

# Post-Crisis Community Recovery and Renewal: Accountability Invisibility

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Natural disasters are typically times of great chaos and uncertainty. Systems and infrastructure often fail under stress. Coordination, always a challenge, can sometimes collapse. In these times, effective coordination and response are particularly difficult to tease out. Who is in charge? Who is answerable to whom? Will people and communities be let down or will they be effectively and equitably served as massive relief efforts unfold? And as individuals' lives move forward, is there a defined, accountable party or parties that meet their rebuilding needs or are they faced with a bureaucratic, exasperating game of "pass the buck?"

Following a natural disaster, community-based organizations (CBOs) play a distinct and valuable role in a community's recovery and renewal. The CBO is often the first responder to offer relief to its community in a disaster, but moreover, it is the lasting responder as community members move back into routines after emergency, relief and even rebuilding efforts have ended. In recognition of this critical role of re-knitting the fabric of community life, The Global Fund for Children established dedicated funding for community-based organizations in the recovery and renewal process following disaster and crisis. Relatively new to funding relief and development work, The Global Fund for Children strategically established its grant criteria and has thus far committed over \$600,000 to 22 community-based organizations affected by and supporting those affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2005 Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf Coast and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake.

The learning from these organizations is not bounded by geography, nor type of disaster. In response, The Global Fund for Children convened twenty-two of its grantee partners from India, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the U.S. Gulf Coast in May 2007, in Mahabalipuram, India for a post-disaster recovery and renewal knowledge exchange workshop. While nearly two years had elapsed since the most recent tragedy (the Pakistan earthquake in October 2005), emotions ran high, as participants found both wonder and solace in common experiences. Today, with the evocative third anniversary of the tsunami upon us, the fading memory of the Pakistan earthquake, and the failures of emergency response in the Gulf Coast still readily apparent, we can examine with growing perspective the accountability channels, or lack thereof, of each episode.

The four-day workshop focused on CBO experience and practice in implementing effective post-disaster programming. It culminated in the development of the participant-written Community-Based Organization Post-Disaster Manifesto that powerfully

claims the unique role and value of CBOs in post-disaster scenarios, and instructs the funding and NGO community on better practices for community recovery.

In some ways, the manifesto simply reiterated long-held tenets and principles elaborated on in other emergency and relief documents such as the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, and the Council on Foundation's Disaster Grantmaking: A Practical Guide for Foundations and Corporations. The manifesto repeated the appeal for collaborative efforts and coordination between civil society and government at both central and local levels. It also underscored the importance of meeting the needs of women, children, and vulnerable populations as a central tenet of relief, rebuilding, and recovery efforts, and attested to the importance of respect for and adaptation to local culture and context of the affected community.

At first blush, the workshop and the manifesto may seem to have merely re-created a process typical of what is undertaken by the UN, multinationals and civil society at a global level and with similar outcomes. Yet the workshop and the document have a more subtle and implicit power. It is generated from the voice and immediate witness of the community-based organizations themselves. Further, the manifesto brings attention to the secondary, unintended effects of post-disaster programming and funding (such as mission diversion and funding skews). This highlights the central importance of sustainable and integrated planning and funding for effective transitions from relief to recovery and, ultimately, to renewal of communities following disaster.

The 22 CBOs that participated in the workshop were not timid in demanding accountability of both governments and funders in supporting them in times of disaster. They declared that the implementers themselves are best qualified to make critical decisions on the use of funds. And they underscored the importance of fluid and flexible funding to adapt to changing needs. These tenets require trust and transparency on the part of funders and grantee partners.

Perhaps, most importantly, the lessons from the workshop and the manifesto remind us that particularly in times of disaster and distress, accountability is in itself a goal that must be integrated in disaster prevention and preparedness. It is the mutually accountable relationships and partnerships established long before the chaos ensues that will carry those involved through relief and rebuilding. ●●○

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