INTERNET RESOURCES

Disaster relief: Starting points for learning

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Recent disasters throughout the globe have shed new light on the vulnerability of life on earth. Whether the result of natural causes or human-induced tragedy or whether they are at the local or on a global scale, disasters have become part of our everyday experience, sparing no community in our increasingly interconnected world.

According to the latest data from the _World Disasters Report_, the number of “natural” and “man-made” disasters occurring between 1999 and 2003 increased to an average of 707 disasters each year. This includes the devastating disaster that afflicted numerous communities in 2004 and 2005, such as the killings in Beslan, Russia; the Indian Ocean Tsunami; the earthquake in Pakistan; and the devastating hurricanes along the Gulf Coast—the complexity and sheer volume seems to be approaching the breaking point.

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The Web is populated by a wide range of organizations and sites devoted to humanitarian efforts, and this column hopes to give a flavor of the Internet’s immense role in disaster relief. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but serves as a starting point for students, faculty, librarians, practitioners, and the general public interested in learning more about disaster relief.

**Domestic organizations**

- **Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI).** With so many disasters nationally and globally, and the need for donations growing, individuals and businesses are often overwhelemed with the choices. CIDI, operated under USAID, has been established to handle public inquiries and provide education on how to respond in a useful and productive manner to a disaster. The current and historical situation reports from expert agencies with operations on site or within the affected countries is one of the primary sources of information. Relevant articles addressing international disaster relief, briefings, and online discussions are a section for teachers who may want to access the discussions about disasters to their curriculum. Access: [http://www.cidi.org/](http://www.cidi.org/).

- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).** A former independent agency that is now part of the new Department of Homeland Security in March 2003, FEMA is tasked with responding to disasters.
planning for, recovering from, and mitigating against disasters. This site provides up-to-date information on FEMA’s current activities, a list of recent disasters and emergencies by state, territory, disaster assistance, and a guide for preparedness. A fairly detailed explanation of types of disasters that affect the country is included, together with a listing of programs and for individuals and communities faced with emergencies. The recent hurricanes along the have provided a rather unflattering portrait of FEMA, though its work at the federal level is in equal. Access: http://www.fema.gov/.

- **National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC)**. This site is primarily intended to assist people in drought and supply planning. Established in 1995, it is based in the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. The site includes an information clearinghouse on drought monitoring and mitigation; drought policy; advice for policy makers; K–12 educational outreach; and a workshops, seminars, and data for the media and the general public. Access: http://www.drought.unl.edu/.

- **U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)**. USAID is an independent federal government agency that is responsible for extending assistance to countries recovering from natural disasters and other events that threaten their well-being. The site provides information about the agency’s extensive work throughout the world. One can navigate the site by topic, such as food security, humanitarian assistance, as well as by country. The library catalog provides access to the library’s collection of more than 10,000 monographs and periodicals published by commercial publishers, donor agencies, and other organizations active in international development. Reports published by USAID can be identified or viewed from the Development Experience Clearinghouse site at www.dec.org/. Access: http://www.usaid.gov/.

**International organizations**

- **The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**. Four international organizations, working together with more than 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty, suffering, and The international site is available in English, French, and Spanish, and there are links to the organizations’ 12 national sites. (Information on Oxfam’s many publications is available from the Kingdom site). Access: http://www.ifrc.org/.

- **Oxfam**. Oxfam International is a confederation of 12 organizations working together with 3,000 partners in more than 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty, suffering, and The international site is available in English, French, and Spanish, and there are links to the organizations’ 12 national sites. (Information on Oxfam’s many publications is available from the Kingdom site). Access: http://www.oxfam.org/.

**United Nations agencies**

- **Disaster Management Planning**. This is the site for the United Nations Centre for Regional Development’s Disaster Management Planning Hyogo Office. The office was established in Japan, in the aftermath of an earthquake that claimed the lives of more than 6,000 people in 1995. This site focuses on various disaster management initiatives through multilateral collaboration at the international level; promotes effective disaster reduction; focuses on key elements of self-help cooperation, and educational activities; and contains publications. Access: http://www.hyogo.un.cr.or.jp/.

- **International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)**. ISDR aims at building disaster-resistant communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction, with a focus on reducing human, social, economic, and environmental losses due to natural hazards and technological and environmental disasters. The UN/ISDR headquarters is based at the Pal Nations in Geneva, has regional offices in Costa Rica and Kenya, and maintains a presence.
with units in Thailand and Tajikistan. Among the many resources available on the site are disaster statistics, hazard profiles and national reports for country, public awareness features the International Day for Disaster Reduction (which occurs annually in October), education and an extensive library of materials on disaster risk reduction. Access: http://www.unisdi

- **ReliefWeb.** Launched in October 1996 and administered by the UN Office for the Coordinating Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ReliefWeb is the world’s leading online gateway to information (documents and maps) on humanitarian emergencies and disasters. ReliefWeb disseminates reliable, and relevant humanitarian information, and is updated around the clock. The site features 150 maps and documents daily from more than 2,000 sources from the UN system, government, NGOs, academia, and the media. It also contains an online library of reference materials on humanitarian policies and issues of a global nature, listings of job opportunities and training opportunities, and a directory of humanitarian organizations. Access: http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?OpenForm.

