

# Churches in disaster response

Guidelines for NGOs



Church in Koraon (India)

# Contents

- 3 Foreword
- 4 Background to this Study
- 4 Methodology
- 6 10 Guidelines for NGOs
- 14 Case Study Guatemala Tropical Storm 2011
- 16 Case Study India Floods 2012
- 18 Case Study Haiti Earthquake 2010
- 20 Case Study Malawi floods and drought 2008/2002
- 22 Case Study Philippines Typhoon 2011
- 24 Case Study Indonesia Vulcano 2010
- 26 Some Questions for NGOs: a checklist



# Foreword



Disasters have a devastating impact on many countries. I am glad that we are trying to reduce the impact of disasters and for a long time, we have worked hard to help the victims of disasters.

In recent years, I have learned that the local church is a key factor in almost every response. I believe that we as Christian NGOs should serve the church and have a responsibility to strengthen the church in its ability to prepare for and respond to disasters. At the same time, we must avoid any negative influence on the ministry of the local church.

I have heard of many examples where churches have reached out to their communities immediately after a disaster. The impact of this is not limited to the response itself but it transforms the local church and its relationship with the community. Furthermore churches have come together in networks in times of crisis, networks which enhance the unity of believers and enable future co-operation.

I believe that the response of Christian NGOs to disaster will be stronger and better when we work together with the local church and when we take a 'servant' attitude in our work. This publication is an important step towards this. The protocol suggested has the ability to build strong bridges between NGOs and churches.

I am thankful for the support of a wide range of people and organizations for this publication. Several NGOs and a number of churches worldwide have made a valuable contribution to this study. I do hope that the results will strengthen the partnership of churches with NGOs as they work together in disaster response.

Marnix Niemeijer  
*Managing Director Tear Netherlands*

## Background to this Study

Disasters cost thousands of lives and cause extensive damage every year. Christian churches and other faith-based communities are often present in these situations and are well-placed to respond immediately to human need. The church has its own resources to offer but its work can be enhanced by Christian NGOs coming alongside in partnership. Such partnerships have enormous potential, but there are risks involved too. Insensitive approaches from the NGO or unrealistic expectations from the church can do lasting damage to the longer-term work and witness of the church. Conversely, an honest, mutually supportive partnership can help the church to fulfil its wider calling for years to come.

This study seeks to build upon earlier work carried out by Andrew Bulmer (formerly Head of Asia Region for Tearfund UK) on the ways in which NGOs engage with churches in times of disaster. That work was based on 12 case studies, resulting in a document summarising the strengths of the church in times of crisis and suggesting some principles of engagement for NGOs in relating to a local church. (The local church and its engagement with disasters: Tearfund, 2009).



## Methodology

In this current study, a number of recent situations were identified across 12 countries where churches had played a significant role in responding to natural disasters, in partnership with a Christian NGO. In some cases, the national relief/development department of the church functioned in a similar way to an NGO in coming alongside and supporting local congregations. Six situations were then selected, for more detailed study, from India, Philippines, Indonesia, Malawi, Guatemala and Haiti. Material from Honduras and Cambodia contributed also.

The process began with the development of 2 questionnaires, one for the NGO which had engaged with a local church, the other for a church leader who had been involved in this response – preferably the local church pastor. The author is heavily indebted to Tear staff, Tearfund Country Representatives and in-country office teams for their assistance in translating and distributing the questionnaires. In most cases, the questionnaires were filled in electronically and returned. An attempt was made to allow the church leaders to respond independently and confidentially, but this did not always happen. Also, the respondent church leader was not always the pastor of the local church; in some cases, it was a more senior person in the hierarchy of the church or another individual representing the views of the church.

Questionnaires were followed up in some cases by a one to one interview using Skype. Data from both sources was then used to complete a case study, using a common format for all 6 studies. Finally, the learning from these studies was used to develop the 10 main points proposed in this protocol, as a basis for NGO-church engagement. The findings of the earlier study were also taken into account. The protocol was circulated for comment and amended accordingly.

This document also contains a checklist to help NGO managers to decide when it would be appropriate to engage with a particular local church, and when it would be wiser not to do so.

