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Disaster Relief, Inc.

It's a good thing when companies pitch in after natural or other calamities. It would be a far better thing if they partnered with aid agencies to make plans before disaster struck.

By Anisya Thomas and Lynn Fritz November 2006

On December 26, 2004, an earthquake and resulting tsunami in South Asia claimed some 227,000 lives and displaced 1.7 million people. The world responded by donating more than $13 billion and initiating the largest relief effort in history.

Private sector response was unprecedented. Worldwide, approximately $2.5 billion was raised by the United Nations from institutional and individual donors, accounting for roughly 50% of the total money it raised, according to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that American companies mobilized more than $565 million: about $273 million in cash contributions; $79 million in employee matching contributions; $140 million in in-kind donations; and $73 million in customer donations. CEOs and employees alike wanted to do something tangible to help alleviate the suffering.

The aid community was looking primarily for cash donations, as cash is the most flexible resource. Many global companies wanted to do more—to give in-kind goods, provide communications or IT support, and lend logistics staff or managers. But that impulse quickly revealed many flaws in the system of private-public relief partnerships. There was no comprehensive list available to corporations of what was needed and by whom. There were no mechanisms to keep track of what corporations had available and where. Relief organizations, stretched thin by the severity and sheer geographic scope of the disaster, largely were unable to take advantage of nonmonetary offers because they didn't have the staff available to evaluate or accept resources from nontraditional actors in relief.

Despite cautions that aid agencies put out against sending unsolicited items, they were confronted with a stream of gifts sent by well-meaning donors. Sri Lanka's Colombo airport reported that within two weeks of the tsunami, 288 freighter flights had arrived without airway bills to drop off humanitarian cargo. Some carried much-needed supplies, of course, that had been cleared by credible humanitarian organizations. But a large number brought unsolicited and inappropriate items (such as used Western clothes, baked beans, and carbonated beverages), which piled up at the airport, clogged warehouses, and remained unclaimed for months. Worse yet, these prepaid flights refueled and then returned empty, when they could have carried commercial cargo. As a result, the airport ran out of fuel for the scheduled flights. After that, many companies' offers of help were met with "no thanks."

Within two weeks of the tsunami, unsolicited supplies piled up at Sri Lanka's Colombo airport, clogging warehouses and remaining unclaimed for months.

Several corporations, however, were able to become deeply involved in the relief effort. The difference was that these firms had established relationships with aid agencies well before the tsunami struck. Coca-Cola, for example, has for years maintained relationships with the Red Cross and other aid agencies in many countries. Working with local subsidiaries, Coca-Cola converted its soft-drink production lines to bottle huge quantities of drinking water and used its own distribution network to deliver it to relief sites. Similarly, British Airways, UPS, FedEx, and DHL all worked with their existing aid agency partners to furnish free or subsidized transportation for relief cargo.

We believe that the response to the 2004 tsunami marks a turning point in the involvement of the corporate sector in humanitarian relief. In its aftermath, corporations and aid organizations alike are examining ways in which they can collaborate most fruitfully with one another. Our research, as well as our experience in the humanitarian sector, suggests that effective partnerships are possible if corporations understand the dynamics of the aid sector. (See the sidebar "Anatomy of an International Relief Operation.")

Then CEOs must make two decisions concerning the form and structure of their company's involvement with relief agencies. First, do they want primarily to give philanthropic donations, or do they want to engage in efforts to improve the aid delivery process at a more systemic level? Second, do they want to foster a deep partnership with a single agency, or do they want to pool their resources with other companies to extend their impact to more aid agencies by joining one of several recently established consortiums? This article will explain the trade-offs involved in these options so that executives can think carefully now about their response to the next catastrophic event.

Why Partnerships Make Sense

Many companies are moved to participate in humanitarian efforts because they have seen the staggering losses inflicted when disasters interrupt the flow of business; working to alleviate the economic impact of such disruptions makes good business sense. In addition, firms feel increasing pressure from consumers, employees, and a growing segment of the investment community to demonstrate good corporate citizenship. As Boston College's Center for Corporate Citizenship reports, corporate social responsibility programs, driven by internal company values and the need to enhance reputation and image, have been associated with increased employee satisfaction, recruitment, and retention. Since the tsunami, business leaders such as Hank McKinnell of Pfizer and Michael Klein at Citigroup have advocated for greater corporate involvement in disaster relief.

