

Highlighting forgotten disasters



Photo: © Reuters/Finbar O'Reilly, courtesy www.aletret.org

Emergency aid hit a record-breaking £8.9 billion in 2005, yet millions still missed out on life-saving support because funds were directed at high-profile disasters.

This is the stark conclusion of this year's World Disasters Report commissioned by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, of which the British Red Cross is a member.

The independently written report shows that governments donated more than £6.3 billion in bilateral humanitarian aid in 2005 – the highest figure since records began in 1970. Individuals also contributed more than £2.9 billion toward the 2004 tsunami appeal. Total aid for the tsunami from individuals and governments totalled more than £7.4 billion.

But, according to the report, aid coverage is inequitable. The tsunami was the best-funded disaster, with at least £653 donated per beneficiary in humanitarian aid – 50 times more than for the worst-funded crises. Emergency appeals for Chad, Guyana, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi and Niger raised on average less than £14 per person. Media coverage is also uneven. Why did Hurricane

Katrina, which killed about 1,300 people, generate 40 times more media coverage than Hurricane Stan, which killed 1,600 people in Guatemala shortly afterwards?

The World Disasters Report asks: *why is humanitarian aid unfairly distributed?; which communities are neglected by the media, aid organisations, governments and donors?; and what is the human impact of this neglect and what can be done about it?*

Matthias Schmale, international director at the British Red Cross, said such huge disparities are unacceptable. "The generous response in 2005 shows people and governments are committed to helping those in need. We have a role to play, alongside the media, donors and governments, to ensure that aid reaches those who need it the most, equitably, efficiently and in a timely manner."

To request a PDF copy of the report, please email publicaffairs@redcross.org.uk

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World AIDS Day

On World AIDS Day on 1 December, the British Red Cross highlighted the plight of the nearly 40 million people who are living with HIV worldwide.

As a humanitarian organisation, the Red Cross is working to tackle the pandemic because HIV is the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world.

“In Lesotho, in southern Africa, two in five young women are living with HIV”

In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV affects more women than men and as a result many of the people the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement helps are female. This fact is dramatically illustrated in Lesotho, in southern Africa, where two in five young women have the virus.

The Lesotho Red Cross, which receives support from the British Red Cross, runs the largest home-based care programme in the country. This operates through a network of trained care facilitators who provide long-term support for people with HIV in their homes.

Mother-of-three Matlape Sethathi has been helped by the Red Cross after she tested positive for HIV. The 44-year-old had been feeling unwell but, until she met Lesotho Red Cross volunteer Bless Mahlampo,

she did not know how to find out about her symptoms or get treatment.

Bless arranged for Matlape to get tested and since then has been providing her with basic medical supplies to ease her symptoms. Matlape has also joined a support group for people on the home-based care programme.

As well as a place to discuss their problems, the support group gives people the opportunity to participate in livelihood projects. For example, basket making, poultry rearing, horticulture, sewing and candle-making.

The British Red Cross also helps young carers in Lesotho, often young girls, to carry on at school by funding books, shoes and school uniforms. Another British Red Cross initiative is providing cash for people to travel to clinics, as this was frequently a barrier to people getting healthcare.

The programme is one of a number of HIV projects supported by the British Red Cross across the world. Working with sister Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the worst-affected countries, the organisation focuses on prevention, home-based care and support, and reducing stigma and discrimination.



Photo: © BRC

2006: A note from the chief executive

Photo: © BRC



This year has vividly illustrated the power of the voluntary spirit that is at the heart of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's work. In the face of overwhelming odds, volunteers in local communities ran a daily gauntlet of mortar attacks to rescue the wounded

in Lebanon and Israel this summer; others are tirelessly working to provide suitable contingency shelter for the survivors of the Pakistan earthquake this winter.

Across the world, the Movement's volunteers not only respond to those crises that grab the headlines, but also help those in need after the attention has moved on. In September, I visited Sierra Leone, a country slowly recovering from a ten-year civil war that saw tens of thousands of people die.

I was amazed by the dedication and resilience of those running child advocacy rehabilitation projects. The children played an active part in the war, either as victims or child soldiers. Many were raped and abused, or witnessed their families slaughtered.