# 10 Guidelines for NGOs

**1. Prioritise building strong relationships.** *Mutual understanding and trust, built over an extended period, will create a genuine partnership and effective response.*

Building relationships takes time, which is often short in a crisis. Working with a church after a disaster is easier if contacts have been established during non-disaster periods. Treat leaders with respect, value their opinions and involve them fully in planning and making decisions. Be open and honest about objectives and expectations, without “hidden agendas”. If distance creates a communication problem, supply a mobile phone and credit. Maintain relationships after the relief operation has finished, looking for other areas of development; consider “refresher” training.

*Example:* World Relief Haiti worked with Bethel Church on Orphans and Vulnerable Children in earthquake relief and continued afterwards with the Umoja process (Church and Community Mobilisation).

**DO...** put time and effort into developing good, long-term relationships with church leaders.

**DON'T...** be abrupt, impatient or disrespectful, especially if things move slowly.

**2. Recognise the wider context.** *The church's position in its community and longer-term ministry should be enhanced by the response, not undermined.*

The wider community will have opinions or perceptions of the church; it may be respected, or criticised or even persecuted. Involvement in a relief project will have implications for the church and provides an opportunity for it to change

community perceptions in a positive way. A wise NGO will help the church to consider its current relationships and the implications, positive or negative, of relief activities, before the work starts.

The wider ministry of the church, and its long term strategy in the community, should always be taken into account. If the church is doing development work, using a self-help approach, then avoid over-generous relief hand-outs and insist on community contribution where-ever possible.

*Example:* In Dhemaji (India), the community responded positively to church help and new opportunities were created; those who fell outside the beneficiary criteria were more critical.

**DO...** discuss with church leaders the perceptions of the community and the implications of relief work; use relief to improve relationships and to complement longer-term programmes.

**DON'T...** rush into a relief partnership, ignoring the wider context and mission of the church.

**3. Strengthen the church's mandate.** *Help the church to recognise and fulfil its calling to show compassion for those in need, as well as spiritual concerns.*

Christians should respond to those in need, including those from different ethnic, religious or denominational backgrounds. (e.g. the parable of the Good Samaritan). Some churches lose sight of this and focus entirely upon their own members and upon spiritual ministry. NGOs should help the church to recognise its mandate and show genuine compassion for all those in need, both in and outside the church. Doors will often open for other ministry later.

*Example:* In Malawi, Eagles carried out “mobilisation seminars” with pastors; EFICOR in India helps church partners to understand holistic ministry.

**DO...** help the church to understand and fulfil its responsibility to help those in need, especially those who are outside their own religious group.

**DON'T...** use the church to simply fulfil NGO objectives.

#### 4. **Use existing church capacities and build new ones.**

*Encourage the church to share what it has and provide it with new skills and standards for the future.*

Church leaders have local knowledge and understand language, culture, power dynamics and marginalised groups in the community. The church may have physical assets – buildings, compounds, equipment, etc – plus whatever skills its members can offer (e.g. counselling, health-care, or volunteering to pack and distribute food). Help church members to recognise these capacities, and give training to improve their use in an emergency. Offer training in other areas (e.g. core content of Red Cross Code or Sphere) for those who need it. Motivate churches to organise their own collections (in cash or kind) for relief, not to always depend on outside help.

*Example:* Around 50 Presbyterian Churches in Guatemala contributed to a relief effort following the tropical storm. In Haiti, members shared food, clothing and money with neighbours.

**DO...** identify the knowledge, skills and resources within the local church and include these resources in the project design.

**DO...** provide training (e.g. in Needs Assessment, First Aid or project planning) which will be useful in future disasters, plus biblical material on disaster management.

**DON'T...** provide absolutely everything; this will encourage a wrong attitude of dependency.

**DON'T...** use the church simply for storage or manpower, and then move on.

#### 5. **Develop realistic expectations.** Church and NGO should recognise the limitations of its partner, and base the co-operation upon a clear, time-bound Memorandum of Understanding.

Whilst churches do have skills and resources, these may be very limited. Knowledge and experience of keeping records, filing reports or preparing accounts may be absent. Considerable support may be needed to achieve even minimum requirements. Churches may be hierarchical and decision-making processes may be slow. NGOs must recognise these limitations and work within them. Churches and the wider community may also have unrealistic hopes, wanting the NGO to deliver much more than they have available.

*Example:* Problems arose in Haiti when church members expected the NGO to rebuild its church.

**DO...** recognise that the church may lack higher education and skills, and is used to moving at a slower pace.

**DO...** develop a Memorandum of Understanding between NGO and Church, setting out clearly what each partner can provide and the time limits.