Doing so by working with the established community of aid agencies makes a world of sense. Humanitarian aid agencies have decades of experience on the front lines of disasters and in long-term development initiatives. They have cultivated expertise in various intervention strategies. Their networks, relationships, and know-how reach into the most remote parts of the world. They don't differentiate between highly visible disasters and unpublicized ones. They are guided by the principles of neutrality and independence, which affords them legitimacy. Their brands generate trust and respect, which facilitate their ability to solicit donations.

However, as the number of large-scale disasters increases, aid agencies struggle to keep up with burgeoning demand. Critically, because their funding mechanisms require them to devote almost all their resources to frontline assistance services, funds to develop backroom infrastructure and processes are limited. Technology is fragmented; having multiple, incompatible information systems is not unusual. As a result, information exists in silos, preventing agencies from collecting organizationwide metrics. There are no clearly defined career paths, professional associations, or communities of practice for people who work in the backroom areas of logistics, technology, finance, and human resources at these agencies. Because each project is funded separately, field staff turnover is very high, sometimes as much as 80%. Therefore, the tacit knowledge of aid workers is often lost at the end of a major operation.

What's more, the sector measures itself with throughput indicators rather than output or outcome metrics. That is, agencies describe how much food they have distributed or how much shelter they have provided, not what outcomes these relief services have created in terms of lives saved or suffering alleviated. Thus, demonstrating the effectiveness, efficiency, or impact of an organization is virtually impossible.

What these agencies need from corporations is not only their wealth of funds and goods but their wealth of operational expertise. As Jan Egeland, the UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, has observed, relief efforts can benefit from the innovation, cost efficiency, and ability to make investments for multiple returns that are ubiquitous in successful global companies. The corporate sector long ago recognized that strong back rooms lead to healthy bottom lines. Companies have calculated the differential cost savings from variously configured supply chains and well-honed technology. They are adept at demonstrating their efficiency and effectiveness both in relation to their own past performance and to industry benchmarks. Universities provide a stream of trained professionals and academics engaged in research relating to logistics, finance, operations, marketing, human resources, and the like. Communities of practice and professional associations abound, ensuring that knowledge will be continually updated and will spread from industry to industry.

Surely, aid organizations and corporations have much to gain from working together. Companies can bolster their reputations with customers, demonstrate their good intentions, and attract employees who want to work for responsible corporate citizens. Aid agencies can become more efficient at alleviating suffering and enhance their relationships with donors by more clearly demonstrating their impact. But if the mutual benefits are extensive and important, so are the challenges of forming truly effective private-public partnerships.

Culture Clash

People who choose a life of working with aid agencies, focused as they are on helping people rather than selling to them, often view profit-driven corporations with suspicion. High-profile allegations of private sector exploitation, such as using sweatshop labor or dumping expired food and medicines on tarmacs in disaster areas, have not helped.

Aid professionals are also leery of the private sector's commitment to disaster relief. Most corporations want to get involved in well-publicized emergencies; they cannot be depended on to help the most needy in less "popular" disasters. Further, economic downturns and top management changes can jeopardize the relationship. Finally, aid agencies fear that partnering with corporations may place their reputations at risk. A corporate scandal could damage an agency's most vital asset—its brand. That's why Oxfam GB, for instance, declined a number of free aircraft trips to carry humanitarian cargo last year; it couldn't verify that the planes had not been used to transport arms in the past.

For their part, companies are wary of the capabilities and professionalism of relief organizations. In interviews with us, corporate executives revealed that they found it extraordinarily difficult to establish effective channels of communication with relief partners. They could not find the right person to call, or, when they did, their calls often weren't returned. One interviewee described frustration at not being able to speak to anyone who was not in the external relations department, which was staffed by people with no experience in either emergency operations or the private sector. Someone from a large software manufacturer told us that the company's donation of several hundred thousand dollars' worth of software was accepted by a large aid agency but couldn't be used because no computer in the organization had enough memory. Relief agencies also tend to work in longer time frames than corporate executives are used to. One aid organization openly states that working out an alliance with a corporate partner takes 12 to 18 months—that can thwart even the most interested company.

If, despite these obstacles, an alliance is struck, these initial conflicts can intensify: The nonprofit may not have adequate resources to manage the relationship, leading to missed deadlines and further frustrations. Differences in professional vocabulary, time horizons, expectations, and metrics may lead to misunderstandings. In fact, the perception of lack of efficiency, transparency, and effective management has led some corporations to question whether partnerships with aid agencies will ever be truly viable. Nonetheless, some organizations such as Save the Children, CARE, and World Vision have become skilled at working with corporate partners, especially in their activities related to long-term development. By making it a strategic priority to engage with the corporate sector and assigning specialized staff, they are now looking to translate those gains to the humanitarian side as well.

