

The local church and disasters

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Introduction

Many churches exist in disaster-prone environments. Some of those disasters occur suddenly, for example earthquakes and landslides, while others – for example prolonged drought – develop more slowly over weeks or months. Many disasters are weather-related, for example cyclones and floods, and there is evidence that these disaster types are becoming more frequent and more severe as climate change affects more parts of the world.

Sudden disasters require an immediate response, and the church is well positioned to provide this. It has its buildings, its land and its people – three most valuable resources. The church is also well equipped to help disaster survivors to cope with the emotional distress of losing family, friends and possessions. It can provide spiritual comfort, emotional support and hope for the future, irrespective of race, religion, gender or nationality.

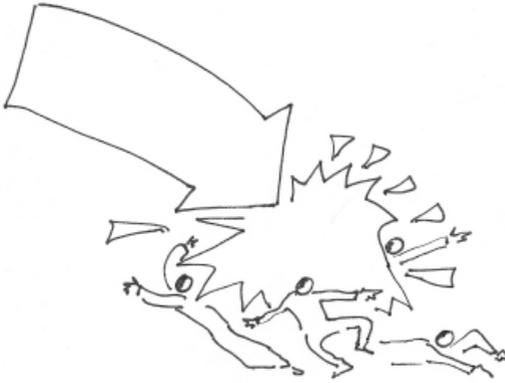
Emergency response is not the only way of addressing disasters. Much can be done to prepare for natural hazards and to reduce their impact. This chapter explains the *disaster cycle* – the sequence of activities which usually follows one disaster (emergency response and rehabilitation) and leads on to mitigation and preparedness for the next. Biblical examples are given for each of these categories.

The chapter also introduces the seven ways in which the local church has strength in relation to disasters. These are described more fully in the Tearfund publication *The local church and its engagement with disasters*. There is also a concise checklist of what to do in a disaster situation and an exercise to illustrate the resources which the church does have available to respond to an emergency.

Finally, there is a Bible study on the theme of 'Why does God allow suffering?'. Another important Bible study, on the Good Samaritan, appears on page 130.



What is a disaster?



Hazards and disasters are closely related but they are not the same.

HAZARD The term *hazard* describes an extreme natural or 'man-made' event. Natural events include earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides, cyclones and fires. Man-made hazards include such things as conflict, inter-community violence and industrial accidents. This book focuses on natural hazards, though some material (for example, on helping displaced people) will be useful for man-made events too.

DISASTER A *disaster* occurs when a hazard affects people who are in a vulnerable situation and who are unable to cope with its impact. One family or one village may be more vulnerable than others.

