



AmericasRelief Team on the News

Earthquake crisis in Haiti

The Miami Herald

DISASTERS

Posted on Saturday, 01.23.10

Bringing smart relief to Haiti



BY TEO BABUN

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During the 2004 hurricane season, the Caribbean region received massive relief efforts from all of Florida. Much of the aid however, once collected, could not be shipped to those countries and was left for days and weeks at collection centers throughout the state.

Unfortunately, the lack of logistical coordination kept many of the victims from receiving much needed relief supplies, such as water, food and medical supplies.

Haiti doesn't need the same disastrous results today.

Following a crisis communities throughout the United States, particularly those with major diaspora populations, organize quickly and begin collecting donated items. Churches, radio stations, firehouses and the like react to the crisis by collecting items to send to organizations in the country where the crisis has occurred. Additionally, small nonprofit organizations (NGOs) send goods for their missionary activities in the region.

While disaster-stricken countries such as Haiti appreciate the assistance, unfortunately, not all kinds of products and commodities are needed, or needed right away. A hasty response that is not based on familiarity with local conditions and meant to complement organized efforts only contributes to the chaos.

Such *ad hoc* donation drives yield goods that do not meet the immediate needs of those on the ground, are often culturally insensitive to the affected communities, compete for needed transportation space or go unclaimed.

Detrimental effects

The result is clogged ports, delivery delay, the need to simply discard the goods upon arrival in the country (this can be as high as 60 percent), not to mention duplication of the work of government-funding programs, which pre-position disaster relief in strategic locations throughout the region.

Perhaps least known is the detrimental effect such donations have on local economies, which may be limited from recovering as quickly because of vast amounts of products that are already available there being dumped in their communities.



Another myth is that things go back to normal within a few weeks of a disaster. The truth is that the effects of a disaster last a long time. Disaster-affected countries deplete many of their financial and material resources in the immediate post-impact phase.

The bulk of the need for external assistance after a few weeks following the crisis is in the restoration of normal primary healthcare services, water systems, housing and income-producing work. Social and mental health problems will

appear when the acute crisis has subsided and the victims feel (and often are) abandoned to their own means.

It is important for the donor community to learn that proper resumption of public health services, such as immunization and sanitation measures, control and disposal of waste, water quality and food safety all ensure the safety of the population and of relief workers.

Public-private collaboration

AmericasRelief Team (ART) is a Florida public-private sector collaboration of corporations, nonprofit organizations and the U.S. government created to help our Latin America and Caribbean friends in times of crisis and disasters. It reacts to an immediate crisis, provides ongoing logistics assistance and conducts plans for future events in the region, which will require effective coordination of humanitarian relief.

With the collaboration of the U.S. government we are working to help better organize the private-sector aid effort. The assistance is being coordinated into sectors such as: (1) water and sanitation; (2) health systems and nutrition; (3) food security; (4) shelter and settlements; (5) protection; and (6) education services.



This collective humanitarian support is sometimes wasted through lack of organized private-sector leadership. We are also working with substantial donors to help provide guidance on the deployment of private-sector goods.

What Haiti needs today is *smart* relief; a means by which to strategically and efficiently deliver goods that help victims as they arrive, and have a broader and more long-term impact on their recovery. The donor community must be aware that allocation of resources is field-driven by evidence of what is needed on-site.

The population in Haiti does not need used clothing, household items or prescription medicines.

The people there want to rebuild safer houses, have their ``normal" health problems attended to at a health center, put their children in school and get back to their lives.

Teo A. Babun is executive director of AmericasRelief Team.

CBS4 News This Morning with Cynthia Demos and Jim Berry

Jan 15, 2010 10:47 am US/Eastern

"Cash Is King" For Haiti Relief, More Help Needed

DORAL (CBS4) —



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Rescuers carry a 3-month-old baby found alive following a powerful earthquake that left much of the capital city in ruins Jan. 14, 2010, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

"Our volunteers from America's Relief Team answered more than 260 calls, and so far at least \$15,000 has been pledged to the Neighbor 4 Neighbors: Haiti Relief Fund," said Maristany. "We're looking forward to receiving more help from viewers in tomorrow night's phone bank."

The phone bank provides a reliable way for donors to give safely donate money. As [CBS4's Al Sunshine warned](#), there could unscrupulous people masquerading as relief agencies for Haiti in order to gain your trust and money for their gain.

Money is the preferred form of donation by many reputable agencies, including America's Relief team. This is because the transportation of food and supplies is extremely difficult to coordinate.

"The thing that is needed the most is cash," said Dr. Teo A Babun, Executive Director of America's Relief.

"Cash is king right now because the logistics is the Achilles heel of the whole process and if we don't have funding to ship and transport the aide to Haiti then you might as well not even collect."

Dr. Babun, who appeared on Friday's **CBS4 News This Morning with Cynthia Demos and Jim Berry**, explained how the relief effort is working so far.

"The only way to get aid into Haiti right now is through the Dominican Republic or through Cape Haitian which is a port on the north part, about 200 miles north of Port-au-Prince. Right now, the process it to collect, organize, and prepare so that when the commercial flights can get in, we can make an impact," said Dr. Babun.

The Red Cross estimates between 45,000 and 50,000 dead people on the island, and those who survived are in dire need of clean water, food and medical supplies. If you weren't able to get your call in Thursday's phone bank, you can call Friday starting at 5 p.m. But you can make a secure online donation using your credit card by [CLICKING HERE](#).