide* is published quarterly to help donors make more informed giving decisions. This guide includes a compilation of the latest evaluation conclusions completed by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance.

If you would like to see a particular topic discussed in this guide, please email suggestions to give@council.bbb.org or write to us at the address below.

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president's MESSAGE

If ever a picture conveyed what a thousand words could not, it's the one on our cover.

Anything I could say about that scene would be inadequate. But there's a point I do want to make to all of you who are moved to help when you see such tragedy.

As vital as charities will be in disaster relief, they will not be alone.

I stress the "multi-party" nature of disaster response because I think we sometimes seem to expect that when nature wreaks havoc, charities can ride in and save the day. In fact, neighbors, strangers, faith-based organizations and a multitude of others will be on the scene as well. Government bodies—from local to national, depending on the crisis—will also be there.

In the rush of post-disaster charity appeals, we may forget that government will always be involved in some way. No other body is likely to have government's resources and powers. American charities, even if huge, do not. Nonetheless, if government performs poorly, as we saw on the Gulf Coast in 2005, charities sometimes get the blame.

Responding to disasters requires cooperation from many organizations. I hope that our cover article will add to your understanding of the emphasis that experienced relief charities put on building relationships with others. In the best scenarios, different groups strengthen and complement one another's efforts.

As you'll also read, organizations that have responded for years to disasters are giving increased attention to disaster preparedness. This work, too, will demand wide participation and cooperation. Charities are absolutely essential in the mix. They deserve your informed support.



H. Art Taylor, *President*



HELP!

GIVING FOR DISASTER RELIEF

At some point after disaster strikes, donors' behavior comes under scrutiny.

Maybe you, like many, hesitated to give after the devastation wrought by the Myanmar cyclone and China earthquake. Overall, giving at the start was "lack-luster," as one headline put it, though some charities reported doing well. There just wasn't the tumultuous rush that commonly follows news of terrible loss.

A few reasons for donors' restraint seem self-evident. In Myanmar, where media had little access, it was hard to know at first what charities were active. Announcements from the country's government raised doubts about whether outside charity help would reach victims. In China, relief work quickly seemed to be well in hand, with Chinese citizens rushing to help and the government active in rescue. Or maybe what held donors back were not conditions abroad but their own daily reality: inflation, the housing crisis, the price of gas.

Speculation even ventured into givers' internal conditions. If contributions for Myanmar and China don't hit peaks that make headlines, maybe it's because contributors are exhausted by too-frequent charity

In a disaster preparedness exercise, villagers in Vietnam learn how to reinforce their homes to withstand strong winds. Photo by World Vision



appeals. Or maybe they're emotionally drained, all compassion spent.

Some theories may prove more fruitful than others, but whatever we can learn about attitudes or ideas that influence

giving is important to all of us. The stakes are high: donors' support is essential for the work that charities do when disaster strikes.



A World Vision worker helps a woman carry emergency relief supplies from a distribution center in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis. Photo by World Vision

Is this what we're thinking?

Focusing on Katrina and to a lesser degree on 9/11, a group of philanthropic professionals took a close look at what the donating public, among others, thought of charities' response to those disasters. In a collection of essays that followed, *After Katrina: Public Expectation and Charities' Response*, which was published in 2006 by the Urban Institute and is accessible at www.urban.org/publications/311331.html, the authors cite a number of findings. Among them:

- The donating public over-estimates the capacity of the charitable sector to deal by itself with large-scale disaster.
- "Many donors do not understand that voluntary organizations cannot function, let alone raise funds, without incurring overhead expenses."
- "Some donors expect all of their gifts to go to victims—and to go immediately—even though charities may have long-term needs that require long-term funding."

If donors have unrealistic expectations about what charity disaster-responders can do by themselves, the kinds of expenses they incur, and the time frame of their



Bundles of tarpaulins are checked against the log as they are loaded onto a barge rented by Mercy Corps to deliver aid in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. *Photo: Mercy Corps Myanmar*

operations, is it because they just can't abandon their rose-colored glasses?