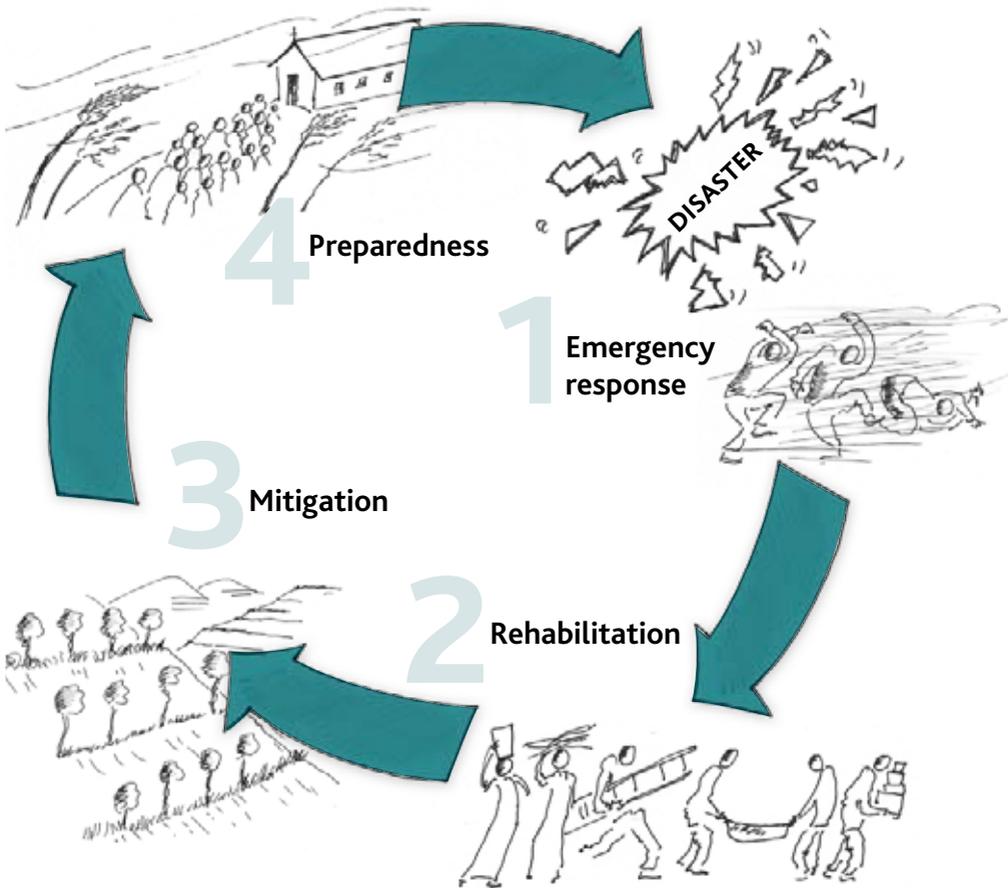
Vulnerable people

The term *vulnerable* is used to describe people who are likely to suffer serious loss, damage, injury or death as a result of a hazard. For example, economic pressures may force people to live in dangerous locations such as flood plains or low-lying coastal areas. They are then vulnerable to flooding or storms. Other people may be vulnerable because of the type of house they live in, or perhaps because of a disability which reduces their mobility. Some vulnerability factors (for example, poor leadership, no access to savings or credit) apply to all hazards; others are hazard-specific (for example, a lack of boats creates vulnerability to flooding).

The poorest people in society are generally most at risk from the impact of disasters. However, children, people with disabilities, minority groups, elderly people and pregnant or nursing mothers are also vulnerable in difficult situations.

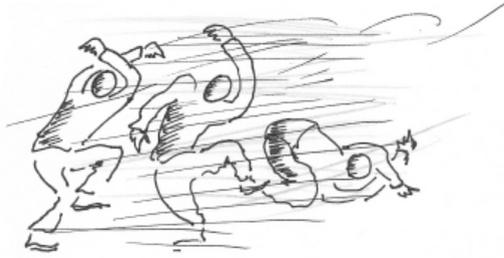
How do we respond to disasters?

How we respond to disasters can be seen as a series of stages which are linked together, as the simple diagram of the disaster cycle below shows.



In some areas of the world this disaster cycle is repeated, because of the vulnerable places in which people live or because of their local weather patterns. An example is Bangladesh. Many people live in poor-quality houses on low land which is flooded when river levels rise. Heavy monsoon rain makes the rivers rise every year. The result is frequent flood disasters.

1 Emergency response



- The aim of emergency response is to meet the immediate and basic needs of the people who have survived the disaster – such as food, water, clothing, shelter, medical care and emotional security.
- In fast-impact disasters, such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones, this process will focus on saving lives and reducing further suffering in the period immediately after the disaster.
- In slow-impact disasters, such as drought and famine, the emergency response period may last for a continuous period of months, or even years.
- If a disaster does happen, most victims are saved and helped by others long before outside help arrives. This is where the church can play an important role, as it has the capacity to respond locally.
- Outside help in an emergency may have a negative impact if it continues for a long time. It can make people dependent on aid and reduce their ability to cope with hazards. The church should provide for the short term only, to avoid creating dependency.

BIBLE STUDY

Emergency response Acts 11:19–30

Background

There was a severe famine throughout the Mediterranean region, particularly affecting Judea. A famine was predicted by prophetic message, and the church in Antioch decided to send assistance to the church in Judea. They decided to use the existing church structure as the mechanism for collecting money, transferring it and distributing it to those in need.



Key points

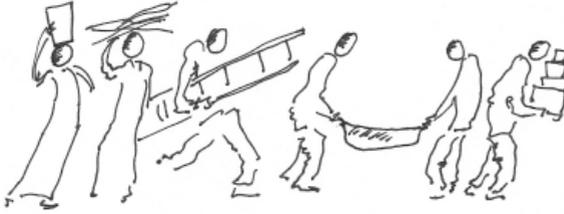
- God speaks through individuals to give wisdom and foresight; this can help to create awareness of the risks of disaster. In this instance, God spoke through the prophet Agabus.
- Awareness and compassion lead to action. When the Christians in Antioch heard of the disaster that was coming, they all contributed their skills, time and resources. They used the existing network of Christians and churches, and sent their gifts through Paul and Barnabas.

Questions

- 1 *In Antioch, a prophet warned about the coming disaster. How do we find out if a flood or drought is coming soon? What disasters happen in our area?*
- 2 *What did the church decide to do in response to this news?*
- 3 *The church in Antioch sent help 'for the believers' in Judea (verse 29). Is it right to give assistance only to Christians? In the present day, the Red Cross Code is widely followed in aid programmes. It says that help should be given to all people in need, without discrimination. (For a church version of the code, see page 99.) Can you see any difficulties in following this code? How can the difficulties be overcome?*
- 4 *Are there any indications at the moment that a disaster could happen soon – such as drought, flooding, earthquakes or civil conflict?*
- 5 *Has your church responded to disasters in the past? How could you improve on what you did last time?*
- 6 *Can you think of any ways your church could help people affected by disaster in other parts of your country?*



2 Rehabilitation



Rehabilitation includes the actions taken to rebuild a community once the emergency response stage has passed. It may last for weeks or months after a disaster. Rehabilitation can include repairing houses, restoring basic services (such as water and sanitation) and helping people to start earning a living again in a way that makes them less vulnerable to future disasters. For example, farmers may want to try out flood-resistant or drought-resistant crops, or perhaps to restock with animals that can survive drought conditions.

