

# Disaster relief



**Background Briefs**  
Development issues and efforts

Imagine waking up in the night to sound of crashing furniture and a rocking, heaving house. You realize it's an earthquake and wonder what you should do! Then the movement stops and thankfully there is little damage. Things don't always work out so well.

In 2005, at least 80 000 people were killed and three million left homeless after an earthquake struck the mountainous Kashmir district in Pakistan. A year earlier, an earthquake struck off the coast of Sumatra and approximately 250 000 people were killed in the tsunami that followed. Exactly one year before that, another quake killed as many as 43 000 people.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, cyclones, fire and drought all create havoc and loss of life – often on an immense scale. Authorities estimate that natural disasters cost the global economy \$181 billion in 2008. Three-quarters

of the world's population lives in areas that have experienced at least one earthquake, tropical cyclone, flood or drought since 1980. With the threat of climate change and rising population growth and urbanization, the number and impact of natural disasters will likely rise.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the southern US, devastating New Orleans and the surrounding area. It will likely take 15 years or more to restore the area to its previous state—and this in a developed country. Unfortunately, when disaster strikes in developing countries, the losses are magnified by the fact that people do not have the resources to help themselves.

Humanitarian organizations and individuals from around the world often offer assistance when disaster strikes. In 2005, Hurricane Stan swept through Central America.

The torrential rains and winds caused mudslides and flooding, resulting in 2 000 deaths. Two of the hardest hit areas were Guatemala and El Salvador. An organization known as World Vision developed a program to deal with the most immediate needs of the hurricane victims in the two countries. Their goal was to maintain health, privacy and dignity by providing essential items. World Vision delivered \$2 million worth of relief goods, including shelters, food, clothing, blankets and medicines. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) contributed \$200 000 to the World Vision Appeal.

When an earthquake struck the Kashmir region of Pakistan in 2005, it was a Saturday morning when the shops and schools were open. The disaster destroyed hundreds of thousands of buildings, often trapping or crushing people inside. Over three million people were left homeless and many were blocked off from help. The goal of CIDA's Canadian Relief Foundation was to improve the overall health of the millions of Pakistani people affected by the disaster. The

fund contributed to over 20 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who provided medical care for the victims. Since the quake occurred just prior to winter, the NGOs provided tents, clothing, stoves and other cold weather essentials. They erected camps for displaced persons. Clean-up crews worked to clear the rubble so that reconstruction could begin. Canada's financial contributions helped meet the initial and immediate needs of the victims. As well, Canada provided funds for more long-term recovery work.

While it is important to aid disaster victims, it is also vital that communities plan ahead to reduce the impact that future disasters could have. Not all disasters can be prevented, but the damage they create can be reduced when a community is prepared and has developed the capacity to protect, respond and recover. Research suggests that every dollar spent in disaster "moderation" will prevent the loss of seven dollars when disaster strikes.



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international