

Emergencies

What is an emergency?

An emergency is a situation or event that causes great human suffering. Emergencies are often the result of a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, flooding or drought. They can also be a consequence of human actions, such as civil war.

Decade of deadly emergencies

These are examples of just some of the natural disasters that have hit communities around the world in recent years.

YEAR	LOCATION	DEATH TOLL	EMERGENCY
2001	India	20,005	Earthquake
2002	China	793	Flash flood
2003	Iran	26,796	Earthquake
2004	South East Asia	225,841	Tsunami*
2005	India, Pakistan, Kashmir	73,338	Earthquake
2006	Philippines	1,126	Landslide
2007	Bangladesh	4,234	Cyclone
2008	Burma/Myanmar	138,366	Cyclone
2009	Taiwan	630	Cyclone
2010	Haiti	222,570	Earthquake
2010	Pakistan	1,985	Floods

(Source: International Disaster Database. * Tsunami caused by underwater earthquake)

TRY THIS Go to the Disasters Emergency Committee website and find out what disasters occurred where last year. Were any of these man-made emergencies? If not, find an example from a previous year.

Why poor people suffer the most



Madame Celina Traesil, 60, lost her home in the Haiti earthquake. She is now part of a house-building project supported by Caritas Switzerland, a CAFOD partner.

In an emergency, there are various reasons why people living in poverty are the most vulnerable:

- Their homes may be built on land prone to natural catastrophes, such as flooding or landslides, because they cannot afford to build on better land.
- The materials their homes are built from may be poor quality and less able to withstand the impact of a disaster.
- They have nothing to fall back on – for example, if they lose their crops because of drought, they can't afford to buy food.
- They are far less likely to have access to the infrastructure – decent roads and hospitals, for example – that can help them out of danger.

FACT

On average 270 million people per year have lost their homes and livelihoods due to natural disasters over the last decade.

(World Disasters Report 2009)

In 2009, 42 million people were displaced by conflict or persecution, four-fifths of them in developing countries.

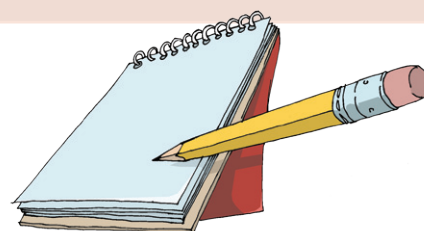
(Millennium Development Goals report 2010)

TRY THIS Discuss or write down some arguments for and against the statement “It is more important to reduce poverty around the world than to raise money for disaster relief”.

“ I am here to say we are with you. You are not alone ”

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to Haiti after the devastating earthquake in 2010

TRY THIS Research and compare impacts of the floods in Pakistan 2010 with those in Australia 2011.



Responding to emergencies

When there is an emergency the Disasters and Emergency Committee (DEC) in the UK coordinates public appeals to raise money. A number of aid charities, including CAFOD, Oxfam and Christian Aid, are members of the committee. The money raised from appeals is distributed between the member charities and they organise a response, often involving 'partner' organisations in the local disaster area that they have worked with before.

There are two key stages to the response:

Immediate help. The focus is on saving lives. Providing food, clean water, shelter and medicines are the priority in the first days and weeks of the emergency.

Longer-term help. The focus is on helping the community build a future. Homes, schools and medical centres need to be rebuilt. Livelihoods have been destroyed so many people need to be helped to retrain or start again. This could take months or years.

Case study: Haiti

On 12 January 2010 the Caribbean island of Haiti was hit by a massive earthquake. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. Millions of people were already living in poorly constructed slums. The earthquake is thought to have killed over 220,000 people and injured 300,000. 1.2 million people needed emergency shelter.

A DEC appeal raised £103 million. CAFOD partners and other aid agencies set to work straight away providing medical care, food, water and shelter. In the days and weeks after the quake, emergency toilets and washing facilities were built, rubbish clearance schemes set up and temporary shelters provided for those who had lost their homes. As cholera became more of a risk, CAFOD funded public education programmes on how to avoid the disease and provided bleach, soap and other hygiene supplies.

Rebuilding the devastation is estimated to take 5-10 years, at a cost of \$11.5 billion.

Case studies: Bangladesh and Sri Lanka

Cyclone Sidr devastated communities in Bangladesh in 2007. Following initial emergency help, CAFOD built storm resistant houses and community cyclone shelters to help communities face future disasters.

After the 2004 tsunami in south-east Asia, thousands of fishing boats and nets were destroyed by the giant wave. Fishermen were not able to catch and sell fish so were not able to earn money. In Sri Lanka, CAFOD funded replacement boats, nets and engines so that they could start again.

Disaster diseases

Dangerous illnesses such as cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea spread quickly if there is no clean water and no toilets. Prevention is simple – clean water and regular hand washing – but in chaos this can be hard. People who have escaped death and injury from the disaster can end up getting sick and dying from avoidable illnesses.

Photograph: Nana Anto-Awuakye Illustration: Dylan Gibson Registered charity no. 285776

Being prepared

If communities can be helped to prepare for future emergencies, then they are better equipped to cope. In Kenya, for example, climate change means that people are facing cycle after cycle of increasingly severe drought. CAFOD is funding programmes that help people prepare for emergencies, including encouraging farmers to plant drought-resistant crops that can withstand the harsher conditions.

TRY THIS Find out more about the illnesses that can happen after an emergency. Imagine you are a health worker at a disaster site. What advice would you be giving people?

“Public money buys about four times as much humanitarian ‘impact’ if spent on preparation before disaster strikes rather than on an expensive response.”

Bekele Geleta, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

TRY THIS What would you do if a natural disaster like a flood hit your town or village and destroyed your home and those of your neighbours? What would you need most the first day, then one week, one month and one year later?



TRY THIS You have to decide what to put in emergency survival kits to take to families who have lost everything in a hurricane. What **six** items would you put in a typical kit for one family and why?



Useful websites

dec.org.uk

Disasters Emergency Committee

un.org

United Nations

redcross.org.uk

Red Cross

alertnet.org

Alertnet

www.who.org

World Health Organisation

cafod.org.uk

CAFOD

All facts correct May 2011