

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

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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.