

World Vision



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Preparedness **saves lives**



“Natural disasters not only continue to kill, but they ruin livelihoods and keep survivors in poverty.”

The world of emergency relief has been evolving over the years, reflects World Vision Australia’s Head of Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs, Daryl Crowden.

I have worked in humanitarian responses for more than 15 years. During that time, I’ve witnessed some incredible achievements, including the global success in reducing death tolls from natural disasters due to strong preparedness.

We recently witnessed the widespread destruction of Cyclone Fani. Indian authorities and response teams have been credited with saving countless lives through swift evacuations of high-risk areas. Locally-led humanitarian relief organisations were also quick to respond to affected populations.

Life-saving preparedness is increasingly important as colleagues in dozens of countries around the world report more frequent and intense weather events, which scientists predict will worsen with climate change.

In this edition of Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs News, we look at how changing weather patterns are affecting the humanitarian world (see pages 4-5 for details).

I also reflect on the small but important ways we are restoring dignity for Rohingya refugees, as we mark the two-year anniversary of the beginning of the mass exodus from Myanmar (page 7). We also highlight some innovative work that could reshape the future for farmers in South Sudan (page 9).

Emergency response is truly life-saving. It’s heart-warming when donors, including the public, private businesses, churches and the Australian Government, decide to rally support for the world’s most vulnerable people – many of whom live in the world’s most disaster-prone areas.

Regards,

Daryl Crowden
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In focus: Humanitarian emergencies and changing climates



Humanitarian workers are at the front line of climate change, writes World Vision Australia's Asia Portfolio Manager, Admir Bajrami.

I nervously watched weather forecasts as Cyclone Fani intensified over the Bay of Bengal, before making landfall in eastern India earlier this year.

The extremely severe cyclonic storm was the strongest summer cyclone to hit Odisha state in 43 years. It unleashed winds of 240 kilometres per hour, damaging more than half a million homes and killing dozens of people.

Any loss of life is tragic. However, with more than 16 million people affected, including an estimated 5.6 million children, it surprised many that the death toll wasn't higher.

Indian authorities carried out swift evacuations of high-risk communities in the path of the category five storm. There's no doubt this saved countless lives.

By comparison, 20 years ago a "super cyclone" hit Odisha and caused the deaths of 15,000 people.

Neighbouring Bangladesh's cyclone-related mortality has declined more than 100-fold compared with severe storms like Cyclone Bhola in 1970, which killed half a million people.

A combination of factors is responsible for this decline, including early warning systems, evacuation plans, increased awareness and better communication.

“Disaster preparedness always saves lives.”

Such compelling statistics paint a positive picture of increased disaster preparedness across Asia. This is due to years of support for disaster risk reduction programs from various governments and non-government organisations, of which we should be proud.

But we also can't ignore worrying global predictions.

Earlier this year, Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique's coastal city, Beira. Then Cyclone Kenneth battered the country's north. Two cyclones in six weeks – both considered among the worst in the country's history – was unprecedented.

And it's not just the direct impact of a cyclone that kills. In the aftermath communities face outbreaks of deadly diseases, like cholera and malaria, and struggle to rebuild their livelihoods.

World Vision provides food, sanitation, shelter and psychosocial support for families affected by natural disasters. In other contexts, we focus on bridging gaps in community awareness for disaster preparedness plans.

Some interventions extend to innovative approaches. In Nepal, we have worked with partner organisation Field Ready to provide devices that detect increased water levels. These act as a flood early warning system by alerting national authorities.

Research from the Overseas Development Institute indicates that over a 10-year period, 58 percent of deaths from natural hazard-related disasters occurred in the 30 most fragile countries. This means the majority of people vulnerable to natural hazards live in contexts affected by conflict and fragility, with limited exposure to disaster risk reduction strategies to help them prepare. Scientists forecast the intensity and frequency of severe weather events will increase as climate change takes hold. This will have serious implications for the world's most vulnerable people, including those living in volatile zones, and humanitarian agencies, who will be on the front line responding to these crises.



A changing world: The rise of cash programming in emergencies



World Vision Australia's Cash Programming Advisor, Junus David, explains why donors should consider supporting "the cash trend" in emergencies.

More disasters are striking built-up areas, where people are already accessing the cash economy. This is a crucial consideration for relief agencies responding to emergencies.

Humanitarian assistance is evolving due to global socio-political and economic changes. It used to be standard practice to purchase food in bulk from international markets and transport it across the ocean. But we can dramatically reduce time and food aid costs when we partner with local traders in affected communities.

World Vision has partnered with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in cash voucher transfer programming for more than 10 years.

Under this model, beneficiaries receive cash or a voucher to buy food of their choice from selected shops.

They don't need to queue in public each month to collect food from agencies. Families can buy food, medicine or other supplies to get back on their feet after a disaster.

