

World Disasters Report 1993

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is one part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which comprises National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the Federation), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The National Societies (151 at January 1993) exist in almost every country of the world. The Societies must fulfil stringent conditions to become recognised by ICRC and to gain membership of the Federation. They must respect the seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (see inside back cover) and be recognised by their governments as voluntary aid societies which act as auxiliaries to the public authorities.

National Societies provide a range of services, including emergency relief, health, services and social assistance to those most vulnerable and most in need. In war-time, they may act as auxiliaries to the army medical services, aid prisoners and refugees and provide a tracing service to help put people in touch with missing relatives.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is the permanent liaison body of the National Societies and acts as their representative internationally. The Federation organises and coordinates international disaster response in support of the actions of the affected National Societies. It encourages the creation of new National Societies and assists them in developing their structures and programmes. The Federation

secretariat is in Geneva and is staffed by more than 200 people of some 30 different nationalities.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is a private non-political independent institution. It acts as a neutral intermediary in humanitarian matters during international conflicts, civil wars and internal disturbances. It provides protection and assistance to both military and civilian victims.

ICRC's role during armed conflict is defined by the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. At all times ICRC promotes the development and worldwide dissemination of these treaties. ICRC has its headquarters in Geneva where it employs more than 600 staff supporting assistance operations around the world.

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) was established in 1973 at the University of Louvain's School of Public Health in Brussels with the cooperation of the government of Belgium.

In 1980, CRED became a World Health Organisation collaborating centre and has expanded its support of the WHO global programme for emergency preparedness and response, as well as increasing its international collaboration to promote the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. It also works closely with the United Nations

Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

CRED aims to: strengthen human and community researches by developing and implementing training programmes for health personnel at regional, national and international levels; research the human impact of disasters and relief as well as develop appropriate tools for health management in disasters, develop and run information systems and computer databases, provide documentation and information services

Training courses are given both at the centre, including the regular international course on health and disasters, and in other countries, and focus on preparedness and training for decision makers.

Specialised training and individual fellowships are arranged in Brussels. Both basic epidemiological research and field research are undertaken by CRED. Issues of the development effects of disasters, risk factors for morbidity and mortality related to disasters, and long-term policies for international relief are of special interest.

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The World Disasters Report

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Why a World Disasters Report?

Acknowledgements

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Finally our thanks and apologies to anybody who has been inadvertently omitted from this list.

Editorial group 1993:

Nick Cater, Jean-Pierre Revel, Deberati Sapir, Peter Walker

Why a World Disasters Report?

Preface

No more vital a challenge

Disaster response has been described as the last resort of the amateur, an unkind assessment but not without a grain of truth. Disaster generates an emotional response and, with each new disaster, new disaster organisations are born. And past lessons on disaster management have to be learnt anew.

The need to increase the professionalism of disaster response is evident. All the more so as in disaster terms the world gets worse, not better. The spread of conflicts, often based on ethnic tensions, leads to increasing flows of refugees and displaced persons. The growth of population and inequities in the distribution of resources increasingly force large numbers of people to live in conditions of extreme vulnerability, desperately prone to the effects of "natural" disasters. Disasters become more complex, frequently involving the interaction of a disaster event, politics and technology.

The last few years have also seen a growth in research in the area of disaster response. Too often, however, disaster researchers and disaster organisations have gone their separate ways. Closing this gap is of particular importance today when there is a growing unease with the politicization of humanitarian aid. As humanitarian practitioners, we have to defend the impartiality and humanity of our work against the short-term objectives of the political process. This will require a constant effort to professionalise our work.

This first edition of the annual World Disasters Report, produced by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies with the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, is a contribution to this effort of professionalisation. The report aims to provide facts and statistics, analysis and exploration of trends. It also aims to dispel myths about disasters, and to define and advocate good practice. In pursuing these objectives, we welcome any and all comments, criticisms and offers of collaboration.

The Federation is acutely aware that we live in a time of enormous change, when clear opportunities exist to make great strides in reducing vulnerability, raising preparedness and cutting the numbers of those killed and injured by disasters. With the end of the cold war and the sudden shift in global security, I believe there is no more vital a challenge than working alongside the billions of people in need to help them transform their lives.

George Weber
Acting Secretary General
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



Why a World Disasters Report?

How to use this report

The *World Disasters Report* is about people and disasters. It is about those vulnerable people who are most likely to be affected by disasters and the local institutions which provide the mainstay of disaster prevention, preparedness and relief.

It covers both "natural" and "man-made" disasters, recognising that any distinction between the two is artificial.

