



2011 ANNUAL MEETING

September 19 - 22, 2011 ★ Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers

Special Session: From Response to Resilience: Effective Disaster Preparedness

Tuesday, September 20, 2011: 3:45 – 5:00 PM

I. Session Objective:

Natural disasters strike both the developed and developing world without regard to economic status, race, religion, or culture. Economic and social conditions do, however, dramatically affect capacity to prepare, respond, and rebuild in the wake of such events. From the earthquakes in Haiti and Japan to the floods in Pakistan, there is a vital need for effective emergency management that balances short-term disaster relief with long-term recovery and prevention. Yet, a lack of basic infrastructure and coordinated response mechanisms can make it significantly more difficult for communities to recover when their existing resources are already taxed. Faced with these constraints, how can communities work together across sectors to create effective, coordinated emergency response systems? This session will examine how NGOs, governments, companies, and citizens can build the tools and infrastructure necessary to systematically prepare for and minimize the impact of future natural disasters.

II. Summary of Discussion:

MODERATOR:

Riz Khan, international journalist, *Al Jazeera English*

PANELISTS:

Valerie Amos, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, *United Nations*

LaTosha Brown, executive director, *Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological*

Denis O'Brien, chairman, *Digicel Group*

James Lee Witt, chief executive officer, *Witt Associates*

Mr. Khan: Have we learned anything from past experiences like Hurricane Katrina or the Asian Tsunami?

- **Ms. Amos:** Population growth, climate change, and poverty have increased the risk. Governments need to take this seriously and the international community needs to support it as well.
- **Mr. Witt:** I think we have done a better job mapping risk areas through GIS or other mapping models. What's more important is creating public education and prevention programs for at-risk communities. FEMA did a study that for every dollar spent on prevention, we save five dollars in future losses.
- **Ms. Brown:** Community members are usually the first responders during natural disasters. We need to support these communities. The community has a responsibility to respond and support itself, but the government has to offer support. We know which are vulnerable communities based on geography, economic structure, etc. So we need to ensure there is preparation, utilize weather forecasting, and involve political and private partners.
- **Mr. O'Brien:** Companies need to work with local partners. In Haiti, we asked a local NGO what they needed and then gave the money/resources. It is important to support NGOs with infrastructure on the ground.
- **Ms. Amos:** People tend to give items that are not needed. Check what is needed and make sure we are helping and not being part of the problem.

Mr. Khan: What about natural disaster planning? Has it been enough?

- **Mr. Witt:** We have inherited buildings without any building codes. We need to break the cycle of building and destroying. We should not build back in at-risk areas. We need more resilience and prevention. FEMA set up a public/private partnership program, Project IMPACT, with \$25 million from Congress. It provided seed money and support to develop a public/private partnership. It helped Seattle respond after its earthquake.

Audience Member: After the Japan earthquake, the needs of employees were immediate. How do you find the local NGOs? Who is on the ground?

Turning ideas into action.



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- **Ms. Amos:** Check who is already there. After a few days, there will be an assessment of what is needed which will be published by the UN.
- **Mr. O'Brien:** Collect the money and go to Japan three months later to see what needs to be done and fund those projects. Show staff where their money is going.

Mr. Khan: Was anger from the community counterproductive during the Katrina recovery?

- **Ms. Brown:** The government and infrastructure failed during Katrina, but it also empowered the community and gave them the opportunity to look at local infrastructure and discuss issues that had not been addressed.

Audience Member: It took funds two years to release funds in Katrina, 2.5 years in Haiti, and 18 months in India. We need to shorten that time. Any ideas?

- **Mr. Witt:** We need more planning in place to work with local NGOs and encourage public/private partnerships.
- **Ms. Amos:** We need pilot projects to identify how to release funds.

Audience Member: What about disaster preparedness vs. preparedness for sustained response? How can we address both funding needs?

- **Ms. Amos:** We need to allocate 50 percent of funding for immediate use and 50 percent for sustained use. But there is an immediate outpouring of money, skills, and capacity from the international community. Then people begin to think about the government structure of the community in need and funding reduces significantly.
- **Mr. Witt:** If we have a major event, FEMA worked with the governors and asked for damage estimates. We would fund 50 percent immediately so public safety can be addressed and the remaining would be for sustained recovery.

Khan: What happened to Project IMPACT?

- **Mr. Witt:** The next administration cut the program. But it was all about creating partnerships to become more resilient. The World Bank can be used to build large-scale infrastructure like schools or houses.
- **Mr. O'Brien:** We need clever thinking and we need to be quicker giving away money. The World Bank is too slow.
- **Ms. Amos:** We need both. Big infrastructure projects can be funded by large organizations like the World Bank.
- **Mr. O'Brien:** We need to give more money to microfinance institutions to get people working and encourage rebuilding the markets. It is more impactful.

III. Opportunities for Action:

- Identify the communities that are vulnerable to natural disasters through mapping methods and create plans to mitigate those risks.
- Create public education programs for at-risk communities to educate them about steps to take after a natural disaster.
- Focus more on prevention and re-think the ways we build communities and where we build them.
- Create public/private partnerships to increase funding and support for at-risk communities.
- Identify alternative funding methods to focus on immediate and sustainable funding schemes after a natural disaster.
- Partner with local organizations that have local infrastructure and community networks in order to increase the efficiency of funding.
- Re-think opportunities to increase timeliness of funding after a natural disaster.

Turning ideas into action.