The Role of the Local Church in Disasters and Emergencies

Micah Network Global Consultation.
Thailand  11-16th September 2006
Final Draft
Objective of Workshop

- To increase understanding of the relative strengths and potential roles of the local church in disasters and emergencies
- To explore how the Micah Network should interact and work with the local church in such contexts
Context

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains” Matthew 24: 6-8

- Natural disasters are increasing primarily due to increasing vulnerability
- Poor countries and poor people are the most affected
- Poorer nations are more prone to conflict. Nearly 40% of conflicts are in Africa
- Climate change increases the risk of disasters
- AIDS is the largest humanitarian crisis facing the world in modern history.
- Disasters pose a significant and growing threat to “Human Security”
- Need for a distinctly Christian response embracing an Integral Mission approach to address the both effects and underlying causes of disasters and vulnerability
Global impact of disasters will increase over time...

- All the evidence indicates that the contributory factors of hazards & vulnerability will all increase

Natural Disaster Reduction, UNESCO’s contribution – W. Erdelen, ADG/SC
Transformation through Disaster Management
Transforming the lives of poor people by mobilising a disaster management capability at local church, community, national and international levels

- Limited resources; Look for leverage points in holistically transforming the lives of the poor (material, spiritual, relational, environmental and personal transformation)
- Local churches best placed to provide an opportunity for people to be spiritually and relationally transformed
- Disasters as unique opportunities to mobilise and resource the church
- There are proven and cost-effective ways to anticipate, cope with and respond to disasters
- 100,000’s churches in the south. Where possible, disaster-related interventions should be linked to the local church
- Ultimately preventing disasters depends on our ability to build just and equitable social, economic and political systems.
Seeking Opportunity in Crisis

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people’s, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” Gal 6: 10

Disasters provide a unique entry point to build safer, more resilient transformed communities:

- God tends to draw closest to people when they are most vulnerable
- Severity and scale of suffering provides a strong moral and economic imperative for action
- High media profile / mobilise public opinion
- Demand political attention / commitment
- Mobilises substantial financial resources
- Creates a climate where change in society is more acceptable
- Injects a sense of urgency / impetus to act
- Sharpens focus and alignment between disciplines / organisations
- Exposes weaknesses in society and the development processes
- Highlights the plight of weak, marginalised, discriminated
- Reiterates the relevancy of Christian values and principles
Strengths of the local church

Group Work Exercise

1. What are the strengths of the local church in disaster situations (pre / response / post)?
Strengths of the Local Church
- Examples

- Long term, local Christian presence
- Organisational capacity
- Local knowledge
- Legitimacy / Biblical mandate (duty of care)
- Relationships and a relational approach
- Spiritual focus
- Links with the wider world
- Ethos of compassion and concern for others
- Agent for building sustainable Christian communities (Integral Mission)
- Prophetic voice
## Disaster Situations - Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-disaster</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Post-disaster</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Public Educated Awareness / Information</td>
<td>• Evacuation / Search &amp; Rescue</td>
<td>• Community conflict resolution / peace building &amp; reconciliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Civic education</td>
<td>• Rapid assessments</td>
<td>• Acceptance / Forgiveness</td>
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<td>• Contingency / Preparedness Planning</td>
<td>• Basic Physical Needs</td>
<td>• Livelihood diversification</td>
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<td>• Community mobilisation</td>
<td>• Security / Protection</td>
<td>• Natural resource management</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Early warning</td>
<td>• Protection of livelihoods / essential assets</td>
<td>• Policy reform / advocacy (voice for the poor)</td>
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<td>• Local / national-level advocacy</td>
<td>• Family tracing</td>
<td>• Family / community support networks</td>
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<td>• First Aid training</td>
<td>• Trauma counselling</td>
<td>• Attitudinal / values changes / justice</td>
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<td>• Evacuation drills / rehearsals</td>
<td>• Relational care and pastoral / emotional support</td>
<td>• Physical / Social / Spiritual / Emotional healing</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evacuation Infrastructure</td>
<td>• Community mobilisation</td>
<td>• Hope / Encouragement / Salvation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stock Piling Relief Provisions</td>
<td>• Public Health Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Changes in attitudes and cultural practices</td>
<td>• Relevant Information</td>
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<td>• Love / Compassion / Kindness</td>
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<td>• Sympathy / Empathy</td>
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Potential role of the local church in disasters

Group Work Exercise

• What are possible complementary roles (niche) that the local church could take in a disaster situation?
Potential role of the local church in disasters - 1

1. Facilitator of community action
   • Support assessments / mobilisation
   • Community meetings / committees

2. Connector with the wider world
   • Early warning information

3. Advocate on behalf of the marginalised
   • Envisioning for this role
   • Identification / targeting of most vulnerable

4. Provider of relational care and support
   • Prayer, pastoral support, hospitality, acceptance, forgiveness, hope, salvation
Potential role of the local church in disasters - 2

5. Community Peace-builder
   - Reparation and reconciliation
   - Basic training and support

6. Influencer and Shaper of values
   - Teaching against unjust, high-risk cultural practices

7. Provider of resources
   - Communications infrastructure, personnel, leadership, buildings

8. Immediate responder to sudden onset crisis
   - Strong Volunteer base
Constraints and Challenges to Local Church in Disasters

Group Work Exercise

• What are some of the constraints and challenges of working with the local church in disasters and emergencies?
Constraints and Challenges – examples

- Low capacity and lack of technical skills
- Lack of willingness to engage in Disasters
- Relevant theology
- Internal divisions / competition within church
- Mixed motives for involvement in disasters
- Government and NGO attitudes (partial)
- Tearfund & partner capacity
- Difficulty of monitoring & evaluation
- Institutional funding (humanitarian objective)
- Contexts where there is no local church
The Red Cross Code of Conduct

Coercive Proselytism = “unjustified manipulation or use of coercive techniques or force to achieve conversion”

Section 3 – “Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint”

- We will not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the acceptance of a particular religious creed.
Possible Ways Forward

Questions and Discussion Points….

• Working with the local churches to support disaster-affected communities

• Mainstream disaster education awareness into church school curricula

• All *at-risk* church parishes to have disaster contingency (preparedness) plans and committees

• Linkages to local and national-level early warning systems

• Protection of local critical public infrastructure

• A global network of high-capacity southern DM organisations resourced / supported by a network of northern organisations.

• Situations where there is no local church......
1. What are the strengths of the local church in disaster situations (pre / response / post) ?

2. What are possible complementary roles (niche) that the local church could take in a disaster situation ?

3. What are some of the constraints and challenges of working with the local church in disasters and emergencies?