Beneficiaries appreciate this approach, especially in places where women feel unsafe standing in public for hours or cultural norms lead to people feeling ashamed about taking "handouts".

Research shows when there's a functioning market, cash distributions can be a more cost-effective way to support people.

Even the Australian Government uses this approach at home. Households affected by this year's Gippsland bushfires received payments to meet immediate needs like food, shelter and clothing.

I'm often asked, "What if people don't spend money wisely?" I know from experience in several emergency responses that people's spending behaviours are directly related to their survival.

"This is a huge paradigm shift for agencies – and the donors behind them – who are used to the idea of in-kind donation as the way to assist disaster-affected people."

Cash injections also help local businesses bounce back after a disaster, or even create jobs.

In Sudan in 2009, Action Against Hunger introduced a voucher program to help beneficiaries cover the costs of grinding the cereal they received from WFP at the local mill. Within three years, the number of milling companies servicing the beneficiaries grew from one to six.

Traditional food distributions will always be needed in contexts where there is no functioning economy. But there are many cases where cash should be seriously considered, given it provides choice and dignity to those in need and is effective in helping local economies bounce back.

From the field: Restoring dignity for the Rohingya



We all want, if not demand, the freedom to choose what we do with our money. Why should it be any different for displaced people? World Vision Australia's Head of Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs, Daryl Crowden, discusses why choice is so important.

When people are displaced, the choices that we often take for granted are taken from them. Like being able to walk into a supermarket and buy what you want, when you want.

Being able to make this simple choice may not sound like much to us, but it's a step toward restoring dignity for refugees. The pain of displacement should never be compounded by the removal of choice.

I recently returned from the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, where close to one million people are surviving on support from the Bangladesh Government and the international community.

World Vision, in partnership with WFP, is working to ensure refugees have a basic food allowance and the dignity of choice.

In a large concrete building divided into four rooms, the Balukhali "mega store" is stocked with fresh and dry rations from three local suppliers. Through open tenders, WFP invites local traders to enter into contracts to supply fresh vegetables, fruit and rice.

People arrive at the store with their e-cards, which are preloaded with a monthly allocation determined by the size of their family. They have the freedom to choose what products

they want to buy across three shops. A list on display encourages them to buy nutritious essentials first – but ultimately, it's their decision.

It's easier to operate a traditional food distribution where people line up to receive a basket of basic, nutritious food supplies. Of course, there will always be a place for this in emergencies. However, there are more dignified ways to distribute food in displacement camps where people have been living for extended periods.

Achieving life with dignity for people displaced may sound like a pipe dream, but I've seen firsthand that it's achievable.

It's often the most difficult way – but it's always the right way.

"It's not life transforming, it's not rocket science, and it's not unique to World Vision, but I have rarely seen it working as well as it is here in Bangladesh."



To find out more about World Vision's response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis, visit worldvision.com.au/rohingya

Afghanistan facing floods and drought at the same time

Afghanistan has experienced decades of conflict, but also ranks fourth globally in terms of disaster risk. World Vision Australia’s program manager for the Middle East, Vanessa Forrest, highlights this precarious situation.

In the last year, a chaotic and unpredictable security situation, combined with severe drought, caused the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan to nearly double to 6.3 million.

Western regions like Badghis and Herat were struggling to overcome prolonged drought as a result of the lowest snowfall and rain in more than 17 years. Drought had caused widespread food insecurity and displaced hundreds of thousands of people in two years. It damaged and destroyed 27,300 homes, killed 95 people and injured nearly 10,800.

The western region of the country, where World Vision Afghanistan operates, was hard hit. It’s estimated that 124,500 people, including nearly 50,000 children, were affected in Badghis Province alone.

“Rain was desperately needed, but throughout March it came in extreme levels, causing flash flooding.”



The impact of flash flooding on vulnerable drought-affected communities has been devastating for wheat farmers like Muhammad Ismael (pictured). Floods destroyed all the fields he had sowed this year.

“Water came and ruined all my efforts. I have nothing now but land with no crop. How I should fill the bellies of my eight children?” he asks.

World Vision has provided immediate food assistance, water treatment, basic survival items and essential medicine to affected households in Badghis and Herat Provinces.

We are working with affected communities on early recovery interventions to enhance resilience to shocks, which is particularly important as the country experiences changes.

Spring rainfall has decreased across most of the country’s north and centre – as well as in pockets along the western border with Iran. In two western provinces where World Vision operates, a WFP report shows

average spring rainfall decreased by 10-20 percent from 1980 to 2010.

With the three-fold impact of conflict, drought and flooding, more than 3.5 million people are internally displaced within Afghanistan. As we head into what is forecast to be a hot, dry summer, food security and access to clean water remain key concerns for families.



How basic crop trials can revolutionise food systems in fragile states



Basic food research can help feed a nation, writes World Vision Australia’s Food Security Program Advisor, Brian Hilton.