That seems unlikely. In fact, charities at times feed misconceptions. The Urban Institute study comments that charities “must frame their appeals for contributions honestly and without giving potential donors false expectations of what can be accomplished, even if this means declining to accept contributions with conditions attached that cannot reasonably be met.”

But donors may have unrealistic expectations for another reason: they just haven't looked recently at how disaster relief works today.

What's to know?

A good bit, as charity materials and charity staff make clear. Here are some key points.

The humanitarian disaster relief that at one time seemed “almost quaintly straightforward” no longer exists, says World Vision's *2006 Review of Global Emergency Response*. Despite profound evolution in the field, however, the assumption that immediate delivery of food, water, shelter and health items will meet all needs hasn't entirely died.

Obviously nothing was ever that simple. To some extent, relief has always included two phases. The first is relief of immediately apparent needs through provision of food, shelter, water and medical care. The second is recovery, in which new needs may emerge. Though the dividing line can be blurry—think grief

counseling, for example—some charities work on the first, some on the second, and some on both. With this spread, it's essential that each soliciting group make clear what it does and that donors know what they're supporting.

The recovery phase is often unfamiliar to donors, yet it lasts longer and usually costs far more than relief. It often requires considerable skills of negotiation and collaboration and deep acquaintance with the local community, as well as technical know-how. Consider this undertaking in Indonesia, described in Plan International's *Tsunami 24 Months After* (2006), the charity's assessment of its own work and impact following that disaster:

The introduction of a saline-resistant rice variety (Co 43) was...difficult to appreciate in the short-term. This variety produces lower yields than the traditional variety (Ponni) but it can be sustained in saline conditions. We had to try the idea very patiently with farmers. For us, it was the only way out of the post-tsunami devastation. But for them it was a big risk. Ultimately we won over many farmers who have recently harvested their first crop, while reluctant farmers continue waiting for their Ponni rice to produce. Those who took the risk are now happy with that leap of faith—although their income is

now only half of what they previously cultivated. We have much more work to do to help them all recover their livelihood to pre-tsunami income levels.

Disaster recovery can be baffling. Even the staff of foundations, people for whom grant-giving is a profession, find it challenging, as is clear in *Best Practices in Disaster Grantmaking: Lessons from the Gulf Coast*, a 2008 study published by the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers. Some of their approaches to recovery worked better than others. Responses that were most successful, according to both funders and grant recipients, were those that, among other things, took fully into account the length of time that recovery requires and avoided paternalism, allowing affected communities to determine what they need for recovery.

New standards, new tools, new danger

Principles and practices: For workers in disaster relief, keeping up with the job goes beyond everyday challenges on the ground. Workers must be familiar

with codes of conduct, best practices, and essential ethical considerations that seem to grow more and more exacting. There are even extraordinarily specific requirements for the nitty-gritty of relief, like how much soap is needed per person per month.

Among the guiding principles are two that charities particularly want donors to understand. One is “building back better,” the idea that charities will improve on conditions that existed before the disaster, not just restore them so that the next disaster repeats the destruction of the last. You may have noted, for example, that a number of charities active in China promise to make any schools they build earthquake-resistant. Another principle is that disaster-affected people should “own their recovery”—it should not be imposed by outsiders. The example of the rice growers suggests the delicacy of putting this principle into action.

Local staff: Aid workers are often largely local, for good reason. Because intimate knowledge of local communities is so essential for effective charity functioning, “the extent to which a charity empowers local staff and partners should be a consideration for donors thinking about giving for disaster relief,” suggests



World Vision provided insecticide-treated nets to help survivors of Cyclone Nargis, like this one, sleep safe from disease-carrying mosquitoes. Photo by World Vision

Community members in Bangladesh take part in a cyclone preparedness drill. Photo: Jeffrey Holt / Save the Children



Jeremy Barnicle, managing director of marketing and communications at Mercy Corps. He says that in Mercy Corps' overseas operations the ratio of local staff to expatriates is 9 to 1.

