

24:14 Goal

Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (66 months)

Post-Disaster Sustainability and Spiritual Multiplication

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When responding to a large-scale crisis or helping people recover from a disaster, how can we maximize fruit? How can we maximize the practical support we give them? And what principles can increase urgent-needs response, sustainable recovery, and multiplication of believer groups in an integrated way?

In 2011 when this article was first written, we had two teams in Southeast Asia which had multiplied to at least three generations of believer groups among “Cousins.” This is the name we use for followers of the majority religion where we serve and they were a group that frequently responded to disasters. They had served in response to four major disasters in addition to some minor ones. Through their experience, they identified fruitful post-disaster response principles. In April 2020, I edited this article to increase relevance for those wrestling with the global crisis caused by COVID-19. I added principles we have learned from more teams in many more situations, doing disaster recovery while also multiplying small groups to many generations.

These principles have guided practical crisis response and post-disaster recovery while at the same time nurturing spiritual multiplication. They empower teams to make creative decisions in the field, in response to local needs, without having to check back with their bosses. These principles provide integration and coordination between field workers in diverse locations without

paralyzing community facilitators or cell-church planters. They provide sustainable recovery for disaster victims and include spiritual recovery, as indicated by multiplication of believer groups.

Many of these principles become most applicable *following* the first weeks after a disaster (when victims are most vulnerable and desperately need practical help quickly). We transition to these principles as soon as possible. This enables sustainable disaster recovery, integrated with sustainable multiplication of small groups in multiple generations.

1. Core Team

Who are your closest co-workers, whom you trust, who are also effective in post-disaster response? You cannot help people beyond the effective reach of your core team. However, if your core team members have already proved they can multiply other leaders, who multiply other leaders, your core team has a much greater reach.

Take a moment to evaluate your core team’s capacity to respond to this crisis.

- How strong are relational ties within your core team? Do your core team members each have their own core teams? How strong are relational ties in their core teams? Will they support one another under the stress of responding to a crisis?



- What is the bridging (connecting) capacity of your core team? Have they shown ability to connect to people who can help them select the neediest people who should be prioritized? Have they shown the capacity to connect to find available resources?
- Disaster response needs leaders who can take initiative, innovate, and activate others. Can your core team members do these things, or facilitate those who can?

2. Local Groupings

Most of those who respond compassionately to a crisis or disaster serve *individuals*. We learned to instead help disaster victims form and solidify into *need-based local groups*. Our core team (and those they activate) serve only local groups. Groups are more effective in recovery because through cooperation in groups, a much smaller budget is needed for recovery. Cooperation adds value at low cost.

After a volcano erupted and lava covered many homes, one new chainsaw kept six men working to remove fallen trees when they formed a local group and cooperated to divide jobs and shifts using the chainsaw. Everyone needed help with clean water when a heavy ash fall resulted from a volcanic eruption, and the wells were filled with lava, but a local group decided which of its members were the weakest and needed help first. They decided which families were close enough that they could harmoniously build and share a tank to store clean water during the recovery period.

Neighbors whose houses were levelled during an earthquake were helped to build their own foundations, helped with reinforcement bar and sand and cement and the design. But they were required to form a group and help the one widow among them, in order to get access to these resources. This resulted in much time in dialog among them about spiritual values. Over a period of months, some of the people in this foundation-building group were helped to form a new business making

concrete building blocks with hand presses. This work gave them income for food, and for every truckload of sand they formed into concrete blocks, they could set aside 500 blocks for their own houses. From these need-based groups, small groups of seekers emerged, which later became small groups of believers discussing together the Bible and how they were applying it.

Groups are also the best place by far to begin *spiritually transformative dialog*.¹ Group members support each other's search for meaning and emotional recovery. They validate new means to find spiritual peace in the midst of uncertainty. Spiritual and emotional issues need to be discussed in small groups of victims who form because they are comfortable with each other.

In the early months of the COVID-19 global crisis, many in our country have lost their jobs and their incomes. One of my core team members is responsible for 30 people in two houses. Another is responsible for 13 people in his own house. Each must give attention to his own family's health, for they are also victims. But they have pre-existing virtual groups and some new groups. They have already activated several local groups to distribute food to the hungry.