- **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).** Established in 1950, UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another country, the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally, or to resettle in a third country. The site is loaded with the latest information on refugees, with statistics (there are now 19.2 million refugees in 191 countries) and publications. Access: http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home.

- **World Health Organization (WHO).** WHO is the UN specialized agency for health-related activities. This site is available in six languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. It provides the latest information on health throughout the globe, with entries on the health situation in each of the 192 UN member states. In addition to the latest news and current topics of interest to the world health community, there are links to a wide variety of health topics that provide brief activities, reports, news, and events. Among the research tools available on the Web site is a database (WHOLIS), which indexes all WHO publications from 1948 onwards and articles produced in journals and technical documents from 1985 to the present. There is also a guide to related epidemiological and statistical data (WHOSIS), access to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), and information on publications. Access: http://www.who.int.

**Regional organizations**

- **Africare.** Africare is a private, charitable U.S. organization assisting Africa. It is the oldest African American organization in the field. This is a well-developed site that includes the latest news and reports from the continent, assistance projects that are ongoing, and opportunities for individuals and organizations to help. Access: http://www.africare.org.

- **Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team (AMURT).** This is the site for one of the few private organizations of Third World origin. AMURT was founded in India in 1965 with the objective of meeting the needs of victims of disasters that regularly hit the Indian subcontinent. It has now expanded to 80 countries to create a network to meet development and disaster needs anywhere in the world. Access: http://www.amurt.net./

- **The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC).** ADPC is a nonprofit organization that advances the advancement of safer communities and sustainable development, through implementing projects that reduce the impact of disasters upon countries and communities in Asia and the Pacific. The site contributes to ADPC’s objectives by providing information to the public, raising awareness among communities, and enhancing disaster management knowledge and skills for expert governments. There are links to past, current and future projects. There is a gateway to disaster-related information, with hazard-specific information, country-specific information, online documents in HTML and PDF, and an online database of non-ADPC materials. Access: http://www.adpc.

- **The Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID).** CRID, the Spanish acronym for Centro Regional de Información sobre Desastres, is an initiative sponsored by six organizations to join efforts to ensure the compilation and dissemination of disaster-related information in America and the Caribbean. Among the items found here are publications, including special bibliographies and technical manuals on disaster-related issues; an extensive database providing access to a broad collection of journal articles, books, and to other information sources; technical advice and training information on disaster management to local and regional centers; a list
that includes regional institutions, disaster-related organizations, and general data of each and news about the CRID’s current projects and other initiatives. Access: http://www.crid.info.net.

• **DisasterInfo.** This is the front page to a collection of mirror sites or direct access to Web many disaster organizations, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. Among the sites here are those of the Pan American Health Organization’s Program for Emergency Preparedness for Disaster Relief, the Humanitarian Supply Management System (SUMA), and several partners in the region and for individual countries available only in Spanish. Access: http://www.disas

• **Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI),** DPPI, founded in 2000, is an organization serving 12 countries of South Eastern Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, FYR Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, and the Republic of Yugoslavia. Its main aim is to assist in coordinating preparation and prevention of natural and manmade disasters. The site provides a list of ongoing projects, such as earth monitoring, joint firefighting exercises, and disaster management training workshops. In addition, there are documents listing declarations of cooperation, action plans, and links to regional and national organizations. Access: http://www.dppi.info/index.html.

- **European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO),** This is the European Union’s site to disaster and emergency relief. Among other items, it includes country evaluation reports on conflict response and prevention of torture, and the rehabilitation of torture victims. Additionally, visitors can read the latest IRCT and IRCT Annual Reports. Access: http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/

### Health/medicine

- **The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED).** Established in 1973, CRED is located at the School of Public Health of the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) in Belgium. CRED focuses on public health, epidemiology, and structural and socioeconomic components, including a weekly listing of natural and technological disasters reported from around the globe, and information on collaborative projects with international organizations, such as the WHO, and the European Union, as well as CRED-sponsored publications. Particularly useful is the site’s three databases: the Emergency Events Database, which contains essential core data on the occurrence and effects of more than 12,800 mass disasters in the world from 1900 to present; the Emergency Bibliographic Database, a list of relevant references to publications and reports worldwide on emergency and disaster issues; and the Database on the Human Impact of Con Emergencies, which is intended to support decision-making on humanitarian aid and to promote effective policy on conflict response and prevention. Access: http://www.cred.be/.