Partnership Decisions

Our research and our direct experience working with aid agencies and corporations over the past five years leads us to believe that partnerships between these two sectors can indeed be successful. The most effective partnerships recognize and take advantage of the strengths of each party. They also clearly articulate the goals of each participant so they can later judge how beneficial the partnership truly is to each player. Before executives can begin to forge strong alliances, however, they must decide on the best structure to follow.

The first factor executives need to think about is the level of participation. In The Collaboration Challenge, Harvard Business School professor James Austin describes contributions from the corporate sector along a spectrum: At one end are purely philanthropic contributions—the provision of cash, goods, or services. At the other end are integrative partnerships, which make full use of the core competencies of both organizations. An integrative approach requires a significant ongoing commitment of resources and, in particular, expert and experienced people on both sides dedicated to the partnership. One example is an information technology company and a relief organization that codeveloped a communications architecture and protocols to coordinate field operations. Another is a manufacturing company working to improve the materials management processes and information infrastructure of its aid agency partner so that relief supplies could be better accounted for and more quickly distributed.

In addition to choosing between a philanthropic or an integrative partnership, a company must decide whether to work directly with an aid agency or pool its efforts with many other companies and nongovernmental organizations by joining a consortium. The permutations of those two decision points leads to four different approaches, each with its own strengths and challenges.

Single-Company Philanthropic Partnerships

In the wake of a hurricane, an earthquake, or a flood, companies naturally seek to respond in the most straightforward and immediate way by giving money or material directly to the agencies on the ground. Examples of such philanthropic contributions abounded after the 2004 tsunami: Citigroup provided office space in Bangkok for UN operations coordination. Danone, the French food corporation, donated millions of packages of high-protein biscuits, water, and milk drinks through its network of local distributors, as well as through the UN's World Food Programme and the Red Cross. Local Indian corporations Wipro and HCL let their employees work with agencies like AID India to assist with debris removal and food distribution.

Without preexisting partnerships, even these philanthropic contributions can be hard to execute. Many aid agencies are wary of receiving donations from companies associated with defense contracting, weapons manufacturing, or harmful consumer products such as cigarettes for fear of tarnishing their brand image. During a relief effort, reputable aid agencies often decline donations from corporations, as Oxfam did, when they are uncertain of would-be donors' commitment to corporate social responsibility or when corporate holdings have not been thoroughly investigated.

Ultimately, the results of these reactive and ad hoc philanthropic contributions are hard to assess for the corporation, the relief agency, and particularly the affected populations. Did the benefits to all concerned outweigh the costs of delivering the goods? Would the agencies and affected populations have been better off with the equivalent in cash? Were the products really needed, or were they pushed into the supply chain? Were local markets adversely affected?

A corporation that chooses the single-company philanthropic approach would be well advised to establish a clearly outlined donation process before help is needed. The optimal arrangement is between a company that provides a good or service and an aid agency that uses said product or service to enhance its relief efforts, just as Project HOPE and World Vision use 3M's donations of first-aid supplies, stethoscopes, and respirators.

Partners should agree to a trigger mechanism that would signal when the aid agency should identify its needs and request donations. Responsibility for shipping and tracking should be prearranged so that when items are needed there's no last-minute haggling over details. At a less logistical level, both partners should understand the type of visibility they can expect to receive, so that the company reaps the public relations benefit of the donation, if desired.

The relationship between Abbott Laboratories and the American Red Cross is a good example of this type of partnership. Abbott has arranged to provide a variety of products, from antibiotics to baby food, to the Red Cross in the event of a disaster. The form of these products, in emergency relief kits, meets the specifications of the Red Cross's delivery system. After a major emergency, a phone call from either partner triggers the donation to the appropriate location. In addition to directly reducing suffering, benefits to Abbott of this approach include increased visibility through the distribution of branded products, joint press releases and speaking engagements, and enhanced goodwill of its employees. Similarly, a number of pharmaceutical and health care firms have annual agreements with humanitarian partners to periodically ship requested products to the aid agencies' warehouses, so that they are ready for immediate deployment when the need arises.