**DON'T...** make unrealistic demands or promises; avoid imposing impossible paperwork burdens.

## 6. **Adopt a forward-looking perspective.** Help the church to face future disasters by including risk reduction and contingency planning in the disaster response.

The church exists long-term in the community and will have to face future disasters. Within the response, help churches to develop disaster preparedness plans and to find ways of reducing risks, e.g. by strengthening the church building or developing a warning system. Consider forming a volunteer team which meets and trains regularly. Sometimes, relief work can be used to create safer conditions for the future.

*Example:* In Malawi, Eagles used cash-for-work projects to rebuild a flood-protection dyke.

**DO...** seek ways of building capacity to face future disasters, through training and equipping of key individuals and teams.

**DON'T...** focus only upon the present disaster, ignoring future risks and vulnerabilities.

## 7. **Recognise and work through church institutions.**

*Form partnerships where both parties influence plans and decisions; be patient when things move slowly!*

The local church is usually part of a larger denomination, and most have a leadership structure which oversees the local pastors. It is wise and necessary to engage with that senior leadership and obtain their permission and support. The higher levels of the church may have capacity to offer, and additional resources may come from related churches in non-disaster areas. In local partnerships, ensure that local leaders are fully included in making decisions.

*Example:* In Guatemala, Saq B'e worked through the structures of the Presbyterian Church.

**DO...** remember that church leaders usually operate under a higher authority (as well as under God!) and engagement with senior leaders is necessary, but often slow.

**DON'T...** push ahead, ignoring the structures and higher leadership of the church.

## 8. **Develop leadership within the local church.** Encourage sharing of leadership by adopting a committee-based approach; ensure women are fully represented.

Consider how leadership can be shared; avoid putting heavy pressure onto the one pastor. Some churches form a "Church Disaster Committee" if the area is disaster-prone, using the skills of its members. Allocate specific tasks and responsibilities to specific committee members and ensure that all groups (women, youth, etc) are represented and their voice is heard. Women's needs are often over-looked by male-dominated leadership.

*Example:* EFICOR with GEMS in Bihar have formed local Disaster Management Committees.

**DO...** encourage formation of a Disaster Committee to share the work-load and train Committee members in leadership and disaster management.

**DO...** ensure that women are fully represented in leadership and their voice is heard.

**DON'T...** deal with a single person only, nor channel all resources through him/her.

**9. Build up linkages and networks.** Churches are stronger when co-operating together and sharing resources; networks can also influence those in authority.

Disasters provide an opportunity for churches to work together, sharing their knowledge and resources, and overcoming denominational barriers. Where possible, create networks of churches and where it's safe to do so, encourage participation in other networks (with secular bodies or Government officials). Identify key individuals who may have the necessary contacts. Encourage these networks to continue after the crisis, to prepare for future disaster or address other issues.

*Example:* Pastors Fellowships with PCMN in the Philippines, and with Eagles in Malawi.

**DO...** encourage churches to work together in relief work, pooling their skills and resources.

**DON'T...** give all resources to one church, risking jealousy and limiting the scale of response.

**10. Ensure that adequate safeguards are in place.**

*Children and vulnerable adults must be protected; avoid creating opportunities for abuse or dishonesty.*

Sadly, there are often people, even within the church, who see disaster as an opportunity to engage in abuse or to pursue personal gain. It is wise to include basic child protection training in the orientation given to church volunteers and to create systems to hear and investigate any complaint. Training should also be given on how to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Financially, the capacity of the church to handle funds should always be assessed and simple, transparent systems put in place. Every payment should involve 2 people, with proper receipts and records. Avoid creating salaried posts; paying just expenses and training allowances is preferred.

*Example:* PCMN in Philippines gave child protection training to churches in its network.

**DO...** ensure that volunteers are trained about child protection and adequately supervised.

**DO...** set up simple, transparent financial procedures.

**DON'T...** create opportunities for wrong-doing.





## Case Study

# Guatemala Tropical Storm 2011

*Guatemala is a Central American country of 14.7 million people. Poverty is widespread, especially amongst rural and indigenous communities.*

With both a Pacific and a Caribbean coast-line, Guatemala is prone to hurricanes from west and east. These often cause flooding, landslides and loss of life. The country also suffers from earthquakes, has 4 active volcanoes and endured a bloody civil war for 36yrs.

