

MYTHS OF AID

MYTH #1: In a disaster response, relief efforts are uncoordinated, chaotic, and haphazard.

Following a disaster, it is common to read reports of too much aid reaching one location, and not enough reaching another, or of a community receiving triple rations of food but no water. Over recent decades, relief agencies and local governments have become more intentional about coordination. Still, gaps remain, and are intensified by the severity of the disaster; number, size, and experience level of responding agencies; and functionality of local infrastructure and services. Coordination is central to improving the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of an emergency response and reducing burden on recovering communities.

While time-consuming, coordination is vital to humanitarian organizations. By coordinating their response with other NGO's, local authorities, and the communities themselves, they can ensure that the most-needed items reach disaster survivors as quickly as possible, without duplication of effort.

World Vision has worked in Haiti for three decades, and has developed relationships with communities, other organizations, and local officials that are critical to the coordination of aid.

Who does World Vision collaborate with in Haiti?

- World Vision is an active member of the **interagency cluster system**, a grouping of United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other aid organisations that work to improve information management, coordination of activities and response standards and practices. There are eleven clusters within the system: Protection, Camp Coordination and Management, Water Sanitation and Hygiene, Health, Emergency Shelter, Nutrition, Emergency Telecommunications, Logistics, Education, Agriculture and Early Recovery. Sub-cluster groups, such as the Gender-Based-Violence group within the Protection cluster, also operate to focus on specific areas of intervention. Cluster groups meet regularly, have set objectives and share lessons, activities and plans.
- World Vision is also a participant in the **United Nations' Humanitarian Country Team**, helping to ensure that the activities of organizations are coordinated and that humanitarian action in-country is principled, timely, effective and efficient, and contributes to long-term recovery. The HCT is a key decision-making group that includes the directors of the humanitarian organizations involved in the disaster response. It is under the leadership of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and seeks to coordinate with national and local authorities and address critical issues when they arise from the humanitarian response.
- World Vision is engaged with the **International Council for Voluntary Agencies, InterAction, and the Comité Permanent Inter Organisations** (coordination body for international organisations in Haiti) to coordinate on humanitarian standards, accountability and response efforts.
- Partnerships with local and international organisations have ensured the provision of **locally appropriate services to target communities**. World Vision partners with many local Haitian organizations as well as the United Nations and international humanitarian agencies such as Oxfam, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, the American Red Cross and Handicap International, among others. Ongoing coordination with the Haitian government is also a priority. In addition, World Vision has worked with local churches and communities for three decades.
- World Vision is an active participant in the **Joint Haiti Security Forum** to ensure information sharing on security matters. In compliance with its civil-military engagement policy, World Vision has coordinated with UN peacekeeping forces, local police and international security forces, including the US military, to provide assistance during food distributions where contextually appropriate.
- As in any disaster, World Vision **adheres to the coordinating mechanisms and professional standards** set by the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations' Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is an "inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners."

###

MYTH #2: Aid agencies are not accountable or transparent.

Accountability is a responsibility and one that professional humanitarian agencies take seriously. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Humanitarian [Code of Conduct](#), aid agencies are accountable to "both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources." World Vision is currently compliant with every relevant donor accountability standard. Accountability emphasizes providing feedback to donors and the children and families we work with by embracing accountability mechanisms to ensure high standards of program quality and the responsibilities of meaningful community participation.

Over the past several years, World Vision has strengthened its global policies and practices to ensure greater accountability, including a robust internal "whistleblower" program as well as a "community of practice" to share lessons learned. In addition, World Vision provides things like executive salaries, general income and outflow information, annual reports, and overhead rates to the general public. All of these things can be accessed on our [website](#).

World Vision International is a signatory to the [People in Aid Code of Best Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel](#) and of the **Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** in Disaster Relief. World Vision is committed to implementing the standards of the [Humanitarian Accountability Partnership](#) (HAP) across its humanitarian programs. World Vision's commitment to accountability and to meeting these international standards in programs is captured in World Vision's **Program Accountability Framework** (PAF) which outlines how field programs can ensure transparency, consultation, participation and methods for feedback and complaints handling are integrated into our programs.

Accountability in Haiti Programs

Accountability has been woven into World Vision's Haiti response from the beginning. We formed a **Humanitarian Accountability Team** (HAT), which aims to improve accountability in meeting the basic and urgent needs of children and their families in Haiti. The HAT works closely with communities living in several camps to provide camp residents with information on who we are, how we work, and what we are doing in the target location as well as communicating how children and adults can be protected from exploitation.

Community consultation is undertaken frequently through assessments, household visits, beneficiary registrations and verification, project design, camp management committees and conflict mediation. Many front-line staff and community mobilisers are hired within project locations and provide regular input into program implementation.

