



Emergencies

Emergencies are awful at the best of times. When you live in one of the world's poorest communities, they can be even more devastating. Let's explore the issue.

Facts

- Between 2000 and 2012 3 billion people have been affected by natural disasters globally ([UNISDR 2012](#)).
- In the same period, 1.2 million people have been killed by natural disasters globally ([UNISDR 2012](#)).
- On average 270 million people per year have lost their homes and livelihoods due to natural disasters over the last decade. ([World Disasters Report 2009](#)).
- In 2011, 42.5 million people were forcibly displaced by conflict or persecution, 80% of these people are in developing countries. ([UNHCR 2011](#)).

What is the issue?

Emergencies occur through events like natural disasters, environmental disasters, political unrest and conflict. When emergencies strike it has a devastating impact on the poorest communities:

- They often live in poor housing, leaving them vulnerable to poor weather.
- They may be located in dangerous places such as on steep hills, particularly prone to landslides during earthquakes.
- They have very little to fall back on. If they lose their crops, they often can't grow more due to poor conditions and they may not be able to buy food. Their families are in grave danger of starvation.
- Communities living in poverty often live in remote locations. There is little infrastructure in place to allow them to get the help they need quickly.
- During conflicts, communities often can't do anything to prevent themselves being caught up in the crossfire. They will often encounter terrible violence, abuse and destruction of their land and property.

Why are emergencies such an issue?

- Climate change is contributing to a greater amount of natural disasters. Sadly, some of the world's poorest communities are becoming used to adapting to the harsh effects of adverse weather.
- Many developing countries face political uncertainty and corruption, this often leaves vulnerable communities caught up in violent conflict.
- Communities need two types of support following a natural disaster:
 - Immediate support – communities need access to clean water, food, shelter and medicines to help deal with the initial effects of an emergency situation.
 - Long term support – communities may have been completely destroyed by an emergency. There may be a need for schools, new homes and medical centres. In addition, businesses and farms may have been destroyed, so people may need to learn new skills. It can be a very long road back from a disaster for people living in poverty.

How can I help?

- Talk about the issues – discuss the issue of emergencies with your friends and family.
- Use social media – share this factsheet or other resources with your social media networks.
- Compare the impacts of the 2004 Asian Tsunami with Hurricane Sandy.
- Discuss the statement – *“it is more important to raise money to reduce poverty around the world, than it is to aid disaster relief”*.
- If a natural disaster hit your community what sort of help do you think you would need – in the first day, first week, first month and in the long term?

Useful links

- [World Disasters Report](#)
- [The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction](#)
- [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#)