It’s little surprise that crop research activities have been almost non-existent in South Sudan over the past 30 years. The country has faced ongoing violence, which is the main driver of food insecurity.

Nearly seven million people – 60 percent of South Sudan’s population – are experiencing acute food insecurity or worse, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (also known as IPC scale).

Low crop production, due to armed groups destroying farms and forcing

growers to flee for their lives before harvest, has been compounded by below-average rainfall.

As soon as peace is re-established and farmers start to grow their own food again, it makes sense to prioritise crop research, starting with adaptive trials. These are cheap trials that involve testing the most drought-resistant regional varieties identified by international research centres.

The rewards for vulnerable farmers and their communities are great. World Vision starts research with staple foods likely to produce a healthy return on investment.

In South Sudan sorghum is the most important crop, followed by peanuts, sesame and pearl millet. World Vision has launched trials in South Sudan,



Violence displaced Theresa from her home. She has struggled to grow sorghum to feed her family. New varieties are expected to arrive soon and boost her harvest.

thanks to support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program. We’ve introduced new varieties of sorghum to a group of farmers, and we help them identify which seeds grow successfully in the conditions.

We expect one new sorghum variety resistant to local pests and diseases could yield 20 percent more than existing varieties in South Sudan. That could translate into tens of millions of kilograms of extra food for the country!

Development of this so-called “seed system” is crucial to ensure sufficient production of crops and pastures.

We can’t change the horrific circumstances, including the violence, that people in South Sudan endure. Yet I’m proud even the most basic research is helping build stronger, more resilient farming communities.

“As a consequence, crop varieties in South Sudan are very old and generally have little to no resistance to recently introduced pests and diseases, like anthracnose and rust.”



World Vision Australia wishes to acknowledge that the project’s achievements would not have been possible without the generous support of Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Snapshot: Five crises that worsened in the past six months

Here are just some of the humanitarian crises that have escalated over the past six months.

World Vision is committed to working in parts of the world where the most vulnerable children and families are living, which means going into zones that are tarnished by insecurity, conflict and acute needs. Due to the unpredictable nature of these complex humanitarian emergencies, the situation in such zones can change at any time, becoming more dangerous, hostile and severe for civilians and non-government organisations. Humanitarian needs remain high in many countries across the world. However, there are five fragile countries in particular where World Vision works, where we have noticed a spike in needs in recent months. Consider supporting World Vision's work to give hope to children in one of these countries, where humanitarian assistance is life-saving.

Ebola spreads in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

As of August 2019, more than 1,700 people have died from Ebola in Eastern DRC. Ongoing violence, including attacks on health centres, has made the effort to contain the deadly virus extremely difficult. Cases have been reported in 'the city of Goma' and neighbouring Uganda. Aid agencies continue to appeal for donations as they face urgent funding gaps.



World Vision has reached more than 400,000 people through community prevention and sanitation programs, including hygiene kits and vaccines for at-risk children.

Fighting escalates in northwestern Syria

Fresh violence in Syria's northern province, Idlib, has forced 600,000 people to flee. More than 11.5 million people need humanitarian assistance in 2019, both within Syria and across borders. About one in seven of those people are in hard-to-reach areas. Syria's civil war has now lasted longer than World War Two.



World Vision is working with partners to respond to needs in four countries, including refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. Programs include education, health, hygiene and shelter.

Future increasingly uncertain for Rohingya refugees

August marks two years since more than 700,000 refugees fled violence in Myanmar and arrived in Bangladesh. Refugees continue to live in crowded camp conditions near the border in Cox's Bazar, where children face barriers to accessing education.

With political discussions around repatriation or relocation to Bhashan Char Island, the refugees' future is increasingly uncertain.



World Vision has reached 265,000 refugees in Cox's Bazar through various programs, including water, sanitation, shelter distribution, child-friendly spaces and livelihoods support.



Political turmoil and chaos strike Sudan

Several weeks of clashes between protestors and the military have resulted in hundreds injured or dead. Regrettably, aid agency distributions have recently been targeted.

This comes as more than five million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the troubled Darfur region where people require life-saving assistance.



World Vision has been assisting communities with programs targeting issues such as malnutrition, water and livelihoods.



Conflict and food insecurity widespread in the Central African Republic (CAR)

CAR is facing a large-scale humanitarian crisis due to increased fighting between armed groups in areas that were previously considered relatively stable.

About 2.5 million people are affected by conflict, and nearly half the population is facing severe or moderate food insecurity. Ongoing conflict has halted early recovery in many areas, which already experience extreme poverty and limited social services.



World Vision's footprint in CAR includes health, education, livelihoods, child protection and reintegration programs for former child soldiers



Being prepared and having strategies in place to respond to humanitarian emergencies is just one of the ways World Vision helps people in need.



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