Another important accountability mechanism is a **complaints and feedback process**, which includes the dissemination of feedback forms to capture complaints and feedback each day. Issues resolved, unresolved, or requiring further action are communicated back to World Vision, and where applicable, emphasis is placed on community suggestions to resolve the issues. Suggestion boxes have been installed in project sites to build safe and strong communication channels.

Designing, monitoring and evaluating (DME) projects is another key way World Vision promotes learning and accountability, as well as good development practice. Using effective DME ensures that interventions are appropriate for that context and enables World Vision to remain responsive to a constantly changing environment. In Haiti, assessments have gathered information using focus group discussions, key informant interviews, contextual analysis, and technical assessments. Regular monitoring is undertaken using indicators developed during the program design phase. Evaluation of World Vision programs is carried out to ascertain its impact and to make key changes where the appropriate impact is not being achieved.

As in any emergency response, World Vision ensures staff are trained on the [Sphere Standards](#) and HAP accountability tools and Red Cross, Red Crescent and NGO Code of Conduct, highlighting and reinforcing that services are provided free of charge, on the basis of need alone, and should not be exchanged for goods or any kind of favours.

World Vision is committed to the highest levels of accountability in the Haiti Earthquake Response and will continue to practice integrity and transparency in the implementation of programs.

###

MYTH #3: Good intentions are enough to provide valuable help during a disaster.

The days and weeks following a major natural disaster often bring an immediate outpouring of generosity from the public and a swell of interest from journalists to cover the story. A common desire is to do more than donate funds; well-intended people from all walks of life want to become involved, doing everything from organizing a local food or clothing drive, to actually traveling to the disaster site in hopes of providing additional on-the-ground assistance.

In a disaster, the best people to help on the ground are those with appropriate skills and training for disaster response, those who understand the language and the context of the particular disaster, and those who have the professional training and experience to work in a disaster setting.

While motivated by generous intentions, the efforts most often are counter-productive. Aid agencies have learned that donated food and clothing can clog up the supply line, and usually costs more to sort and ship than it is worth. And while volunteers with the needed professional skills, language, and experience can help save lives, local relief staff often has enough work to do without having to provide logistics, translation, and even care for untrained and unprepared volunteers.

Consider this: would you prefer to have life-saving surgery done by a friend who sincerely means well and cares for you, someone who wishes the very best for you and wants you to be well? Or would you prefer to have such life-saving surgery done by a highly skilled professional with years of training in the medical field? The same is true when it comes to the logistics, skills, and experience needed to mount a relief effort in the days and weeks following a disaster. It is not simple to feed millions of people, bring in shiploads of medical supplies, or handle an outbreak of cholera like the one we've seen in Haiti this year. It is not simple to create a disaster response program that is sustainable, culturally appropriate, and serves to build capacity with local partners and government ministries. In a disaster response, when the lives of children and their families are at stake, simply showing up to a disaster with a desire to help can do far more harm than good, both in the short run and the long run.

In addition, basic supplies like food, water, and shelter are limited for humanitarian aid workers following a disaster. Untrained volunteers with little practical experience to offer can strain an already overburdened system and unintentionally divert resources from those who are able to best help the survivors.

In today's constantly moving, 24/7 culture, we all have a tendency to expect quick results. But a disaster response (particularly one as catastrophic like the 2010 Haiti earthquake), requires a long-term view. World Vision's experience has shown that relief and recovery work takes *at least* 3 – 5 years to help communities truly begin to reestablish themselves after a major disaster. Short-term trips to the field by volunteers who want to help for a week or two can actually set the timeline back.

It is natural to want to rush to help when we see families and children in need around the world. We feel the same way, and that's why we want to help you understand that the very best way to help those in need is through your financial gifts. Cash donations can be used immediately to purchase critically needed items – either in the affected country (thereby helping its economy at a time of great need) or in nearby countries. Relief organizations have established logistic channels that will get the aid to the country in the most-efficient way possible, through customs, and to those who need it most, while avoiding duplication.

Take the time to research an organization you believe in ([Charity Navigator](#) and [GuideStar](#) are great resources), and then support them in their work! Financial gifts allow these professional humanitarian aid organizations to respond as quickly as possible to the most-urgent needs on the ground, and your gift will be an important part of that work.

###

MYTH #4: Aid agencies should spend donations as quickly as possible to address immediate needs

When images of destruction and despair in the wake of a disaster are splashed across the world, the natural reaction is to want to help as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. Certainly recovery and rescue efforts, as well as getting life-saving food, water, shelter, and medical care to survivors, must be accomplished as quickly as possible. However, aid will also be needed in the months and even years ahead; experienced aid agencies know they must plan to meet both the present and the future needs of a community seeking to recover from a disaster. Of course, this doesn't mean stock-piling food in warehouses while children go hungry. It does mean that aid agencies should follow best practices to respond to emergency needs and keep relief supplies flowing, while planning for the long-term recovery.