Philanthropic partnerships established before a crisis occurs can be highly effective. They can provide substantial relief to people affected by disaster. They can give corporate employees a sense of contribution. They can create positive publicity and goodwill for corporations and relief agencies alike. Perhaps most important, they can make sure that good intentions don't turn into piles of unnecessary supplies being pushed into the relief supply pipeline, clogging existing capacity and impeding the flow of valuable and needed aid.

Multicompany Philanthropic Partnerships

The problem with direct contributions between corporations and aid agencies is that the companies don't always have what the agencies they deal with want, nor do they necessarily know which agencies want what they can contribute best. Businesses can get around this difficulty and increase their impact if they join together in a consortium with other companies to provide supplies and services to many member aid agencies during a disaster. Two examples are the Partnership for Disaster Response, an initiative of the Business Roundtable, and the Disaster Resource Network (DRN), a creation of the World Economic Forum.

The Business Roundtable, an association of approximately 160 CEOs of leading U.S. corporations, launched the Partnership initiative in response to the 2004 tsunami. Its goal is to coordinate private sector assistance and serve as a clearinghouse for corporate resources during a major disaster. Member companies identify beforehand the equipment, supplies, expertise, and staff they could contribute in an emergency, and the Business Roundtable matches those with the needs of aid agencies with whom clear channels of communication have been established before a calamity occurs.

In a similar way, DRN facilitates corporate donations during a disaster by matching the resources of company donors with the needs of humanitarian agencies with which its individual members have relationships. For example, after the recent earthquake in Pakistan, DRN connected Fast Retailing, a provider of fleece jackets in Japan, with Crossroads International and the Interfaith League Against Poverty to distribute 10,000 jackets in the Mansehra district. And when Hurricane Ivan left some 60,000 people homeless on the island of Grenada in 2004, DRN solicited assistance from companies such as Parsons Brinckerhoff, Nestec, Lowe's, Home Depot, and Danaher for donations of chain saws, tree branch cutters, safety goggles, and rope to use in clearing roads and rebuilding homes. These were made available to local charities in the affected area. DRN relies primarily on existing contacts or networks and plays the intermediary role in matching donors and recipients and in arranging the transportation, thus speeding up the donation process and ensuring that the supplies can be properly used.

The challenges to multicompany philanthropic partnerships lie in verifying the capabilities of the local charities, making sure the needs of each member agency are clear to the corporate donors, and ensuring that the companies respond in a timely manner. What's more, consortium members must all agree on the types of disasters and agencies that qualify for assistance and establish a method for prioritizing the many requests for aid when an emergency occurs. Finally, setting up and maintaining a broad network that can deliver the myriad kinds of goods needed in different types of disasters requires a fully staffed intermediary organization, which in turn requires large-scale funding. Both consortiums are currently wrestling with these issues.

Consortia represent a new form of cooperation that reduces the transaction costs of philanthropic donation.

Even so, because of their scale, multicompany partnerships can make a greater impact on disaster relief efforts than any single company could. They represent a new form of cooperation that reduces the transaction costs of philanthropic donation by sharing and automating information. In short, they take the guesswork out of giving.

Single-Company Integrative Partnerships

Whether they forge relationships directly or through consortiums, philanthropic partnerships address immediate concerns of a crisis. Companies looking to make a more systemic impact on the entire process of disaster response should consider forging integrative partnerships. In a single-company integrative partnership, a corporation and an aid agency take advantage of each other's core competencies to deliver assistance more effectively. Few such arrangements exist because of the vast cultural differences and traditional lack of trust between the corporate sector and the aid sector. But one good example is the partnership between Dutch logistics giant TNT and the World Food Programme.

In 2001, TNT's CEO, Peter Bakker, read an article about the widening gap between the rich and the poor and decided that his company could help. TNT wanted to find a partner with a common core business, a reputable brand, and a willingness to make a long-term commitment. It spent a year evaluating data on potential partners, meeting their leaders and staff, visiting field operations, and assessing the compatibility of cultures, management, and core competencies. Ultimately, the company decided to approach the WFP.

With the primary responsibility for delivering food to locations from North Korea to Sudan, the World Food Programme is acknowledged as having the UN's most sophisticated logistics infrastructure. In 2005, it distributed 4.2 million metric tons of food to 96.7 million people in 82 countries. WFP's executive director, James T. Morris, was looking for a corporate partner to enhance the program's organizational capacity and gain access to private sector expertise and resources. The alliance between WFP and TNT, which does business in 19 of the countries WFP has feeding stations in, made perfect sense. The partnership focuses on five initiatives: emergency response, joint logistics supply chain, transparency and accountability, school feeding support, and private sector fund-raising.