3. An Urgent-Needs Phase Transitions to a Recovery Phase

Disasters have an initial urgent-needs phase that may be extended if the crisis is hard to define, multi-dimensional, and/or recurring, as in the case of COVID-19. The needs during this period should be defined and an assessment made: which needs can be met by the victims themselves, and which could be met by others? With COVID-19 we determined that just three weeks into the crisis, almost everyone among the lower-paid members in almost every

¹ For more information on spiritually transformative dialog, see *Core Skills of Movement Leaders: Repeating Patterns from Generation to Generation*, by Trevor Larsen and the Focus on Fruit Team. Also see *Focus on Fruit! Movement Case Studies & Fruitful Practices*, by Trevor Larsen and a Fruitful Band of Brothers, both available at www.focusonfruit.org.



area in our country was having trouble buying food. These hand-to-mouth wage-earners have no savings and struggle economically if they miss just three weeks of work. Even farmers are having trouble because they cannot sell their products. These are going to waste, for buyers don't have money to buy the products.

During this urgent-needs phase, we are setting up distribution systems (including volunteers) that use a minimum of middlemen. These reduce food costs, bypassing traditional markets (closed because they bring too many people too close together), and enforce high standards of food handling (few people handle raw food, and those who do use masks, gloves, and other protective equipment). We are negotiating with suppliers to provide raw food at lower costs in return for getting larger orders. Since people's savings in densely populated areas are almost used up, costs must be negotiated to lower levels and volunteers used – toward the goal of simply keeping people eating. However, all potential food donors are also losing money in this period.

This points to our need to transition to a recovery phase as soon as possible. We recognize that most factors are out of our control, but we have begun to discuss a few things over which we do have some control.

4. Long-Term Thinking

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster think mainly about the immediate needs of victims. They tend to shift only slowly to thinking about long-term solutions. Leaders of disaster responders must facilitate discussions of cases to help volunteers think further ahead, in order to discover longer-term needs and solutions.

For example, we wouldn't help a group upgrade to wood walls rather than bamboo in a temporary shelter they would soon leave behind. We would focus instead on buying them woodworking tools and a simple shop so they could get their business and income restarted. Paradoxically, our determination to look beyond the

empty stomachs of today provides more compassionate long-term help.

In the spiritual arena, long-term thinking is *multi-generational thinking*. Our approaches must foster the discovery of local leaders who have spiritual sensitivity and thirst. We look for those who not only make personal progress in small Bible discussion groups but who also reveal capacity as replicators and multipliers. We want to find those whom God will grow into partners for raising up future generations of spiritual leaders.

We have tried to imagine new jobs that will emerge because of new demands in the recovering economic system when that begins. For example, we are envisioning motorcycles equipped with racks to carry the maximum amount of raw food at the lowest cost and make drop-offs to houses.

Clearly our spiritual mentoring will have to grow stronger in utilizing social media.

5. Victims as Solution-Finders and Laborers

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster view themselves as givers and see victims as receivers. In contrast, we aim to find leaders among the victims. Local influencers emerge after a crisis and can help organize the victims so they take an active role in the recovery of their own community. This makes recovery possible on a lower budget. It also strengthens victims emotionally after a big hit and loss to their self-esteem and hope. The most diligent and responsible victims will be most likely to facilitate more benefits for more victims. For that reason, selection of which victims to partner with is important. Generally speaking, local people themselves know which among them will be more effective during post-disaster uncertainty and can choose them. They realize that the leaders needed for responding to a crisis or disaster must be active leaders, not the symbolic leaders who might have been in place prior to a disaster.



In one area covered by deep volcanic ash that brought all farming to a halt, disaster victims made 2,200 handicraft products during a three-week period. Initially, people from outside the community did product design, training of workers, and marketing. But the organizers among the victims also contributed to success, under the supervision of a person who lived just outside the affected area and gave volunteer time. Five villages of victims each chose four to eight representatives best suited to receive training. They chose people who not only would produce good products for their fellow villagers but also would ensure quality control and select and train other villagers to produce these products. From these initial trainees, the most competent trainers and organizers emerged. The natural center of production also became clear: one village that was well organized and motivated. All trainings were held in that village, and products were delivered by group leaders from each of the other villages for payment. The macro system in the area became more self-sufficient, reducing its reliance on the outsiders who initiated the handicrafts project.

