

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's screens, 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 three months. 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

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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.