

humanitarian aid

PREPARING FOR DISASTER SAVES LIVES



Disaster Risk
Reduction

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

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EMERGENCY SHELTER

Cyclones, earthquakes, floods and landslides sweep away the fragile houses of the poor in an instant – often year after year. As a first humanitarian response, aid agencies step in with basic items such as tents and tarpaulins. A few weeks later, if necessary, assistance continues with building materials and tools for temporary shelters so that people can have a roof over their heads until permanent homes are ready.

The poorest people are the first to receive a “transitional” shelter. Unfortunately, experience shows that these basic and fragile structures often remain their only home for years. They frequently serve as a foundation for future housing, to be expanded, reinforced and embellished. It is therefore crucial that proper materials are provided and correct methods used from the very outset.



In disaster-prone areas around the world the Commission is increasingly funding temporary housing designed to withstand at least small-scale natural disasters and offer a good base for recovery.

In flood-prone areas such as parts of Cambodia, houses are built on pillars, while in Bangladesh plinths are raised and reinforced with stone or concrete, to prevent them being washed away. In the Philippines, a country hit by at least 20 typhoons a year, houses are built on solid foundations, the walls and roof structures are joined and have cross bracing to ensure that they can withstand lateral movements.

However, reducing the risk of disaster goes beyond improving temporary housing distributed in the context of humanitarian relief. It also entails training local people, builders, masons and future home-owners in disaster-resistant building techniques. These techniques can then be applied to other houses constructed outside relief programmes. The projects include promoting a strong commitment from authorities at all levels to ensure proper planning and the enforcement of building norms and regulations.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN ACTION

Disaster preparedness is proof that people at risk are far from helpless when armed with the appropriate local knowledge, practice and response mechanisms.



BANGLADESH

In June 2007, Chittagong, the second largest city and port of Bangladesh, was affected by devastating landslides. Heavy rainfall saturated the hillsides giving residents no chance of escaping when mud and water entered their homes in the early morning. Around 95 people were killed or went missing.

Action Aid volunteers, recruited and trained under a DIPECHO project, played a vital role in search and rescue operations right from the start of the landslides.

Even before official help arrived, a group of community volunteers were involved in the rescue effort, saving lives, transporting the injured to hospital and recovering bodies.

By the end of the operation, the group had saved eight people themselves and had contributed to the official rescue effort that led to more lives being saved.

One volunteer recalls, "The training we received in search and rescue and first-aid, and the discussions we had, enabled me to respond quickly".

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

In the early hours of 28 October 2007, a tropical depression in the Caribbean developed into Tropical Storm Noël. For the next 72 hours, this huge, slow-moving weather system poured colossal amounts of water on to the Dominican Republic.

By the time Noël had passed, at least 116 people were dead, dozens had disappeared and two-thirds of the country was flooded. Damage to public infrastructure, housing and agriculture was severe and widespread.

However, in the capital city, Santo Domingo, there was a small miracle. Extensive flooding had occurred there with hundreds of houses destroyed. Most of the inhabitants' belongings were lost. But despite this, no-one was killed or injured in five neighbourhoods where Intermón OXFAM had implemented a Commission-funded, community-based, disaster preparedness operation.



The focus of the project was to help the communities help themselves before, during and immediately after an emergency. They had been taught to react without waiting for outside help, so the five targeted communities were able to recognise the threat before it arrived, alert others and evacuate the danger zone in time. None of the infrastructure built by Intermón Oxfam to alleviate the risks – evacuation routes, posts and signs – suffered any damage.



GREATER HORN OF AFRICA

Most of the people who live in the arid and semi-arid lands of the Greater Horn of Africa are nomadic pastoralists who keep camels, cattle and goats. It is a way of life that used to be highly suited to this fragile ecosystem, but climate change has set alarm bells ringing. The communities' coping mechanisms are under pressure and livelihoods are threatened.

In recent years, recurrent drought has led to a massive reduction in livestock. The loss of load camels, which provide transport for the nomads, has proved disastrous. Too few camels have survived to take on the increased workload of transporting water and relief supplies to families located far away from the distribution points.

In a long-term strategy to prepare communities to cope with drought, the Commission, with its partners CORDAID/PISP (Pastoralist Integrated Support Programme), initiated a drought preparedness project. One of its components was the distribution of pack camels.

The Yaa Galbo community benefited from this operation. Gufu Umuro, a ritual elder commented:

"We experience drought every second year nowadays and this has significantly undermined our resilience and our traditional social mechanisms. We received 87 load camels from PISP and are better off as a result. Now our village of 48 households can migrate in three shifts rather than the five or six we used to need. The camels help us to get water: it was just what we needed."



"The European Commission's humanitarian mandate focuses on saving lives. By including disaster preparedness in our funding, we are at the centre of the global effort to strengthen disaster risk reduction efforts and help the most vulnerable communities."

Louis Michel

European Commissioner for Development & Humanitarian Aid

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY WITH THE VICTIMS OF DISASTERS

The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department is a service under the direct responsibility of Commissioner Louis Michel.

Since 1992, the Commission has funded relief to millions of victims of natural and man-made disasters outside the European Union.

Aid is channelled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, nationality or political affiliation.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS IN THE FIELD

For humanitarian aid, the Commission works with about 200 operational partners, including specialised United Nations agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

A KEY DONOR

The European Commission is one of the biggest sources of humanitarian aid in the world. In 2007, it provided more than € 768 million for humanitarian programmes. This does not include the aid given separately by the European Union's 27 Member States. Commission support went to projects in more than 70 countries. The funds are spent on goods and services such as food, clothing, shelter, medical provisions, water supplies, sanitation, emergency repairs and mine-clearing. The Commission also funds disaster preparedness and damage limitation projects in regions prone to natural catastrophes.

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needed most

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