Charity self-assessment: Post-disaster work increasingly involves determining how each response could have been better handled. Organizational self-scrutiny is incessant, if the number of public “lessons learned” documents is any indication. Studies of the tsunami response are available on many individual charity sites, including those of the American Red Cross and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). ALNAP, an international interagency network, quickly uploaded key lessons from past disasters to help agencies operating in response to Cyclone Nargis.

Specialists and generalists: Like so many occupations, disaster relief has become professionalized. World Vision lists specializations in fields like food security and health, gender and girl-child issues, migration and global urbanization, stress counseling and conflict resolution. Generalists rely on knowledge management systems to help them reach specialists when they need them. At World Vision, when a relief program ran out of tents just as winter was coming on, a ground worker's call to a specialist in emergency shelter quickly brought in Quonset hut-type structures that could be easily and cheaply assembled.

Technology: Corporations are showing increasing interest in manufacturing products. They've gone beyond insecticide-treated nets to tarps that serve the same purpose in temporary shelters. There's a tube that purifies water as one sips through it—and lasts for a year. Filtration systems have been down-sized to be easily transported in trucks. Satellite phones, once an expensive luxury, are now widely used by workers in the field.



A woman who lost her home in the earthquake in China is comforted and given supplies by World Vision workers. *Photo by World Vision*



Mercy Corps helped this farmer in Indonesia restart his rice farming business after the Indian Ocean Tsunami. *Photo: Shirine Bakhat / Mercy Corps*

Risks: Yet plentiful professional guidance and technological aids don't eliminate stress. Charities are concerned that their workers have adequate mental health resources themselves. In some places, there's physical danger. Humanitarian workers, traditionally allowed to work without harassment, are increasingly subject to attack and even killing.

No job for loners

“Partnering” is a word you'll see again and again on Web sites of relief agencies. Given the competing appeals for funds that hit your mailbox, you may wonder how charities can vie for your support but go shoulder-to-shoulder on disaster sites.

Those different activities involve different mind-sets, says one charity executive. While collaboration is essential on the ground, in fund raising “you don't want anyone else fishing in your pond.” (Charities stress, though, that what they'd really like to see is a bigger pond—increased overall giving for international humanitarian aid.)

Partnering has been common in this year's disasters.

- Save the Children operated Child Friendly Spaces in Red Cross-run shelters after the Midwest floods and the California wild fires.
- In China, some religious charities without a presence there are working through the Amity Fund, described as an independent Chinese Christian voluntary organization.
- Mercy Corps, without its own staff in Myanmar, partnered with Merlin, a UK-based medical aid agency with a well-established presence there, providing it



A Save the Children facilitator leads a training session for volunteers in a disaster management program in Bangladesh. Photo: Jeffrey Holt / Save the Children

first with financial aid and supplies and later, when access eased, with specialists.

- InterAction, the largest U.S. coalition of international relief organizations, reports that the limited staff of its member agencies who were on the ground when Cyclone Nardis struck Myanmar joined with workers from the UN and the International Federation of the Red Cross.

Financing disaster response

One of the toughest parts of charities' disaster response is financing it—not only how much, but when.

After 9/11, there was a widespread complaint that the Red Cross did not adequately convey to donors that it initially intended to use part of the 9/11 donations for broader purposes after, in the Red Cross's view, all 9/11 needs were met. Subsequently the Red Cross changed that practice and revised its fund raising policy.

One result of the uproar was that some charities and some donors began being very specific about what they were being solicited—or giving—for. After the Gulf Coast hurricanes, charities sometimes offered donors the option of giving to a Katrina Fund or to a general disaster fund. That could backfire. Charities that received money specifically for a Katrina Fund, and used what they could for that purpose, could not spend anything left over to help victims of Rita.