This phase provides an opportunity to introduce new guidelines and procedures – for example, for making new buildings in an earthquake zone safer. This can help to reduce the risk of a similar disaster in the future.

Rehabilitation also provides an opportunity to increase community cooperation by forming self-help groups or cooperatives. This may open up opportunities for new livelihoods, so that people can earn a living in ways that are less affected by hazards.

BIBLE STUDY

Rehabilitation Nehemiah 1–4

Background

God called Nehemiah to lead the reconstruction of Jerusalem after the disaster of invasion and conquest, which had taken place about 70 years earlier. Much of the city, including the protective walls, had been destroyed. Nehemiah, a Jewish captive in Babylon, had risen to an important position in the king's palace. He asked the king (the government authority at that time) for permission to return to his city and for extra resources to rebuild it (Nehemiah 2:8). The king generously gave Nehemiah letters to the local governors and an armed escort for his protection (2:9).

Key points

- Nehemiah provides us with good lessons on planning, organisation, motivating the community, dealing with opposition, and the importance of prayer in the whole rehabilitation process. He showed that rehabilitation is more than physical rebuilding. There are spiritual battles also and a need to rebuild and reform unjust social structures, which often increase the suffering of the poor.



Questions

- 1 *Nehemiah made a night-time inspection of the damage to the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11-16). Why do you think he did this?*
- 2 *How does Nehemiah motivate and organise the people for the task of rebuilding? (Nehemiah 2:17-18; 3:1-32). What does this teach us about sharing or delegating specific tasks?*
- 3 *What forms of opposition did Nehemiah encounter? How did Nehemiah deal with this opposition? (Nehemiah 2:19-20; 4:1-5, 7-9, 13-14; 6:1-13).*
- 4 *According to Nehemiah 6:15, the work was completed in just 52 days, an amazing achievement. What do you think was the 'secret' of Nehemiah's success?*



3 Disaster mitigation

Many natural hazards cannot be prevented. However, it is possible to take practical action beforehand to reduce the potential impact of hazards on a community so that the risk of a disaster is reduced. This is known as mitigation. Pastors cannot be expected to be skilled in all the areas listed below. However, they can help to identify people in the church and community who have these skills and who can be encouraged to share them for the good of the community.



1

Examples of mitigation measures include:

- building flood protection dykes
- improving drainage to take storm water away more quickly
- building stronger houses to resist flood or earthquake
- planting trees on steep slopes to reduce rainwater run-off
- planting trees in coastal areas to reduce wind and tidal wave impact
- growing crops which are more resistant to drought
- peace-building and reconciliation, to reduce future conflict

Mitigation and rehabilitation are closely connected. For example, any rebuilding of homes or livelihoods should include mitigation measures to make them more resilient to hazards.

BIBLE STUDY

Mitigation Luke 6:46–49 and Matthew 7:24–27

Background

Both Luke and Matthew include this parable at the end of a longer session of Jesus' teachings. In Luke, he has just taught about loving our enemies (Luke 6:27–36), not criticising others (6:37–42) and assessing a tree by the quality of its fruit (6:43–45). In Matthew's account the topics are similar but include God's desire to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:7–12) and the contrast between entering through the narrow gate and the wide gate (7:13–14).

The passage itself is not intended as guidance for house-builders! Rather, it is an instruction from Jesus to base our lives on him and on the 'rock' of his teachings, not on the changing fashions and beliefs of the world around us (the 'sands'). Nevertheless, Jesus always based his parables on familiar examples from everyday life. People presumably knew that house foundations matter – that only a house built on a solid foundation had any hope of survival when storms and floods struck.

Key points

- It is important that we not only hear the words of Jesus but also act upon them. This will give us a firm foundation for life, even when pressures and difficulties arise.
- To hear Jesus' words but not take action is foolishness, leading to ruin as soon as pressures or opposition appear.

Questions

- 1 *To whom was Jesus addressing this teaching? To what extent are the two passages a commentary on the earlier words of Jesus in Luke 6 and Matthew 7?*
- 2 *In his parables, Jesus uses activities from everyday life, often from farming (eg the sower, the true vine) or from keeping sheep (eg the good shepherd, the lost sheep). Why do you think Jesus chooses house-building in the passages above (Luke 6:46-49 and Matthew 7:24-27)? What do the passages tell us about building practices at that time?*
- 3 *What are the ways in which we hear and receive the words of Jesus? How can we make sure that the spiritual house (our lives) does not collapse under pressure? What are we doing ourselves to apply the teachings of Jesus?*
- 4 *For this book, choosing good foundations for a house would be called disaster mitigation! What other suggestions could you make to ensure that a physical house does not fall down in a time of flood, windstorm or earthquake?*



4 Disaster preparedness



1

Preparing for natural disasters

Preparedness is a set of activities preparing for the impact of a hazard – activities that will help the community members to cope and to recover. When you are doing preparedness work, you have to assume that a hazard will hit the community soon!