- **International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).** Based in Copenhagen, the IRCT is an independent professional health organization that promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works to eradicate the practice of torture in collaboration with a global network of more than 100 rehabilitation centers and programs worldwide. This site—available in English, French, Spanish, and Russian—contains a brief definition of torture as defined by the UN, on rehabilitation and reparation of individuals and communities, a list of current and past projects, and support information for victims. It also contains the Documentation Centre database, the world’s largest library dedicated specifically to the subject of torture, prevention of torture, and the rehabilitation of torture victims. Additionally, visitors can read the latest IRC worldwide news, the organization’s publications (including recent editions of TORTURE), and the IRC Annual Reports. Access: http://www.irct.org/.

- **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).** MSF is an international humanitarian aid organization that provides emergency medical assistance to populations in danger in more than 70 countries international site, with access to 21 national sites for the organization. Here, one can get an information on key issues, such as refugees, water and sanitation, women and violence, or course, health. There is a medical information section on many of the world’s devastating illnesses, such as cholera, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. Also included are press releases about the organization’s activities throughout the world. Access: http://www.msf.org/.
Mental health

• **The Centre for Humanitarian Psychology.** This is the site for an international organization whose aim is to provide psychological support to humanitarian workers in the field. We work through a network of professionals who are both psychologists and familiar with humanitarian work, partners, and volunteers in Europe and in the field. The site is available in English, French, and Spanish versions. The center offers a wide array of programs and services, many of which can be found on the site, including training course materials, information sheets on disaster-induced mental health issues, testimonials from humanitarian workers, and opportunities for individuals and groups involved in relief work. Access: [http://www.humanitarian-ps.org/](http://www.humanitarian-ps.org/).

• **Disaster Psychiatry.** The objective of this site from the American Psychiatric Association Committee on Psychiatric Dimensions of Disaster is to provide information to working psychiatrists involved in disaster work. Included here is the full-text of the committee’s Disaster Psychiatry Handbook, links to several publications on disaster psychiatry, as well as recommendations and strategies for broader involvement of psychiatrists in disaster work. Access: [http://www.psych.org/disasterpsych/](http://www.psych.org/disasterpsych/).

• **The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS).** ISTSS is an international, multidisciplinary, professional membership organization that promotes advancement and understanding of traumatic stress. The society’s mission includes understanding the scope and consequences of traumatic exposure, preventing traumatic events and ameliorating their consequences, and advocating for the field of traumatic stress. Access: [http://www.istss.org/](http://www.istss.org/).

• **The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** The center, established within the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989 by a Congressional mandate to address the needs of veterans with military-related PTSD, has a mission “to advance the clinical care and social support needs of America’s veterans through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders.” The Web site is intended as an educational resource for professionals and researchers concerned with PTSD and other disorders related to traumatic stress for a variety of audiences. The site includes information about traumatic stress and associated disorders, assessment instruments designed to provide clinicians with information about child and adult trauma exposure and responses, and video satellite broadcasts available for viewing. The site also sponsors PILOTS Database, the largest interdisciplinary index to worldwide literature on traumatic stress in the world. This freely available database is available via NISC’s BiblioLine interface. Access: [http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/).

Online journals

• **The Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies.** This is a peer-reviewed electronic journal published at Massey University in New Zealand. It provides a forum for the publication of original research, reviews, and commentaries on disaster and trauma mitigation and prevention, response, support, recovery, treatment, policy formulation, and planning. The journal is interested in events of natural, technological, and human-induced origin and their effects at the individual, group, organizational, and community level. Contributions are from academics and practitioners from diverse professional backgrounds, including those in mental health, physical and geological sciences, and health and welfare services. Access: [http://www.massey.ac.nz/%7Etrauma/welcome.shtml](http://www.massey.ac.nz/%7Etrauma/welcome.shtml).

• **Journal of Humanitarian Assistance.** The purpose of this journal is to facilitate communication between the many diverse practitioners and analysts who comprise the humanitarian community. The journal encompasses all aspects of humanitarian assistance, from early warning and emergency provision to post-conflict peace-building and the transition to development. Contributions from law, politics, military studies, and practitioners are welcome. The journal is entirely open published by the Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University in England. Access: [http://www.jha.ac/](http://www.jha.ac/).

• **Forced Migration Review (FMR).** FMR is published by the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University, in association with the Norwegian Refugee Council. It appears three times a year in English, Spanish, and Arabic and provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience.
information, and ideas between researchers, refugees, and internally displaced people and work with them. Access: http://www.fmreview.org/.

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