Raising money for future disasters has never been easy. Because potential need hasn't the drawing power of immediate need, charities take steps to have money on hand *before* disaster strikes. Save the Children says that interest from an endowment fund allows it to meet emergency needs before it begins public appeals. Each year World Vision allocates about \$6 million globally for urgent disaster responses, subsequently reimbursing

this allocation through new fund raising. The Red Cross regularly sets aside money for disasters, but this year's needs have wiped out that reserve, forcing the Red Cross to borrow so that it could cope with the Midwest floods and California wildfires while it undertook fund raising for them.

New directions in disaster fund raising

The biggest change in World Vision's disaster fund raising since the tsunami is the use of the Internet, reports Randy Strash, the organization's strategy director for disaster response fund raising. Prior to the tsunami, 20% of World Vision's new donors came through the Internet and 80% from direct mail. Now the percentages are nearly reversed.

Fund raising online has enormous advantages. "It used to take 10 days to launch a disaster appeal," says Strash; "Now it now takes 10 hours." Online appeals cost less than mail, contributions come in faster, and thank-you notes go out before they sound stale. Donors are more likely to give again if they hear back quickly about work they supported.

The Internet has affected not only fund raising but the amount of space that charities devote online to describing and reporting on their work. If you visit the Web sites of the larger disaster relief charities, you may be struck by the breadth of information they provide. Many, including the Red Cross, have sections describing how they handle disasters. You can learn about emergency response teams that can be deployed on short notice and how materials are pre-positioned where emergencies are likely to occur. Sites often include first-person news from staff on the ground. Photos crowd the screens.

And donors are taking advantage of what's there, going online for information about charities in ever greater numbers, as documented in a *NonProfit Times* study published July 15, 2008. Charities say they benefit from the opportunity to educate donors in ways that a two-page letter can't handle. Online it's possible to



In an emergency simulation, children in Nicaragua practice providing first aid to a classmate. Photo by World Vision

convey vividly, through pictures or narratives, a complex subject like restoring a region's economy after disasters have ruined businesses.

The biggest influence on disaster giving, however, is the media. It's the media that sends people to their computers or desks when calamity strikes. Charities say there's definitely a correlation between the extent and timing of media attention and the scale and timing of giving. For that reason, larger charities put considerable effort into forging relationships with media people, providing information that will help them produce sound stories about disaster response and, hopefully, about those charities. Charities note that good coverage pays off in both contributions and donor understanding. Negative coverage, even of one charity, can hurt many.

Forecast: turbulence

Disasters are becoming more frequent. Writing in the *New York Times* on May 31, 2008, Charles M. Blow says that there have been more than four times as many weather-related disasters in the last 30 years as in the previous 75 years. In reflections dated July 1, 2008, Markku Neskala, the outgoing secretary general of the IFRC, cites a near-doubling of disasters in ten years, from an average 230 a year in 1988-97 to 380 a year in 1998-2007. There's no indication that the trend will reverse.

Even if disasters are spread around—Blow says the U.S. has gone through more weather-related disasters than any other country—the effects on human life are more dire in some places than others. A 1999 UN report says that over 90% of all disaster victims live in developing countries, where poverty and lack of resources intensify loss. TV images from New Orleans

after Katrina remind us that the same conditions can intensify loss anywhere. Worldwide, such developments as urbanization, population growth, climate change and environmental degradation increase the impact of natural disasters.

Acting on the hard facts, relief charities are increasingly broadcasting this message: *response alone is not enough*. As stated by former IFRC official Neskala in his July 1 2008 reflections, "There is now a pressing need to invest heavily in the area of prevention—to provide the most exposed communities with the means to protect themselves from crises, anticipate disaster and universalize early warning systems, so that people can take control of their lives."