Local people, churches and community-based organisations do have their own resources that can be used in times of crisis, but these resources must be available and accessible in an emergency – preparedness is about making sure they are.

The resources of a church usually include a building for prayer and worship. Sometimes these buildings can be used to provide temporary shelter for displaced people, especially if the church is the only strong building available and is built on high land. If the church is considered a holy place, perhaps one part or one end of it can be separated from the rest and not used by the displaced people. If buildings are to be used in this way, they should be safely built and well maintained.

Churches can also play a key role in preparing their congregations and local communities for a disaster situation. For example, they can give training, provide volunteers and pass on warnings.

Some other practical examples of such preparation include:

- early warning systems (for example, ringing bells or flying flags on the church building)
- First Aid training for church members
- plans for moving people and livestock to 'safe areas'
- keeping small stocks of emergency materials (such as plastic sheets and dry food)
- identifying the vulnerable who will need help
- training volunteers in search and rescue methods

BIBLE STUDY**Preparedness** Genesis 41:25–39**Background**

God warned the Egyptian king through a dream that drought and famine were coming to his land. Joseph was called from his prison cell to interpret the dream (about cows and heads of corn!) and suggested some actions to cope with the disaster. The king appointed Joseph to carry out these actions.



Joseph set up administrators and buildings to store grain during the seven good years. Farmers had to hand over one-fifth (20 per cent) of each year's harvest to the government so that it could be stored and then used during the seven years of famine (Genesis 41:33-36).

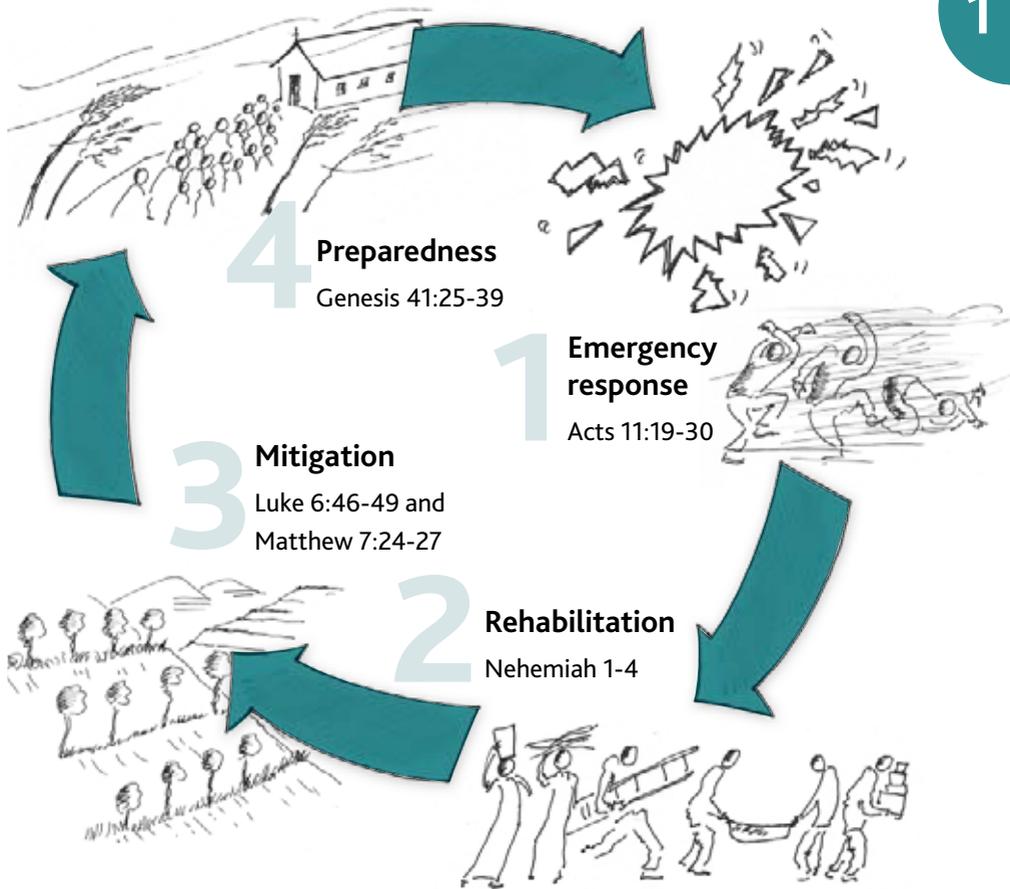
Key points

- This story is about a hazard that was predicted, so that action could be taken before it happened. It emphasises the importance of early warning systems, whether they are divine or man-made! In today's world, early warning of drought, storms and floods can help reduce the impact of the hazard.
- Management responsibility was given to Joseph – he was trusted. In emergency situations there needs to be trust in the leadership.
- God used this project to save Jacob's family and the future of Israel. Disaster planning can be used by God to do good and achieve his purposes in the world.

