



Working with humanitarian partners to respond to disaster

Three steps for business to take

In November 2019, Business in the Community (BITC) brought together business leaders to share their approaches to disaster resilience and relief. They discussed the advantages of working with humanitarian partners, which helps make sure contributions are appropriate, reaches the right people, and are coordinated with the wider disaster relief effort.

There are different ways to work with humanitarian partners, but it is important to note that these partnerships take time, effort and investment and should therefore be agreed upon in advance, before disaster strikes. Carol Solórzano Canales, Communications and Project Manager from [Latin American non-government organisation TECHO](#), said that in TECHO's work to build resilience in communities "...the best partnerships are the long-term ones."

Organisations based in the UK should consider joining the Local Resilience Support Programme, which is part of the [Business Emergency Resilience Group](#) at BITC. The programme supports communities in times of emergency, with participating businesses nominating colleagues to join the volunteer programme work with local resilience groups.

1. Agree the scope of your involvement

International disaster relief can be an emotional issue for staff and customers. Therefore, having clear criteria in advance about which disasters your company will or will not get involved in can help not only to make rapid decisions, but also to communicate and explain these decisions at difficult times. Criteria to consider include geographic scope and types of disasters, such as man-made (conflict, data etc) or the different kinds of natural disasters, as well as things such as business and supply chain presence, staff and customer impact or concern, media interest and humanitarian and environmental impact. Humanitarian partners will know how best your organisation can help in the response to a disaster if the scope is set early.

Another way to make quick decisions is to be financially prepared for disaster response. This includes having budgets allocated, deciding if and how to fundraise, whether employee contributions will be matched and who to donate to. Claire Hitchcock, Director, Community Partnerships and Head of Save the Children Partnership, Global Health Programmes, GSK, spoke about how GSK seed fund their humanitarian partner, Save the Children, which gives them the ability to make quick financial decisions and have resources ready to go in 72 hours.





It is important to define the endpoint for your organisation's involvement, as there may still be years of work to help communities fully recover and build resilience to future disasters. This could be in the form of a time limit or reaching a target, such as completing a set of objectives or raising a certain amount of funds. You can also limit the extent of your involvement by linking to a partner and ending your involvement in the disaster when they do.

2. Decide what your business can contribute

Your business can contribute to international disaster relief in many ways, including cash donations, in-kind gifts or product and service donations, low-level and highly skilled employee volunteering, skills and expertise sharing and making assets and core business capabilities available. The planning and preparation must be done in advance of a disaster, by agreeing in advance what support will be provided and under what circumstances. When disaster strikes, a humanitarian partner that works on the ground can help bring to light the assistance that is needed.

Think about your business and what unique and strategic contributions there could be. Linking your contribution to your core business capabilities is likely to make an intervention more strategic, more sustainable and will leverage greater benefits than a purely philanthropic approach.

For example, the UPS Foundation creates programmes that respond to global problems using UPS' expertise in logistics and transport. This is done by utilising drones to provide a bird's eye view of disaster struck areas and deliver vital medication to remote areas. Jennifer Herkt, Human Resources and Labour Relations Director for UK, UPS, said: "You don't see the roads leading into villages and communities that have been washed out or the airport and landing strips that have been devastated," she said. "The last mile to get to people in desperate circumstances is often the most difficult and that's where logistics expertise and drones have become critical."

3. Engage stakeholders

Engaging with stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers, clients and customers, can ensure that the response strategy that has been created is implemented and effective. BITC's 2016 research² showed that 75 per cent of companies reported employees were one of the most important triggers for a companies' decision to mobilise on international disaster relief. Some ways that employees can be engaged are through fundraising or volunteering.

It is also important to engage external stakeholders to have a greater impact, for example, sharing your disaster relief plans with customers can help to raise awareness and customer donation matching can raise a greater amount of funds. Involving business partners, supply chain and distributors in disaster relief, providing they have not been impacted by the disaster themselves,





can increase the effort. However, collaborating with these partners to prepare for disasters and develop a disaster preparedness plan, is just as important as supporting them to respond.

Securing buy-in from senior leaders can also help to drive engagement, both internally and externally. One way to do this is through the lens of the Global Goals, using BITC's toolkit, [Own the Conversation – Drive the Change](#), for advice on how to structure some of these conversations.

The guidance in this fact sheet has been adapted from "Addressing International Disaster Relief and Resilience: Guidance for Business", BITC, 2016. For more information about any of the topics mentioned, or for support on creating your own Disaster Management Plan or Policy, contact globalgoals@bitc.org.uk.

References:

¹ Business' Unique Contribution III, BITC, 2018

² Business's Unique Contribution II, BITC, 2016

These documents are available to view on request.