The readiness is all

It wasn't yesterday, of course, that charities or any of us suddenly realized that "be prepared" isn't a Boy Scout exclusive. Noah got the word on good authority long ago.

Some preparedness goes without question. You expect firefighters to be trained before you dial 911. People take first aid and CPR courses. For years the American Red Cross has worked for disaster "mitigation," a word that refers to steps you can take to minimize flood damage to your house, for example. FEMA is promoting preparedness widely. But today relief charities repeatedly call attention to one particular success story:

- Bangladesh, 1991—a cyclone kills 140,000
- Bangladesh, 2007—a cyclone of similar scale kills fewer than 4,000.

In a Bangladesh community, the Cyclone Preparedness Program holds a training drill. *Photo: Jeffrey Holt / Save the Children*





Save the Children staff play with children in a shelter after Cyclone Nargis. Photo: Save the Children

Preparedness made the difference. After the 1991 cyclone, Bangladeshis undertook such steps as establishing shelters on higher ground and publicizing their location. There was an early warning mechanism. Volunteers and other workers were trained for rapid deployment. Cyclone simulations were widely attended. The 2007 cyclone still brought tragic death, but the contrast with the earlier outcome was striking: a UN report says 3.2 million people had been evacuated from vulnerable areas early on, and other pre-planned actions cut damage drastically.

Thorough preparedness, say the professionals, saves money as well as lives. According to the IFRC, studies indicate that “a dollar invested in disaster risk reduction can save two to ten dollars in disaster response and recovery costs.”

Bringing preparedness home

Giving to help foreign populations be prepared for disaster is of course only part of the story. Preparedness at home, in this country, is being pressed more and more onto our consciousness by FEMA and others.

One charity effort in our own backyard seems both poignant and practical. Operation Brother’s Keeper (OBK), in southeast Louisiana, “seeks to address the vital need of an evacuation and sheltering plan for the many thousands of people living in New Orleans without a means of transportation in the event of a major disaster, whether natural or human-made.”

The organization, which according to its mission statement is “an initiative consisting of non-profit, faith-based, university and governmental organizations,” has a range of objectives, mainly involving congregations in its area. One goal: “to pair an at-risk congregation with a host congregation outside of the risk area for evacuation and sheltering purposes.”

Fast forward

If the charities that deal with current disasters must also be concerned about preparing vulnerable populations for the next one, you may well wonder how they’re going to carry it off. They can’t do it without your financial support, and obtaining that may not be easy.

Scenes of storm-wrecked villages, near-famished children or newly homeless families have always carried immense fund raising power. They grab the heart in ways that concepts like risk reduction, resilience building and mitigation, even when somehow caught in photos, just don’t.

Charities know that. But they know that now they must convince donors and all of us that when it comes to natural disasters, dollars used for emergency preparedness have far more impact than dollars used for response. “Making that point,” says Ned Olney, vice president of international humanitarian response at Save the Children, “is a major, major challenge.”

“Long-term” grows longer

But meeting the challenge may not be insurmountable. There’s evidence that donors are increasingly knowledgeable about relief. “We’re seeing more donors who understand how emergencies roll out,” says Anne-Marie Grey, vice president for resource development at Save the Children. “They understand the phases from relief to recovery and the aim of ‘building back better.’ They want more information about what’s happening on the ground and are willing to take the time to read.”

If you’re among them, you have none of the expectations called “unrealistic” in the study we mentioned at the beginning of this article.

That’s not to say you’re without expectations. You expect charities to do what’s within their capacity and collaborate with others (realizing that relationships can be delicate). You expect charities appeals to be clear about how funds will be used (and not include untenable claims that “100% of your contribution will go for relief”). You understand that after disasters, immediate needs are important but that long-term ones are, too. You look for accountability for the work that’s done.

And perhaps now you’ve begun to expect appeals to support disaster preparedness as well as disaster relief. Both causes need donors’ thoughtful consideration.