After the 2004 tsunami, WFP had a formidable mandate as the UN organization designated to transport and distribute food to all the major affected areas. The communications and operational processes that WFP and TNT had established for their emergency response initiative allowed TNT to use its existing infrastructure to get involved immediately and deeply in the relief efforts. The enhanced logistics services created through the partnership allowed the agency to feed more people in a timely manner. In Indonesia, TNT's truck convoys and Mi8 helicopters were the first to deliver food to Banda Aceh. In India, TNT's subsidiaries warehoused WFP's relief supplies and transported them from those hubs to the disaster areas. This operation may mark the first time that a company and a humanitarian organization have run such an enormous operation together: TNT contributed more than 2 million in in-kind support, including transport, warehousing, and personnel, as well as over 1 million in employee donations. Still, it was the jointly developed logistics operation on the ground that made the biggest difference.

As with all alliances, there are risks to so deep an engagement. Because the identities and brands of the two organizations may become closely linked, a change in one partner's brand may affect the other's, and it may be difficult to separate identities later, if desired. Some detractors will question underlying motives. (Is TNT's real aim to capture the large market of shipping humanitarian supplies?) And there's always the chance that an economic downturn or a shake-up in top management will jeopardize the arrangement.

Single-company integrative partnerships like this one require a huge commitment of time and resources, yet their impact can be equally large.

Besides increasing WFP's effectiveness and reach, the relationship has established TNT's reputation as a company with a conscience and given it greater access to, and knowledge of, the developing countries where WFP operates. A survey of TNT employees reveals that almost 75% have made financial contributions to WFP as a result of the partnership. About 70% of employees reported that they had more pride and were more fully engaged in the company because of the initiative. In fact, in 2004, Fortune named TNT one of the ten best companies to work for in Europe, largely because of its alliance with WFP. In the article, Morris calls the partnership, "One of the best things that could happen to the World Food Programme."

Multicompany Integrative Partnerships

Just as multicompany partnerships can multiply the impact of philanthropic donations so, too, can they magnify the potential of integrative partnerships. A multicompany integrative partnership brings to bear the collective resources and best practices of a number of companies to improve the disaster response capabilities for a whole range of agencies. It is the most complex of the four approaches in its execution. It has a longer time horizon and generates fewer immediate payoffs for both the corporations and the agencies. Yet because of its scale and vast resources, such a partnership harbors tremendous potential. Two examples of integrative consortiums are the Partnership for Quality Medical Donations (PQMD) and our own Corporations for Humanity.

PQMD was incorporated in 1999 to develop, disseminate, and encourage high standards in the delivery of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies for humanitarian purposes. The consortium's 27 members include over a dozen aid agencies, such as AmeriCares and World Vision, as well as pharmaceutical and medical device companies like Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, and Johnson & Johnson.

The goal of PQMD is to materially improve the delivery of medical products to underserved populations around the world, including those made vulnerable by disasters. Working as a liaison for the myriad players, it promotes sound donation practices, influences policy, and encourages replication of best practices among its members. The value of this type of consortium lies not only in its ability to elicit much-needed medical supplies from corporate partners but in its continual work toward improving trust between corporations and agencies by increasing the understanding of each other's assets and expertise. In addition to the ongoing education efforts, the PQMD Emergency Committee, cochaired by members from industry and the NGO community, convenes during both the relief and rehabilitation phases of a disaster to facilitate communication and collaboration between the two sectors and highlight the major needs out in the field. One measure of PQMD's effectiveness is that none of its members' tsunami relief efforts was found to be inappropriate by Pharmaciens Sans Frontières in a 2005 investigation sponsored by the World Health Organization.

Because many-to-many partnerships are innately complex, it makes sense to engage a neutral, third-party nonprofit to help partners bridge their cultural differences, align expectations, and build trust. Our organization, Fritz Institute, serves as an umbrella for the Corporations for Humanity, a consortium of 40 companies and aid agencies trying to improve humanitarian relief delivery through better supply chain management. Ongoing projects being conducted on behalf of its partners include mapping the supply chains of relief organizations, documenting common weaknesses, and collecting data on the delivery of supplies during relief operations. Results are discussed with the corporate and aid agency partners, and alternative solutions are generated and evaluated.