This case study describes the response of the Presbyterian Church in Guatemala, assisted by NGO Saq B'e, to a severe storm (Tropical Depression 12E), which hit the south and some northern departments on 10th Oct., 2011. The storm brought heavy rains and severe winds, which damaged homes, contaminated water supplies, destroyed crops and left many communities without food and water. Country-wide, 524,480 people were affected, with 36 dead and over 63,000 made homeless.

Bethel Presbyterian Church in Quetzaltenango, some distance from the worst affected areas, organised collections of goods, money and services from about 50 Presbyterian churches. Volunteers received gifts, purchased food,

packaged materials and loaded trucks – themselves made available by 3 churches. In the affected areas, Church members transported affected families to shelters, where food, medicines, purified water and clothes were provided. Volunteer teams packed and distributed food. Church buildings were used for storage, for shelter and as clinics for casualties.

Success of the program depended largely on a key bi-lingual church member who is well known in the area – both among churches and government officials.

The NGO Saq B'e brought additional resources through its links with international donors. It helped to co-ordinate the whole operation,

which involved many different offices, departments and member Presbyteries of the Church. Saq B'e used its financial systems to manage the funds and ensured aid reached the worst affected areas. It also provided a methodology for assessing needs and selecting beneficiaries.

The church's response locally changed its relationships. The community has become more involved in the services and activities of the church. The church is respected and recognized as a possible shelter in case of an emergency. Long-term ministry has benefitted, as the church is seen as willing to involve with the problems of the community; future engagement to reduce poverty and illiteracy is planned.

### Key Learning

- Great things are possible from the generosity of a nationwide network of churches, donating goods, manpower and services.
- Success is greatly helped by key individuals with the necessary contacts and experience.
- Relief projects provide an opportunity to encourage generosity from church members and to challenge ethnic, socio-economic and geographic divisions.
- Good communication with affected areas is essential and may mean investment in cell-phones to maintain regular contact.
- Food purchasing and packaging should be done as close as possible to the disaster area.
- Contingency planning, plus selection and training of volunteers, should be done in advance of the hurricane season in high-risk areas.
- Increase co-operation between churches in affected areas and ensure there is a local representative on national relief committees.

## Case Study

# India Floods 2012

*Assam is one of the 7 states of north-east India, with a state population of 31.2 million (2011 census). It is crossed from east to west by the mighty Brahmaputra River, which is fed from the Himalayan mountains and floods nearly every year.*



In 2012, flooding commenced on 26th June across 14 districts, with 43 recorded breaches of the river bank. In 2 weeks, 124 lives were lost. Others died in landslides caused by the heavy rain and at least 2.2 million people were affected, many displaced to higher land.

The NGO NEICORD, formed in 1981 and based in Shillong, operates throughout the North-East and has extensive experience of relief, development and disaster risk reduction. NEICORD partnered with the Dhemaji Baptist Christian Association. A local network of churches (DBCA and others) was

formed and a core committee selected to manage the relief. The National Disaster Rescue Force provided timely support to NEICORD.

Church members contributed rice and money to feed people in displacement camps, before other help arrived. They used one small boat and a banana tree boat to rescue stranded people. Around 50-60 church members were actively involved. Church leaders provided information to the NDRF about the location of stranded people. Church buildings were used for committee meetings, volunteer

training and storage of materials. NEICORD began to help on 3rd July, and worked with the churches to provide mosquito nets and bed sheets in Sisiborgaon Block, followed later by more nets and sheets, plus food rations and hygiene kits in Machkhowa Block, reaching 2,350 of the worst effected families (from around 8,000 in total). NEICORD gave health awareness training before distributing materials, and also trained church volunteers, who assisted with Needs Assessment, selection of suppliers and checking quality of relief goods. NEICORD worked through the senior

church leadership, which was slow at times. Also, church members did not always have the skills for paperwork needed.

The impact upon community relationships was generally good; the church was seen as a caring organisation and new contacts were established. Some opposition was experienced also, usually from villages who had not been included, and the location of some distribution centres had to be changed, in consultation with church leaders.

### Key Learning

- Do a thorough survey of the needs, in more creative, caring ways.
- Recognise each other's limitations; be clear about expectations on both sides, perhaps having an Memorandum of Understanding, detailing contributions.
- Women always to be involved in the committees.
- More awareness required for volunteers in taking care of People with Disabilities during surveys and distributions.
- Church leaders to make first approaches to the government on behalf of NEICORD.
- Consider setting up sustainable DRR projects, so that benefits will continue; local ownership of contingency plans is needed.
- Build the capacity of local churches, before disasters as well as during the crisis. Give training on methods and standards, plus motivational biblical material.
- Keep in touch with churches in disaster-prone areas, so as to strengthen and maintain long-term relationships.
- Always be sensitive to the local political and religious situation, so as not to create risks for the church.