Today's fast-paced lifestyle can create a false set of expectations for fast results when it comes to disaster response. We live in a world of live video chats, online ordering, same-day delivery and on-demand movies, so we expect needs to be met instantly. After all, people were even able to send aid to Haiti via cell phone donations after the earthquake, but that doesn't mean that the aid itself can (or should!) be delivered instantly.

Many who have not experienced a disaster first-hand assume that things can "get back to normal" within a few months, but in fact as any survivor of a flood, wildfire, or other natural calamity here in the U.S. can attest, the effects of a disaster are most often long-lasting. After the 2004 tsunami, it was at least five years before the majority of families were able to return to a home. Today, in Pakistan's Swat Valley, more than 1.2 million people remain displaced after a 2009 conflict forced them to flee their homes. Parts of New Orleans have still not fully recovered more than five years since Hurricane Katrina. Keeping long-term recovery needs in mind, it's critical that aid agencies take a longer view when budgeting to help restore communities.

The Haiti Earthquake

Since the earthquake in January 2010, World Vision has been running two races in Haiti: 1) an "emergency sprint" to meet urgent basic survival needs such as food, water and shelter; and 2) a "long-term marathon" to help rebuild Haiti.

As one of the World Food Programme's biggest partners in Haiti, World Vision worked frantically to deliver millions of kilograms of food to over one million people during the first threemonths. At the same time, we were also planning for livelihood recovery programs which now, one year later, are critical to reduce reliance on food aid and make it possible for families to meet their own needs.

So just how quickly is World Vision spending earthquake funds? As we approach the one-year mark, we have invested about 60 percent of our earthquake resources (\$107 million) into a multi-sector response. With the remaining funds, we will continue to provide for immediate needs such as shelter, while accelerating medium- and long-term recovery and development, including projects in rural areas for displaced families, as well as disaster risk reduction programs to strengthen communities against hurricanes and other potential disasters.

Although speed is important in a disaster response, efficiency and coordination will, ultimately, help the most people in the shortest amount of time possible. Consider shelter construction: land tenure and debris remain hurdles, further complicated by the lack of a "master blueprint" for the resettlement of more than a million Haitians still living in camps. So while we continue to build transitional homes, World Vision is encouraging the government of Haiti to create a common shelter strategy so that construction work is coordinated and meets standards set by the humanitarian sector.

####

MYTH #5: The more money raised, the faster the response.

There is a tendency to simplify humanitarian aid and assume that the more money that is raised, the faster and less complex the response will be. However, money is not the only resource needed when it comes to a disaster response. Unfortunately, natural disasters and humanitarian crises are by their very nature complex situations which take more than money to fix. No matter how generous donors are, myriad factors can delay work in the field:

- **Access** – Physical devastation such as damaged airports, seaports and roads can clog the aid pipeline. Bad weather might also be a factor if it prevents aid workers from reaching a disaster zone. Even a fleet of brand new aircraft cannot deliver aid if there is no runway to land on!
- **Local political stability** – Weak governments can impede the efficiency of relief work. A lack of political will to support a disaster response can cause aid workers to find themselves “swimming in mud” to get the necessary permissions, permits and paperwork to do their work.
- **Poverty** – Poor countries often lack infrastructure such as health systems and transportation networks that provide an operational foundation upon which to mount a disaster response.
- **Lack of coordination** – The presence of new and inexperienced organizations who do not participate in the existing coordination mechanisms can lead to problems of duplication and overall inefficiency.

The Haiti Earthquake

The Haiti earthquake response is a case in point. Donors were incredibly generous, but a year later find it difficult to understand why more than a million people lack safe housing and are still struggling to survive. All of the above factors are causing slow progress; shelter issues are particularly daunting.

World Vision had funds to start building transitional shelters immediately; however, we faced challenges such as:

- **Land tenure:** NGO's cannot build homes when the ownership of land is in question; only the Haitian government can clear up the legal issues involved in land tenure. So far, it has been unable to do so quickly enough to provide safe land to rebuild homes for the vast majority of Haiti's homeless.
- **Rubble removal:** In a heavily urban setting, this work is no small task. There is a shortage of heavy machinery sufficient to complete the task with any level of efficiency. Also, there are pre-existing factors such as a lack of building codes (or adherence to national building codes) and a lack of disaster-resilient materials available for construction, resulting in poorly planned and constructed infrastructure.

Getting it right

Finally, it's worth noting the importance of taking extra time upfront to get it right. In Haiti, World Vision invested the time needed to consult earthquake survivors to get their input into the design of our transitional shelters. While this may have lengthened the construction timeline, we wanted to ensure our shelters would be well-received and appropriate to the local environment.

Despite the challenges, progress is being made. As of mid-December, World Vision has constructed nearly 640 transitional shelters, and are committed to further construction throughout Port-au-Prince, La Gonave, and Corail. Ultimately, over the course of the next three to five years, World Vision's goal will be to see families in safer, more permanent communities with homes, functioning schools, and jobs that allow them to support their families.

###