Questions

- 1 *How did the dream change the way the people of Egypt responded to their situation?*
- 2 *Joseph was given the role of coordinating Egypt's response. What qualities did he have that made him suitable for this job?*
- 3 *What specific measures did Joseph put in place to help the nation (and its neighbours) survive the drought?*
- 4 *Can you identify any natural leaders in your church and community who could help in an emergency situation and who would be trusted?*

Biblical reflections on the disaster management cycle



Christian groups responding to a disaster often focus their help only upon emergency response; rehabilitation, mitigation and preparedness are neglected. When the hazard re-appears, another disaster will follow. If more attention is given to mitigation and preparedness, then the harmful consequences of the hazard can be very much reduced.

We could use a medical proverb: 'Prevention is better than cure.' This means that it is better to prevent someone catching a disease than to have to give treatment later. Similarly, preventing a disaster is a better approach than simply responding every time to the suffering.

Different types of disaster

Type of disaster	Description	Examples
Slow-onset disasters	Situations in which the ability of people to continue their livelihood slowly declines to a point where they may not be able to survive. Such situations are usually due to climatic extremes, but made worse by ecological, social, economic or political conditions. Climate change and environmental degradation also cause slow but progressive changes which can undermine livelihoods and living conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drought • displacement • water-logging • long-term conflict
Rapid-onset disasters	Sudden calamities caused by natural phenomena. They strike with little or no warning and have an immediate harmful effect on human populations, activities and economic systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • windstorms (hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, tornados) • earthquakes • volcanic eruptions • floods • tsunamis • flash floods • glacial lake bursts
Human-made disasters	Disaster or emergency situations of which the principal, direct causes are identifiably human actions, deliberate or otherwise. This mainly involves situations in which civilian populations suffer casualties, losses of property, basic services and means of livelihood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • war • civil strife • displacement • fire
Technological disasters	Situations in which large numbers of people, property, infrastructure or economic activity are directly and adversely affected by major industrial accidents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • severe pollution • nuclear accidents • air crashes • major fires • explosions

The role of a church leader in disaster management

Church leaders can play an important role in helping congregations and communities prepare for and respond to a disaster. However, there are many different tasks to be done and these cannot all be achieved by one pastor. It is important that the pastor delegates tasks and identifies people with the appropriate skills to carry them out. Listed below are some of the things which pastors themselves can do, alongside their regular pastoral responsibilities.

Leadership

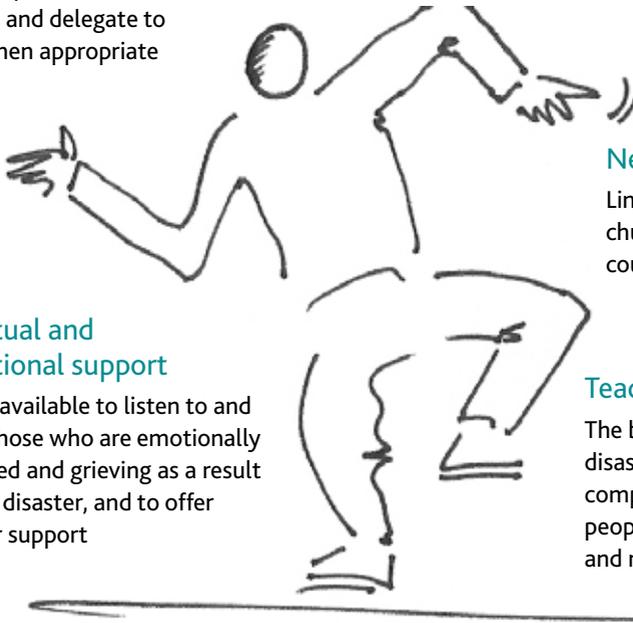
Ability to think quickly in a crisis, to prioritise, make decisions and delegate to others when appropriate

Insights

Being aware of the risk of disasters in your area and being able to share this with your congregation and community

Managing volunteers

Being able to recruit, organise and encourage volunteers



Spiritual and emotional support

Being available to listen to and help those who are emotionally stressed and grieving as a result of the disaster, and to offer prayer support

Networking

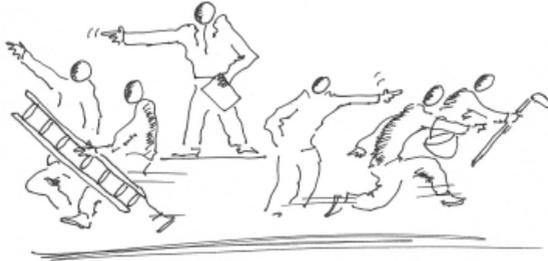
Link to the wider church, both inside the country and overseas

Teaching

The biblical view of disasters, and God's compassion for all people, of every race and religion

The strengths of the church in facing disasters

This section looks at **seven distinctive strengths** of the church, which it can use in disaster situations.