After an earthquake, communities were able to build concrete 3m x 6m house cores for US\$600 each. This very low budget was possible because the people organized themselves into groups of eight former homeowners, pooling their labor and motivation to build the eight houses together. Groups identified the weaker members of the community who most deserved their help. They had only one trained carpenter, but one was sufficient to oversee the building of three neighborhoods of eight house cores each, using the same simple design. Through cooperative groups, which mobilized the volunteer ideas and labor of victims, all donation money could be focused on purchasing cement, sand, and reinforcement bars. This allowed them to rebuild earthquake-resistant house cores.

From a spiritual vantage point, seekers of God can be mobilized quickly to gather like-minded others who desire spiritual and emotional recovery. By using a simple set of questions that stimulate local people in discovery

of biblical truth on topics that meet their needs, natural leaders can be mobilized quickly as group facilitators.

6. Observe—Question—Add

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster give pre-packaged solutions. Instead, we observe and question to activate victims to fully describe their challenges. We then help them come up with several alternate solutions and combine those solutions to find the best *solution set*. Through this process, they develop solution sets that are cheaper and better fitted to the challenges and they are more motivated to keep pursuing the solutions. For these reasons, their own solution sets have a higher likelihood of sustainability.

When responding to a volcanic eruption, I began discussions with victims at a refugee camp, when it was still too dangerous to enter the area. I mistakenly put forward the idea of making building blocks from sand that had been expelled during the eruption. In response they identified reasons it wouldn't work, such as that the sand had too much sulfur in it. The imported idea failed. When I could visit the area with them, I observed raw products made following the disaster. They preferred two inexpensive motorized tools to a single nice one. Because it was their own idea, they could bear without complaint the negative factor that the cheaper tools were heavier. I had thought a large machine would be needed to move the raw logs onto trucks. They decided teaming up to carry them was cheaper.

In spiritual dialog, we observe and ask about victims' needs. To their existing spiritual knowledge we then add fresh spiritual insights fitted to their needs.

7. Transformative Dialog

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster separate physical needs from emotional and spiritual needs. They usually serve physical and surface-level emotional needs first, then much later serve deeper emotional and spiritual needs. Often, however,



the window of spiritual openness has closed by then. Instead, we view people holistically and start early with emotionally/spiritually transformative dialog. We do this in ways that combine naturally with practical caregiving. This reduces victims' grief paralysis effect and increases their participation in their own recovery.

In agricultural recovery groups, an integrated transformative dialog must affirm God's sovereignty and care for His creation, including His care for people. It must at the same time wrestle with their questions as to possible reasons He has allowed their suffering. A second transformative dialog can help them see themselves in Adam's lineage as vice-regents of God's creation. God has entrusted to them management of His grace, expressed as natural resources in creation. He intends their management to provide for their own needs and to channel that grace to others. A third transformative dialog discusses the return of Jesus to usher in God's complete creation recovery. All creation now eagerly awaits this new creation.

"Cousins" have an integrated worldview, so a majority-Cousin area must be served with an integrated rather than a secular approach. Rather than Jesus' followers serving them as secularists, an approach true to the convictions of neither party, we look for bridging zones for transformative dialog. These dialogs build off common ground, going back to the common belief in Adam and Abraham. Such verbal dialogs usually draw on cultural proverbs and paradigms, Quranic verses, and verses from the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil. In some cases, victims desire to read and discuss selected samples of their sources of strength and faith.

Forming groups to address community development challenges is a critical first step toward having spiritual dialog among a small number of people who have a prior relationship and trust each other for mutual support. Many pre-believer groups formed to tackle practical recovery challenges welcome the infusion of transformative dialog as part of the recovery group's agenda. Many pre-believer

groups, formed to support practical recovery, grow in faith and eventually become small groups of believers.

8. Team Meetings that Clarify Operational Principles

Most management systems after disasters are too bureaucratic and slow. At the opposite extreme, some are too autonomous, wasteful and lacking coordination and direction.