## Case Study

# Haiti Earthquake 2010

*Haiti has a history of natural disasters and tropical storms occur every year. Impact is increased by poverty and environmental degradation.*



The magnitude 7.0 earthquake on Jan, 12th, 2010 was the largest since 1842; 220,000 people died, 300,000 were injured and about 1.5 million made homeless. This study describes the partnership between World Relief Haiti (WRH) and a network of 12 churches, led by Bethel Christian Church in Carrefour-Feuilles, a suburb of the capital Port-au-Prince.

Immediately after the earthquake, the Churches responded using their own resources for 12 days; members helped each other and the surrounding community – even though one church had lost half its members. Food, clothing and shoes were shared and “corvee” (doing work for others) put into practice. Bethel Church used its school playground as an IDP camp. Pastor Joseph Daniel Charles led by personal example in giving, although he had lost his own home.

WRH had previously worked with Bethel Church and came alongside again to provide tarpaulins and shelter kits, jerry cans, food, hygiene kits and training in trauma counselling. As time passed, WRH provided income by initiating a cash-for-work programme (organised and supervised by church members), with

workers contributing 1 day of “free” labour for every 4 days paid. WRH constructed a transitional school using building skills of Bethel members. When cholera broke out (about a year later), WRH providing training in cholera prevention; those trained passed on the training to others.

Since the disaster, churches are working together in a more co-ordinated way. In some ways, the relief response has strengthened relationships between the church and the local community; the church gave leadership and was seen as a caring institution. The church has subsequently grown. There was also some criticism of the church by those

who suspected (wrongly) that leaders had received resources which they were not sharing with the community.

WRH listened and responded to community concerns, for example, by reducing the numbers of people from other neighbourhoods participating in the Bethel cash-for-work programme. Misunderstandings arose over church reconstruction; some members were expecting WRH, or linked US churches, to rebuild their church.

WRH continues to partner with Bethel and has begun the “Umoja” process of Church and Community Mobilization, using local resources to overcome local problems.

### Key Learning

- The church has its own resources (e.g. land and buildings), and the skills, assets and compassion of its members. These can be used to face the early aftermath of disaster and during the recovery process.
- Co-operation in disaster response is more effective in the context of a longer-term relationship of trust and understanding. Decision-making should be shared.
- Disaster response can be more

effective if training has been given in disaster management and risk reduction before the event; this should be given during recovery in preparation for future emergencies.

- Expectations and commitments between the NGO and church should be clearly explained and documented as an Memorandum of Understanding, with an agreed time frame.
- Always be sensitive to the local political and religious situation, so as not to create risks for the church.



## Case Study

# Malawi Flood and Drought 2008/2002

The Republic of Malawi is a country of 15.4 million people in southern Africa. Many of its people live below the poverty line (HDI 171), plus a relatively high prevalence of HIV, which increases their vulnerability to drought and floods.

Climate change has affected weather patterns and made it more difficult for subsistence farmers to grow adequate crops. Chikwawa District (the target area) is adjacent to the Shire River, which floods after heavy rain. Droughts have also become more frequent and longer-lasting in recent years.

This study relates to flooding in 2007-08 and a drought in 2002. Intermittent flooding between November and March affected over 180,000 people across 9 districts of Malawi, causing displacement and damage to homes and crops. In the study area around Dzungwe village, about 1240 families were affected. Food prices became 5x higher than in 2007. The earlier drought in 2002 caused crop and livestock losses, and created a need for food and potable water.

The primary church partner was the Living Waters Church, plus a network of others around Dzungwe. Churches provided less inputs, but did assist in the

selection of beneficiaries and in the choice of food for work projects. They also influenced project design during the drought, requesting the partner NGO Eagles to build an water storage tank, instead of attempting more boreholes. Eagles agreed to this in addition to providing food aid.

Following the 2008 floods, Eagles was able to help by:

- Conducting envisioning sessions for church leaders
- Food stuffs provision through food for work projects
- Helping communities to construct flood control structures

The church's relationship with the wider community was strengthened,

mainly because the selection of project participants did not discriminate between community members who were affiliated to different denominations. (This form of bias had often happened in the past.) Greater unity was promoted and the church was seen as caring for the most vulnerable.