1 Responding immediately to disasters

The local church is already present when a disaster suddenly strikes, so it can help the community immediately. Needs are urgent, and the church may feel compelled to respond.

In places where disasters often happen, the church and its leadership may develop simple disaster preparedness plans with the local community. For example, this might include identifying evacuation routes, making church and community buildings available for emergency shelter, and setting up emergency food stores.

Some disasters begin more slowly: for example, when there is a drought, people suffer continuously over many months. The church can help by sharing its resources among members. When a drought is forecast, the church may be able to take a lead in the community to set up a grain bank to store food (see Chapter 7, page 192). As a longer-term measure, if the church has some land it may be able to demonstrate new gardening methods or new crops and encourage farmers to adopt them.

The Catholic churches in Tamil Nadu, India, responded immediately to the devastation after the 2004 South Asian tsunami, rescuing people, tending the injured, comforting relatives of victims and burying the dead.

- *In what ways do you think your church could respond immediately if a disaster occurred?*
- *What plans could your church develop now, so it could respond quickly if and when a disaster did occur?*

2 Providing resources

The local church has assets and resources which it can use in disaster situations. People are a key resource and can be mobilised into a willing body of volunteers, motivated by love and compassion and trained in skills appropriate to the situation. Buildings are also valuable assets which can shelter displaced people or can be used to stock emergency response materials. Church bells may be available to form part of an early warning system. The church's land may provide a temporary camping area for displaced people.

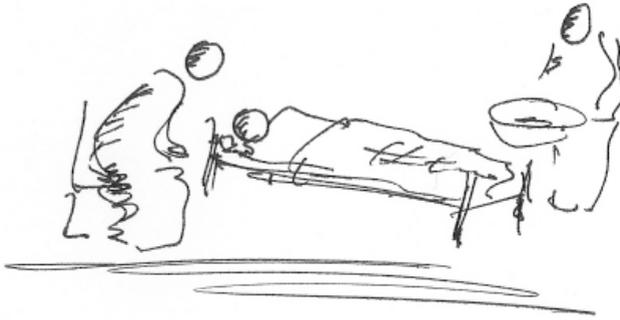
As congregations meet regularly, all together or in various smaller groups, it is possible to communicate messages to a significant number of people. These messages can be about mitigation or preparation before disaster comes. Instructions can be given in times of emergency. The local pastor can supplement the information with a spiritual message, making it more likely to be well received and used.

The Pentecostal Church in Makamba, Burundi, made 20 hectares of church land available for growing a type of lentil (pulse) so that a nutritious pre-mixed porridge could be sold in the local market, with the aim of helping malnourished children.

- *What assets or resources does your church have that could be useful in a disaster situation? (Think about land, buildings, bells etc.)*
- *What useful information could your church communicate, both before and during a possible disaster situation?*
- *What skills do you have in your congregation? (For example, medical knowledge, construction experience, counselling ability.)*



3 Providing compassion and care



One of the church's greatest strengths is the importance it gives to relationships. This makes it very able to provide relational support. It acknowledges people's inner hurts and griefs, and responds with hospitality and pastoral care. The church recognises that people have spiritual and emotional needs and should be treated with dignity; sadly, aid organisations do not always do this.

The church can provide funerals and burials and pass on the message of God's love and hope for the future. Prayer is also a key contribution, both for those who have suffered in the disaster and for aid workers who are experiencing high levels of stress and emotional pressure.

After the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, many people lost their homes and were given temporary accommodation in camps. The Pentecostal Mission in Port Blair, the Andaman Islands, listened to, prayed for and cared for people living in a camp, and also served food to more than 500 people a day.

- *In what ways could your church support those who were bereaved or emotionally upset by a disaster?*
- *How can the church show love and hospitality in times of crisis?*

4 Influencing and shaping values

People are often more vulnerable to hazards because of cultural values and beliefs. For example, societies which give little value to women may not take enough action to care for them in times of crisis. The local church can address this type of issue – everyone has value in God's sight and should be treated equally, whatever their

background or beliefs. It has experience of wrestling with values, behaviour and differing world views, and seeks to bring transformation in these areas.

Biblical teaching is a central part of that process. In many communities, people expect the church to provide a moral lead. In other communities, where the church is a minority, it can have a prophetic role, politely challenging widely-held views when it is safe to do so.



Some communities and cultures have a fatalistic mindset which can significantly hinder both disaster preparedness and disaster response. The local church can challenge this mindset, because it has a vision for the future. The church is built on hope and the expectation of seeing God bring change, so it should not share the fatalism which may be common in the wider community.

The churches in Puno, Peru, emphasised the participation of women in their preparedness and mitigation projects. This was in a society where women were not expected to take such a lead.