Disasters occur all over the world, but differ tremendously in type and effect from region to region, so Section Two, Part I, *Disasters Today*, provides an introduction to the main issues in disaster response today and the regional distribution of disasters.

The nature of disasters is changing over time. Some types become more common, others less common. New types of disaster evolve, perhaps associated with technological developments. Section Two, Part II, *Disaster Trends*, analyses the trends in the changing face of disasters.

In Section Two, Part III, *Disaster Causes and Effects*, the causes of today's disasters are analysed. The focus is less on the occurrence of natural hazards, such as hurricanes, than on why certain groups of people are more vulnerable than others to these events.

Spread through Section Two are shorter *Focus* pieces examining the common questions asked, misconceptions held and important issues often raised about disasters.

The events, victims, impact and effects of eight of today's main disaster types are examined in Section Three, *Dynamics of Disasters*, which also includes *Focus* pieces

illustrating either how recent disasters have been tackled, including the role of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and individual National Societies around the world, or the deeper issues behind the disaster.

Section Four, Part I, *Disaster Definitions*, is the text of a set of disaster definitions developed to facilitate analysis and research into disasters; Section Four, Part II, *Disaster Statistics*, provides one of the most comprehensive compilations of world-wide disaster statistics available today; and Section Four, Part III, *Who's Who in Disasters*, lists a range of organisations with a variety of roles in disasters, from research to relief.

The *World Disasters Report* is designed to be dipped into. Individual Sections, Parts and *Focus* pieces can be read on a stand-alone basis and tables and graphs used individually.

We hope it will prove relevant and useful in all parts of the world, at every level of national and local government, in international, national and community organisations, academic institutions and commercial companies, whether as information source, training or advocacy tool, reference work or educational materials.

We would encourage users to photocopy or use the text freely (it is written to be used, not sit on a shelf) though an acknowledgement and a copy of the article or document would be appreciated (contact details are on page 4).

The *World Disasters Report* is informed throughout by the unique perspective and experience of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, an

organisation whose actions and policies remain firmly fixed on disasters

Together, the three elements of the International Red Cross Movement — the Federation, the 151 National Societies around the world, and the International Committee of the Red Cross — at local, national, regional and global level, create the largest non-governmental organisation in the world, which has the longest and most extensive experience in helping countries and local communities prepare for, cope with and combat disasters.

Three messages

There are three major messages of the *World Disasters Report*:

First, clear lessons from disasters are not being fully learned by the world community, in particular the need to invest in low-cost measures of disaster preparedness which reduce the vulnerability of people in disaster-affected countries, and not just in high-cost disaster relief operations.

Second, vulnerability and a lack of human rights are two parts of the same crisis. This is not merely a negative message, that denial of human rights creates or exacerbates vulnerability, but a supremely positive one, that implementing human rights fosters and enhances

individual, community and national capacities against disasters.

Third, a simple one of economics: the "humanitarian gap" between the cost of disasters — preparedness, relief assistance, recovery, effects on national economies — and the resources made available to meet them, is widening fast. While governments find it harder, financially and politically, to support international development assistance and national welfare, and expect humanitarian organisations to meet the unfulfilled needs, they are not providing the funds to fill the humanitarian gap.

Overall, the international community must realise the scale of the humanitarian gap, and also realise that disaster preparedness and prevention measures are by far the most cost-effective ways of filling that gap.



Disasters: are they natural or man-made?

Old attitudes to disasters can still be seen in the wording of some insurance policies which use the phrase "acts of God and other natural calamities". Until the 1970s, disasters were divided into three categories: natural, covering floods, famine, earthquakes and similar events, man-made, referring to such events as industrial accidents; and war. This simplistic analysis is no longer adequate.

Increasingly, agencies which respond to disasters point out that, although torrential rain, for example, may be the proximate cause of flooding and resultant

deaths, it caused flooding only because the upland catchments had been denuded of trees by loggers, and the flood caused so many deaths only because people living in the flood plain (who know the dangers but have no choice because of their poverty) did not receive a warning of the approaching waters and, anyway, did not have the means to evacuate the area quickly.

Man's actions, therefore, can both accentuate the effects of extreme natural events, such as heavy rainfall or drought, and render already vulnerable people even more

vulnerable to those effects.

The *World Disasters Report* uses the accepted classification of natural and man-made for disasters, but it does so by attaching these labels to the trigger events, not to the process. From the point of view of the process, all disasters are man-made without people affected, there can be no disaster.

This is also why the *World Disasters Report* refers to earthquake disasters, flood disasters and other event disasters: the logic is that an earthquake or a flood is not necessarily a disaster, unless and until it affects people