Our leaders from disaster response and recovery teams initially meet weekly for two hours to listen to each other (if distances are a factor, these may transition to bimonthly meetings after some months). The coordination meetings have four purposes: 1) to gain better understanding of recovery challenges through multiple peoples' lenses; 2) to link resources and synchronize effort; 3) to provide cross-training in a relational context; and 4) to clarify principles that undergird the field decisions of individual facilitators of recovery. This last purpose allows facilitators to make decisions in the field, knowing they harmonize with broader principles of the team, without being delayed by having to get permission from supervisors on each decision. They evaluate together, then revise their plans for effective service.

Case studies of spiritual progress are presented by more experienced facilitators, to provide learning opportunities for others. Spiritually oriented challenges can be discussed and solutions sought together while at the same time reinforcing the principles behind them.

During the COVID-19 global crisis, virtual meetings of team leaders will need to be a higher priority, with skills developed in this sphere.

9. Innovation

We encourage not just putting back the pieces so that recovery returns things to normalcy. We aim for innovative solutions that potentially will improve conditions via incremental evaluations and adjustments.

Trial and error is used on a small scale to test best possible solutions. A period of great loss might need to be followed by carefully guided paradigm change, or transition to find better means for supporting the goals of the community. Methods of building, means of getting drinking water, and the type of crops or agricultural methods chosen might need to be revised in the most optimal direction possible, in the period after great setbacks. Centuries-old agricultural methods and crop and fertilizer choices might have reduced soil quality or market value and need to be revisited. Experimentation on a small scale with multiple comparative case studies should be encouraged and funded.

Innovation is risky. One part of loving people and God is helping to bear the cost of innovation for longer-term compassionate solutions. Victims who increase their faith can embrace innovation, expecting God to guide.

During this COVID-19 crisis, we will need to prioritize innovation in urban areas, because of greater needs there. However, many people are likely to return to their parents' homes in villages and smaller cities, where food might be easier to come by.

10. Multicultural Synergy

Most workers should be local or near-local people, but mixing in selected foreigners might make an optimal balance of team composition and roles for the recovery period. Outsiders are needed because impoverished local conditions require linking agents who bring in outside resources and ideas. Local people can operate more economically and with less confusion. Yet having the right kind and amount of foreign involvement provides an added advantage, particularly after a crisis. Outside perspective and connections are helpful during the chaos of crisis recovery—for ideas and for connection to resources.

The key is capable field leaders and community facilitators who can build and synchronize multicultural teams. These capable field leaders and facilitators must be of the type who can serve amidst chaos. To be successful, outsider or near-culture community facilitators need local organizers who are flexible in relating to outsiders. These are often not the same people as community leaders previously chosen by communities to protect the status quo in traditional cultures. Community facilitators must be careful to avoid isolating local organizers and to win endorsement for them (and for joint programs) from longer-term status-quo leaders.

Disaster victims have lost much and have few options to improve their future. We must be, and pray for, people of integrity, honesty, and wholesome character. This is critical to minimize negative emotions often felt by victims. Loving God and others, finding local organizers, and promoting godliness in victims supports effective recovery.

11. Fruit-based Management

Most disaster responses focus on the helpers' activities. We need, rather, to focus on outcomes for the beneficiaries: the actual outputs, outcomes and impacts that help them. Markers of fruit, and progress toward fruit, help us discern the right direction and then evaluate and improve service. Establishing a culture of discussing matters openly and constructively reduces fear of criticism and increases fruit production.

Markers of fruit in disaster recovery include 1) the number of people eating, with homes, with their children in school, who are healthy; 2) the number of people working again; 3) the number of need-based groups formed to pursue practical solutions; and 4) the number of need-based groups who have added transformative dialog and are making spiritual progress. Meetings of community facilitators should clarify fruit markers that indicate short-term progress, building cumulatively in the right direction. Team meetings should periodically evaluate progress toward those markers and revise plans to make incremental improvements.

Spiritually, time should be taken periodically to celebrate partial progress made and give thanks to the Lord who provided that progress. Dialog helps us center our efforts to produce fruit around the source and owner of all fruit.

Conclusion

Fruitful teams support sustainable disaster recovery integrated with sustainable Church Planting Movements. They orient themselves around a set of principles and empower their field workers to make decisions and act based on alignment. These eleven sustainability principles have been observed in the most fruitful teams involved in such ministries.

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