- *What values and attitudes in your community make some people more vulnerable to disaster? Is there fatalism or superstition?*
- *How can your church challenge and change these values and attitudes?*
- *What are the key teachings which the church should give after a disaster?*

5 Acting as a community peacemaker

In many communities the church naturally sees its role as reconciliation and peacemaking. It can help to prevent future violence by assisting people to find solutions to long-standing arguments and promoting forgiveness for wrong actions in the past. It can help to resolve conflict by setting up small groups who can look at the causes of the disputes and begin to address them. The church is often present on both sides in an ethnic conflict and therefore is in a strong position to help restore peace.

In natural disasters the same principles apply, with the church able to challenge selfishness and competition over scarce resources. Justice, impartiality and forgiveness are important principles in such contexts, and the church can uphold them.



Local churches in Marsabit, Kenya, established peacemaking forums to prevent future outbreaks of violence between two pastoral communities over grazing rights and scarce water sources.

- *What sources of conflict are there in your community, and what can the church do to help resolve these disputes?*
- *How can the church ensure that everyone in the community who needs help is given it?*

6 Facilitating community action

The local church, through its relationships in the community, its credibility and its leadership, can help to bring people together and organise them for action – both before and after a crisis. This applies not only to sudden disasters, but also to the creeping, slow-moving disasters of drought and famine. Within the church there are usually youth groups, women's groups and others who can be mobilised quite quickly for action.

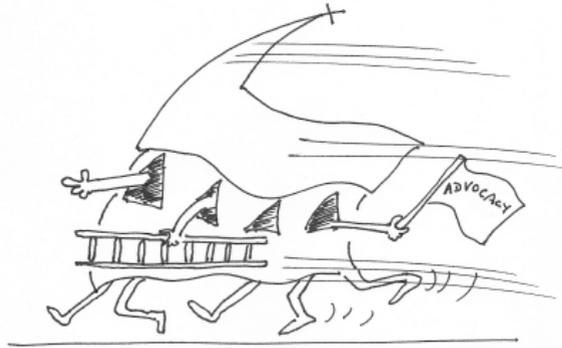


The Anglican church in Ruaha, Tanzania, organised its community to carry out community-managed targeting and distribution of emergency response materials so that the poorest people received assistance.

- *How could your church bring together the whole community to decide on action to prepare for, or respond to, disasters?*
- *Who are the key people in your community that you would want to involve in planning and running such a community meeting?*

7 Advocating on behalf of poor and marginalised people

In a disaster situation, the church can be an advocate on behalf of poor and marginalised people – for example, by ensuring that these people receive relief goods. The church can check that help is indeed reaching the most vulnerable people in the community. In many communities, church leaders are respected and have some influence. The church's wider networks are an additional strength, because they enable it to carry out advocacy at a number of levels – for example, by passing on information to national church offices.



Churches in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, successfully lobbied the UN envoy who came to learn more about the situation after people lost their homes in the government's demolition of the city's slums.

- *Are there issues of injustice in your local community that need to be challenged, and how can your church best do this?*
- *Who are the poor and marginalised people in your community who might be overlooked by emergency response programmes?*

A checklist for responding to disasters

1

Focus	Tasks
Coordination	<p>Call an emergency meeting of church and community leaders to agree the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will coordinate an emergency needs assessment? • Who will carry out the assessment? • Who will coordinate the available resources?
Resource identification	<p>Make a list of all the resources available in the church and the community under the following headings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available volunteers and associated skills • Available food, utensils and fuel for cooking • Available shelter materials • Available water and sanitation options • Available First Aid and healthcare • Available storage facilities for the above
Needs assessment	<p>Assess the needs among affected people – of all backgrounds and beliefs (see Chapter 3, page 80). Once the assessment has been done, agree the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities in First Aid and health • Priorities in food • Priorities in shelter • Priorities in water and sanitation <p>Make a plan for each of the above areas; use the resources identified in the previous step; decide on any extra resources required (for example, people or money); minimise security risks.</p>
Setting up volunteer teams to carry out tasks	<p>Consider specialised teams for the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Aid and healthcare • Food storage and distribution • Construction or repair of shelter • Water and sanitation • Counselling and emotional support <p>Assign volunteers to handle the priority needs identified by the needs assessment (above). Ensure all volunteers are instructed and supported in carrying out their specific tasks.</p>

Focus	Tasks
Ongoing recovery	<p>In longer-term responses, consider the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A system of shifts so volunteers can rest • Regular contact with government officials and other organisations linked to the response • Regular reviews with church and community leadership to assess progress of the response

In a disaster situation, people naturally look to the pastor for leadership. However, the pastor has many responsibilities, and it is possible that a church member may have the skills and confidence to coordinate the disaster response. In such a case, the pastor can support and advise the coordinator, and look after other aspects of the response – teaching, prayer and counselling – for which he/she is better trained. The pastor will also be aware of the gifts of church members, so can assist in identifying individuals who can help.