The network of churches has continued to work together. They have diversified their work and now tackle advocacy issues affecting their community. They also support vulnerable people in their community which includes rehabilitation of houses for elderly people and providing food for orphans, the chronically ill and elderly.

### Key Learning

- There is a need for more capacity building for the local church, especially on local resource mobilisation and how to handle disasters without external support.
- There should be more involvement with government decentralised structures, such as Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs).
- Disaster risk reduction should be considered when designing relief projects. In this case, Food For Work was used to construct flood defences and after the drought, a water-harvesting structure was built.
- Church networks and Pastors fellowships can promote unity and co-operation; they can also provide a platform for advocacy, seeking to influence Government policy and hold officials accountable.
- Full participation of church leaders in project planning and implementation is essential, in order to utilise their understanding of community dynamics and their knowledge of the most vulnerable groups and local needs.



## Case Study

# Philippines Typhoon 2011

*The Republic of the Philippines is composed of 7,000 islands and is home to 93.6 million people. It is exposed to frequent Pacific typhoons and associated floods, plus earthquakes and tsunamis.*

There are 20 active volcanoes and until recently a guerrilla war with separatist groups. The majority of the population are Christian with Moslem minorities.

The current disaster was caused by Typhoon Washi which hit the southern Island of Mindanao on Dec. 16th, 2011. It brought hours of torrential rainfall, causing multiple flash floods and mudslides. Rivers overflowed their banks, inundating some areas under 3 metres of muddy water in less than an hour, sweeping away vehicles and homes. According to the NDRRMC (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council) there were 1257 casualties, 113,651 affected families and more than 13,000 houses damaged. The typhoon hit Iligan City the hardest, on the northern coast. Whilst immediate needs have been met, the effects were felt for many months.

This case study describes the response to Typhoon Washi by the Philippines Children's Ministries Network (PCMN) and a network of local churches around Cagayan de Oro, including the Church of the Nazarene. Although severely

affected themselves (one church lost 38 members), churches were still able to respond. Initially, members helped with search and rescue, then with distribution of food and clothing, plus offering comfort and support to bereaved families. They then assisted with needs assessment and with cleaning schools and community centres. Churches served as evacuation centres initially and later hosted training sessions. Some provided vehicles, water containers, tents and housing equipment, plus the use of cell-phones and laptops.

Using the local Pastors Fellowship and its Disaster Committee (already set

up), PCMN was able to provide house repair kits, school supplies, support for orphans, training on children in crises (included Child-Friendly Spaces) plus DRR training and materials. Church leaders insisted that house repair kits should be "customised" according to need, a move which slowed the process but made the aid more effective.

Typhoon Washi changed the attitude of many church members; they realized they had to help their community, and opened their doors to those made homeless. The church gained credibility from the community and its wider ministry was enhanced.

### Key Learning

- Training churches in reporting and project management is crucial to improving future responses in collaboration with churches.
  - Intensive and direct communication between NGO and church during the response is very necessary. This takes time and effort from NGO staff.
  - The establishment of an immediate response team and a stockpile of non-food basic necessities could be done in the preventive period between typhoons.
  - The church has local knowledge to ensure that the most needy are reached with a specific aid package;
- "customising" repair kits was a good example of this.
- The NGO should realise that working with the church may slow down the aid process, but make it more effective; much patience is needed to reduce frustration.
  - The NGO should note that some churches themselves are hit hard, with loss of people and damage to buildings. Ability to respond is therefore reduced.
  - The pre-existence of Ministerial Fellowships and disaster committees can help churches to co-operate together, in a faster response.

## Case Study

# Indonesia Volcano 2010



*The Republic of Indonesia is composed of thousands of islands and has a population of 232 million, including the largest Muslim population in the world.*

It has great ethnic and religious diversity, with over 300 languages. Indonesia is highly

prone to natural disasters, including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and typhoons. Mount Merapi (literally meaning Fire Mountain) is the most active volcano in Indonesia, located near a densely populated area of Central Java province. Thousands of people live on its slopes, some as high as 1,700 metres.

On 25 October 2010, with an eruption imminent, the government declared an exclusion zone of 20 kilometres. For many, however, this was too late; a period of intense seismic activity began that afternoon, as Mount Merapi erupted, pouring lava, hot ash and gas onto the villages below. Explosions were heard 20km away. Over 100 people died in the eruption, and over 70,000 people were evacuated; many of the houses they left behind were burnt.

