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WHO Emergency Preparedness and Planning

The general public tends to perceive emergency management in terms of the delivery of relief supplies and medical care. Such notions are reinforced by widespread media coverage of airlifts of essential drugs and convoys of food that are certainly vital to the success of relief operations. Gradually, however, people are learning that disaster management incorporates a whole cycle of activities that precede and follow crisis situations.

In fact, an essential part of that management takes place long before disasters actually occur. At a fraction of the cost of expensive relief operations, disaster-vulnerable countries can do a great deal to safeguard their health infrastructure and to minimize the death and destruction that stem from disasters. As the leading UN agency for health issues, WHO puts strong emphasis on emergency preparedness activities for the health sector.

Such activities save lives and money and are more cost-effective to operate than response programmes aimed at picking up the pieces after the event. Moreover, they encourage national self-reliance in handling emergencies by making communities more effective in responding to disasters the moment they occur, better able to deploy locally available resources and more competent to manage international relief assistance.

Counter-disaster planning

As part of emergency preparedness planning, WHO helps countries to undertake vulnerability analysis and mapping – that is, to

