



Behind the news

DISASTER STRIKES!

Lights, camera, action! It happens at least once a year. For a few brief weeks, some desperate corner of the world becomes a flurry of international activity. The TV cameras focus, satellite dishes dance with action, hotels brim with journalists and the local people are portrayed in living colour around the world – either in their misery or in a feeding line, being given an emergency meal.

Suddenly, and just as quickly, the focus shifts to another part of the world. After the most sensational part of the story has finished, after the emergency rations have been given out, after the crisis has calmed, journalists pack away their cameras and notebooks and the hotels empty. The cyclone or war moves off page one and on a good day, gets a mention in the back of the paper. Public interest wanes and donations slow to a trickle.



Images of devastation caused by disasters, like this from the Haiti earthquake, are important to ensure media coverage.

But a year later, when the real rebuilding should be taking place, the money has dried up and only a handful of aid organisations remain. The long-term recovery process and ongoing struggles are rarely featured.

REPORTING DISASTERS

Disaster stories are popular with the media. However, some disasters are more popular than others. These include:

1. Local disasters. Smaller disasters which happen in Australia or involve Australians are more popular than more significant disasters that occur overseas – especially in developing countries with which Australians are not familiar.

2. Sudden or rapid onset disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis. Gradual and ongoing disasters like droughts, famines and land degradation receive less coverage than the more "spectacular" disasters.

3. Disasters occurring in England or the USA. The influence of American and English media in Australia means greater coverage is given to these countries.

4. Disasters that are sensational and include dramatic images. The popular media prefers footage of spectacular escapes, gruesome death, heroic rescues or "survival against the odds" stories. A common media saying is, "If it bleeds, it leads." Major disasters and tragedies that are not filmed receive little coverage.

Did you know?

World Vision raised funds required to implement a 90 day relief plan for the most severely affected areas in Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Approximately 83,000 people were supported in evacuation centres. This included the provision of relief items of clothing and food and psychosocial support. Under what circumstances should organisations like World Vision provide relief to wealthy, developed countries like Japan?



SURVIVOR

THE JAPANESE TSUNAMI

Friday 11 March 2011

A 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the north east coast of Japan triggered a 10 metre tsunami that caused extensive damage and washed entire communities away. More than 50 million people were affected; some 15,300 people died, almost 100,000 were evacuated and 8,200 people missing. A nuclear emergency was also declared following explosions at various nuclear power plants in the Fukushima area.

Mr Muraoka is 60 years old and one of the survivors from the earthquake and tsunami that swept away his town of Minami Sanriku. With a population of 20,000, half of the population was killed with more than 8,000 people displaced. Mr Muraoka lost six relatives.



Snow and freezing temperatures make recovery efforts even more difficult.



Mr Muraoka meets with World Vision staff in a local school shelter.

"The tsunami came 25 minutes after the earthquake but here, we are all used to earthquakes and tsunamis and we received training on what to do when something like that happens. So I ran to the evacuation place but this time, the waves were much higher than usual. I had to run further up into the hills and I remember vividly that 30 others were running with me."

"The night was cold and only two houses remained untouched by the tsunami, we stayed two nights there. There was no electricity, it was dark. We started a small fire and used snow water to boil rice. It was just a small amount but we all shared that meal together."

For You To Do!

1. Identify the language features of the media story above. What features are used to capture and hold the reader's attention or interest?
2. Keep a list of disaster stories appearing in the media and record your findings in the table at worldvision.com.au/schoolresources. For example:

| Name of story/ article/headline | Source | Country | Disaster | Impact |
|------------------------------------|-------------|---------|----------|---------------------------------|
| 10 KILLED! | ABC TV News | China | Flood | 10 killed Thousands homeless |

3. Look up alertnet.org to see which recent disasters are not being reported in the Australian media.