This study describes the response of NGO Yayasan Sion Foundation, in partnership with local churches. They targeted the villages of Sidorejo, Tegalmulyo and Balerante, where a combined number of 1500 beneficiaries

required food, water, sanitation and health services. The churches were able to provide a church building as a temporary regional office for Sion, volunteers to help clean the ash and counselling services for traumatized residents.

Sion Foundation were able to help with the recruitment process for volunteers, distribution of food and other necessities, health facilities and co-ordination between members of the church network. It also provided some training on trauma counselling. The church leadership helped to identify the neediest areas and where the volunteers should be deployed.

Sion resisted pressure to take church members onto their staff, preferring instead to give appropriate expenses and food to volunteers.

In the most affected area, there were some villages with no local church present. Network churches from nearby villages visited them to provide relief and care for the victims and affected families. The aid was accepted by the Muslim community, and the position of the church improved considerably. The relief operation created more tolerance, openness and less suspicion. Relationships between member churches in the network also improved.

### Key Learning

- Maximize the internal potential of the church – its knowledge, buildings, manpower and other resources.
- Volunteers can do many tasks, but should be selected carefully, motivated and trained for the tasks they have to do.
- Provide training on disaster management in advance of an expected disaster event.
- Reduce the expectation or hope that people will be recruited as full-time staff; ensure that expenses and food costs will be covered.
- More attention to practicing and sharing the Gospel after the event
- Churches can be well intentioned and energetic, but un-coordinated in their response. This can be a key role for the NGO to fulfil.
- Clarify expectations and commitments from both sides at the beginning of the project, if possible with an Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the parties.

## Some Key Questions for NGOs: a Checklist

NGO managers considering working with a local church, may like to answer the following questions, before entering a formal partnership. There will be cases where it is preferable not to work with a particular church.

### Interpretation of results

- If the questions produce 8 or more yes answers, then an NGO-Church partnership may be advisable; however, give special attention to the points which have “no” answers.
- If there are only 7 “yes” answers or less, then a partnership may not be wise. Some “no” answers carry enough weight to stop the process (e.g. Questions 4 and 8).



No.	Question	Yes	No
1	Will the participation of the local church increase the effectiveness and the size of the relief response?		
2	Does the church have local knowledge (of language, culture, marginalised groups, people in need, etc) which is not available from other sources?		
3	Will the participation of the church improve its relationships with the local community and/or with the local Government?		
4	Is it safe for the local church to participate in a relief project?		
5	Will the participation of the church enhance or benefit its longer-term spiritual and developmental programmes?		
6	Does the church have a wide, biblical vision to embark upon a relief project to meet the physical and emotional needs of all those suffering in the community (and not just the church members)?		
7	Is the local church willing to commit its own resources to the relief effort – use of buildings or compound, providing volunteers, donations in kind, etc?		
8	Does the church have the experience, qualified people and financial systems necessary to manage the amounts of money which the project will need?		
9	Is the NGO willing to allow church leaders to actively participate in decision-making processes, even if this slows down the speed of response?		
10	Does the NGO recognise the limitations and constraints of the local church, and is the NGO willing to operate within them?		
11	Is the NGO willing and able to provide the necessary training and capacity building, both for the present relief effort and to equip for future disasters?		
12	Have the necessary permissions been obtained from the higher levels of the denominational church leadership?		
<b>Totals</b>			

## **Colophon**

This is a Tear-publication.  
Tear supports churches in the fight  
against poverty and injustice in order  
to change human lives.

Editors: Bob Hansford, Peter Kamphof  
and Hielke Zantema

Design & Print: [www.dendj.nl](http://www.dendj.nl)

Photos: ACED, Lingap, Neicord,  
PCMN, Tear, Yayasan Sion

Tear Netherlands  
Laan van Vollenhove 2941  
3706 AK Zeist  
Postbus 981  
3700 AZ Zeist  
T +31(0)30 69 69 600  
F +31(0)30 69 69 635  
E [info@tear.nl](mailto:info@tear.nl)  
I [www.tear.nl](http://www.tear.nl)

Bank: ABN AMRO Zeist  
Account no. 50.80.12.600  
IBAN: NL78ABNA0508012600  
BIC: ABNANL2A