When it is clear that a potential solution can bring value to the group of aid agencies, financial and expert help is solicited from the corporate members. Aid agency partners are requested to provide a venue where the solution can be tested and its value assessed. The solution is then made broadly available to the community.

For example, a dearth of skilled logisticians in the field and a lack of technology for tracking supplies from various donors to the affected areas caused supply chain bottlenecks and distribution delays for both the 2004 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. In response, we created a training and certification program for field logisticians using models common in the private sector. We are also applying best practices in technology development and deployment drawn from the private sector to improve supply chain management in the field. In both cases, steering groups of logisticians from both the private sector and the aid agencies donated substantial time and expertise, and outside vendors were used to create the products. Fritz Institute acted as the project manager.

The advantage of this approach is that it brings together peers (supply chain managers) from both the corporate and humanitarian sectors. The interaction between them is stimulating: Each learns to appreciate the complexities of the other's job, and their different experiences and expertise generate innovative thinking that has proved to be mutually valuable. The private sector gains insight into managing complex supply chains in unpredictable and dynamic environments, and the humanitarian sector has a window into the competitiveness and rigor of the corporate supply chain environment.

One drawback of this model is that corporate participants don't get the boost in social brand equity that comes from a direct integrative partnership or a high-profile philanthropic donation. The diffuse and long-term benefits also may be difficult to promote within a company. While participating organizations have a vote in setting direction and selecting projects, they do not have the same level of control as they would in a one-to-one integrative partnership.

Partnering with many organizations, however, means gaining access to a wide array of expertise and being able to take advantage of the core competencies and assets of many different players. And, undeniably, the greatest advantage of joining an integrative consortium is its vast potential for lasting, systemic change.

That corporations are eager to get involved with disaster relief is a good thing. Yet how much greater could their impact be if they started working with aid agencies now to prepare for the next emergency.

Maintaining a commitment to systemic improvement between disasters will reduce suffering far more than a philanthropic donation made after the fact.

We've outlined four approaches executives can take to join forces with relief organizations. Each has its own set of pros and cons, although as a general rule the more deeply a firm engages with partners, the greater the potential for widespread change. It's easy to see why the image of a relief worker carrying a sack of grain packs an emotional wallop, but the behind-the-scenes work of process enhancement is just as crucial in humanitarian efforts. Maintaining a commitment to systemic improvement between disasters, though less glamorous, will reduce suffering far more than a donation made after the fact. The sooner executives realize this, the better positioned the world will be to respond to global catastrophes.

Anatomy of an International Relief Operation

Within hours (sometimes minutes) of a major disaster or humanitarian crisis, news is broadcast across the world by the media. The international aid community goes on alert. Before any assistance can be rendered, however, the country affected must acknowledge that the response and relief required are beyond the capacity of its own national resources and signal its desire to receive aid. Once it does, it grants local and international teams permission to assess the damage. This information leads the country to issue an appeal for help, generally in the form of a call for cash or specific items like tents, blankets, water, and sanitation kits. In many cases, aid agencies have already made informal requests, and donations have already been pledged, before the formal appeal is issued. In an increasingly connected world, individuals and corporations around the world also offer their assistance unsolicited in response to media coverage of the disaster.

Local governments, aid agencies, and corporations within the country bear the brunt of the effort initially and, sometimes, entirely. Our survey of 1,000 affected families in India after the 2004 tsunami, for instance, showed that a mere 10% of relief administered in the first 48 hours was provided by international organizations. In fact, the Indian government did not invite international aid agencies to participate at all in the first 60 days of the relief effort. The country had invested in building relief capability and infrastructure after the 2001 Bhuj earthquake, so it felt that it was self-sufficient. Subsequent evaluations revealed that the government and local aid agencies did an excellent job during the relief phase of the tsunami operation.

A similar survey of 600 families in Sri Lanka indicated that only 14% of relief there came from international efforts. In countries with weak relief infrastructures, however, such as Indonesia, victims of disasters may have to wait for international relief actors to arrive.

After a country requests outside assistance, international resources are mobilized. Depending on the extent of damage and the number and capacity of domestic aid agencies, these external parties operate directly or through local partners. In almost all cases, however, local organizations have already completed most of the rescue operations and have begun to provide food, shelter, and social services. The resources of the international aid agencies augment local capacity and carry on over the ensuing months, shifting from the initial rescue phase to relief and rehabilitation.