1 Community development and disaster management

Ongoing community development projects can help communities become resilient to slow-onset and fast-onset disasters.



Community development builds resilience

- communities working together
- improving livelihoods and education
- strengthening incomes and assets
- disaster mitigation activities
- risk assessments and disaster preparedness plans

Community responds and recovers from the disaster

- community-based relief and recovery
- learning from disaster
- ongoing strengthening of livelihoods
- risk assessments and disaster preparedness plans

In contrast, the benefits of development can be lost if disaster risk and climate change are not taken into account. For example, new wells on low land may be flooded, or new crops may be damaged by drought.

Tearfund has produced a resource called *Umoja* (the Swahili word for *togetherness*) which helps the local church work with its community to set up a project that will bring lasting change. This resource seeks to strengthen the church's vision to work with the community through a range of practical activities and steps, and it can be used together with this manual.

Umoja, a key resource for church and community mobilisation, is available from Tearfund. Email: umoja@tearfund.org

Activity: Using our own resources

This is a good activity for getting a group to think about what they can do with their own resources. It can generate a lot of fun and laughter as well as provide some useful learning. When you use this exercise it is important to be sensitive to local culture and tradition. This is just one of many activities contained in *Umoja*.

Full stretch

Ask the group to form two lines, with an equal number of people in each line.

Explain that they are going to use anything they have on them to make the longest possible line (shoe laces, belts, ties, etc).

Each person must be in contact with another person, either by a part of the body or by holding a belt, tie etc.

The team that wins is the one that forms the longest line.

- *What were people prepared to do to make the line as long as possible?*
- *What were the barriers to people sharing what they had?*
- *What does this exercise teach us about using our own resources?*
- *What skills and resources does your church have to respond to disasters?*

Learning points to discuss with the group

- It can surprise us when we see what we can achieve using only what we have: resources are present but may not always be recognised.
- Sometimes challenging situations produce natural leaders.
- Once people have a clear vision of what is needed they become motivated and energised.
- Challenging situations can produce creativity. For example, people may decide to lie on the ground to make the line longer, or find creative uses for clothes and accessories.
- For some people this exercise may be uncomfortable. Sometimes giving up our resources for the common good can be challenging and uncomfortable too.

BIBLE STUDY**Why does God allow suffering? Luke 13:1–5****Background**

This passage refers to two events involving suffering that had happened recently and would have been talked about a lot by people around Jesus. This passage is our only source of information on these events.

1 *What two events are mentioned here?*

The first incident appears to have been that Pilate, the Roman Governor of Jerusalem, carried out a deeply sacrilegious act by having Jewish worshippers killed while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple.

The second incident records the collapse of a tower in Siloam, which was part of the Jerusalem wall, killing 18 people.

One set of deaths is a result of political brutality; the other the result of a random accident.

2 *Have any events occurred in your country recently that would be similar?***The question about suffering (v2)****3** *In this passage, we only hear Jesus' part of the conversation. What do you think may have been the question that prompted Jesus to answer in the way he does?*

In ancient times it was often assumed that disasters and calamities only happened to people who were extremely sinful. Look at John 9:1–2 and Job 4:7 for examples of people making this assumption.

4 *Is this a question you have heard people asking today? Is it a question you have asked?***Jesus' response****5** *How does Jesus answer this question? Does Jesus believe that the level of our sinfulness affects how or when we die?*

Note that Jesus rarely answers questions with a simple 'yes' or 'no', but here he does.

- 6** *Can you think of godly people, whether in the Bible or in modern times, who have suffered? Was their suffering a result of their personal sin?*

For example, in the New Testament alone, John the Baptist, Stephen and of course Jesus himself all died cruel and inhumane deaths, and in the early church there were many other martyrs.

- 7** *What do you think Jesus means, then, when he says that 'unless you repent, you too will all perish' (verses 3, 5)?*

Jesus appears to be saying that there are consequences to actions. If the people of Israel continued to live in disobedience to God, Jerusalem would end up being destroyed and all its citizens, innocent or not, would die at the hands of Roman soldiers and in the collapse of the city's walls. This is more or less what happened 40 years later, in AD 70.

Application

- 8** *How can our actions lead to the suffering of others?*
- 9** *How should we respond to those who are suffering as a result of natural or man-made disasters?*
- 10** *If people say that disasters are God's punishment on those who do wrong, how would you respond?*



Review of this chapter

- *What have we learnt about the causes of disaster, and what do we understand about the key terms: risk, vulnerability and hazard?*
- *What examples are there in the Bible of how people have responded in a crisis, and what can we learn from them?*
- *What are the seven strengths of the local church which are useful in times of disaster?*
- *What specific skills and resources do we have in our church and community which can be used to prepare for and respond to a disaster? How can you make sure that the skills of both women and men are fully recognised and used?*
- *What should be the priorities of the church leader or pastor when disaster strikes? What responsibilities can be delegated to other church members?*