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A DECADE OF DISASTERS



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Disaster Logistics and the Private Sector: Issues and Opportunities

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As a businessman, I have had a seven-year journey seeking to understand and enable the engagement of the business and industry in effective disaster relief support. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to do much of this as the president of the American Logistics Aid Network (ALAN, www.ALANaid.org), which is a post Hurricane Katrina initiative of 18 supply chain associations.

The impact on and recovery rate of supply chains after an extreme event often defines the magnitude of a disaster. Avoiding long-term economic and demographic trauma requires the engagement of the authority, resources, structures, and capacities from the government, nonprofits and private sectors.

Disaster relief is not an orderly command-and-control environment. The following elements come into play.

- Relief agencies are not monolithic. They usually exist at a national level as well as state and local levels. Agendas may differ, and from unit to unit there are variations in services provided and in the capacity to serve.
- Relief is choreography, and the music changes. A meal served by the Red Cross may have been prepared by Baptist Relief Services with Feeding America (or a food services company) providing the food delivered via logistics support from Adventist Community Services and water provided by FEMA. Some of these relationships will be long-standing; others are ad hoc arrangements.
- Participation is relationship and trust-based. Agencies work with one another and build their teams from known entities and individuals. Concern about brand protection and policy understanding coupled with the demands of an

extreme event complicate the process of engaging with a responding agency during a disaster.

- Business, with notable exceptions, does not organize to support disaster response on a sustained basis.
- Most business engagement is at the financial philanthropic or leadership level. While there may be periodic involvement at the operations level, private sector and agency sectors generally operate within their own silos.
- Responsibility is initially at the local level. Once past the community-level, responsibility rises to state emergency management agencies (EMA) structures which typically work with the relief agency community—usually in the form of voluntary organizations active in disaster (VOADs). When invited the federal government became engaged through the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).
- Government response is encumbered by legislative and regulatory constraints in funding relief efforts, use of government assets, purchasing, and the accepting of donations.
- Visibility is poor. Systems do not cross relief agency and government lines. There is no shared system of nomenclature and classification (taxonomy).

ALAN has found a number of ways to engage supply-chain-based associations and their members constructively.



- ALAN's Web portal, which is based on National Donations Management Network (NDMN) technology, allows EMAs and relief agencies to post specific needs including on-the-ground contact information for the agency and individual involved.
- By directing NDMN-posted needs to the individuals and companies most likely to have the capacity, the ALAN network has yielded results. Recent examples include sourcing donations of cleaning supplies to help with Nashville floods, transporting orphans out of Haiti, and identifying a volunteer experienced in logistics and IT for on-the-ground support in building transitional housing.
- Disaster response constrains and removes logistics capacity. Drawing on industry knowledge and connections ALAN has been able to present options and identify transportation alternatives. When Global Links needed transport for donated medical equipment from Pennsylvania to Florida for shipment to Haiti, a connection to Pittsburgh-based Genco provided the solution.
- Participation in conferences, tabletop exercises, and emergency management conference calls is important in establishing the relationships and trust necessary to engage and is critical for understanding the operational language and ethos. USAID's invitation to participate on a transportation committee led to the identification of shipping alternatives for Haiti relief agencies.

ALAN provides an outlet for organizations who may not have otherwise participated in relief efforts. Some corporations have established outlets of participation in community and national humanitarian efforts. For those who don't, ALAN brings visibility to requests by vetted organizations. In the weeks after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike hit the Gulf coast, ALAN facilitated donations of fans, bedding, wheelchairs, and walkers. The donations were made after companies were alerted by supply-chain-association communications. Most businesses want to help; ALAN allows them to participate in the way that makes the most sense for their business. That said, we are enthusiastic about proactive corporate efforts such as the below and encourage such direct engagement.

- Establishing ongoing programs with relief agencies prior to an event is the best form of private sector involvement. W. W. Grainger's partnering with the American Red Cross established the "Ready When the Time Comes" program, which provides trained employees and meaningful corporate participation. UPS, TNT, and Agility established small quick-response logistics emergency teams (LETs) that collaborate with the UN Logistics Cluster structure. Numerous other examples of this approach exist at the national and regional levels.
- Events may create specific opportunities. An example is the Jobs4Recovery website established by IBM and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce after Hurricane Katrina.
- Corporate preparedness is in itself a contribution to disaster relief as it reduces the burden on the system should there be an event. This includes programs for employee preparedness such as those offered by the SafeAmerica Foundation. A corporation's resilience is only as great as the readiness of its people.

Events of the past decade have greatly increased interest in disaster response. Larger-scale and multiple events are now considered the norm in planning sessions. New concepts of organization are being discussed such as the Megacommunity thinking espoused by BoozAllenHamilton which describes a sphere of interest where governments, corporations, and nonprofits collaboratively intersect. Numerous academic institutions internationally are engaged in research in humanitarian relief and disaster logistics as well as developing curricula for graduate and undergraduate study in these fields. Technology supports democracy in allowing potential donors to connect directly with needs, helping to offset skepticism and cynicism regarding funds usage and overhead.

Disaster relief engages a network of networks. This creates some organizational messiness but enables creative self-organizing approaches. It offers the opportunity to "put on a glove and get in the game."



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