Red Cross volunteers and staff provide support for these children, basic education for those whose remaining relatives cannot afford to send them to school, and a range of skills training, including carpentry, horticulture and tailoring, to help them reintegrate into the community from which they have become alienated.

Humanitarian action isn't always about massive aid airlifts and high-profile fundraising appeals. Mostly it is about the extraordinary, quiet acts of kindness performed by ordinary people, every day, for their neighbours in need.

May I wish you and all those in your communities a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Nicholas Young

News in brief

Prince visits Pakistan

Following the first anniversary of the Pakistan earthquake, HRH The Prince of Wales visited a mountain village where the British Red Cross has helped thousands of earthquake survivors.

Prince Charles, who is president of the British Red Cross, visited the remote village of Pattika to learn how local villagers are rebuilding their lives after the quake that killed some 73,338 people and left more than 3.5 million people homeless.

Accompanied by his wife The Duchess of Cornwall, The Prince visited patients and staff at a health clinic that is being supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

They also learned about vital recovery work such as a crop regeneration project funded by the British Red Cross.



Photo: © John Tullock/IFRC

Clinton receives humanity award

The British Red Cross presented former US president Bill Clinton with a Humanity Fellowship Award at a prestigious event in London in September.

The Humanity Fellowship Award honours people who reflect the values of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and have a long association with, and a dedication to, humanitarian work. The only previous recipient has been Nelson Mandela.

Sir Nicholas Young, chief executive, said: "President Clinton was a clear choice for us to receive this award. He has demonstrated a long-term commitment to humanitarian work through his foundation, tackling issues such as the economic empowerment of the poor, religious intolerance and the education and health of young people."

He also cited President Clinton's role as the UN's special envoy for tsunami relief.

Tsunami recovery in troubled Sri Lanka



Photo: © Jerry Galea/International Federation

As the second anniversary of the 2004 tsunami approaches, the British Red Cross is making substantial progress in helping survivors rebuild their lives across Indonesia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

In addition, the British Red Cross is helping thousands of people affected by the recent upsurge of violence in Sri Lanka, while continuing vital tsunami recovery work.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been in Sri Lanka since 1989, acting as a neutral intermediary in the conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

After a number of years of relative peace, the conflict re-ignited during the summer. Clashes near Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the east and fighting on the Jaffna peninsula have claimed many lives and displaced tens of thousands of people from their homes.

In response, the ICRC has been providing additional relief items and staff including personnel from the British Red Cross.

British Red Cross logistician Janardanan Kannanthodath has been delivering relief goods to families living in makeshift camps north of Batticaloa.

He described how the fighting has created a sense of despair among many people who are still grieving following the tsunami.

He said: "I asked a local fisherman who was just staring out to sea, 'why are you not fishing?'. He said, 'I lost my whole family in the tsunami, who would I be fishing for? All my family are in the sea'. He was completely depressed and, due to the conflict, is now living in a camp."

The tsunami recovery programme includes helping vulnerable people in Sri Lanka restore their livelihoods by providing fishing boats and cash grants for people to set up small businesses and agricultural activities.

Young humanitarians rewarded

Young humanitarians from across the UK were justly recognised at the British Red Cross' second annual Humanitarian Citizen Awards.

The awards recognise young people who have made a positive difference to the lives of others in their community. The winners attended a ceremony in London on 4 November, where former Eastenders actor Chris Parker also turned up to add a little celebrity glamour.

Charles Atkey (23), from Shrewsbury, won the individual prize. Following a gap year working with Malaysian orphans, Charles has been developing a Red Cross training programme that will help young people discuss refugee and asylum issues in schools to improve their understanding.

The group award was won by CHUMS (Canterbury Helping Unaccompanied Minors Scheme), a long-running



Photo: © Jonathan Banks

scheme that helps young and unaccompanied asylum seekers adjust to life in the UK.

Runners-up included Annie Wilson (12) from Manchester, who used her first aid skills to help a road traffic accident victim. The Dynamic Approach to Awareness (DATA) group in Exeter, which organises HIV awareness events for young people, was also recognised.

Frankie Hitie, award coordinator, said: "These awards recognise the positive impact young people have made, both with individuals and the wider community. It is a chance to say thank you and well done for all their hard work."