

Emergency response:

Mobilisation of resources at the right time to the right place

By Bob Vlietstra



Natural disasters are unpredictable. Earthquakes, floods and landslides will often occur without warning. Political and religious power struggles can result in untold human suffering. All of these potential tragedies can not only set back the most sophisticated development plans but may also effect local food security, housing, medical care and education amongst many other things. With the international community focusing on humanitarian needs following any disaster, it places an enormous responsibility on aid organisations to quickly mobilise funding, equipment and logistical support.

Meeting urgent requirements

Hot spots are scattered around the world and ranging from boat refugees in Thailand, victims of the ongoing civil war in Sudan, continued human suffering on the Balkans, ethnic crises in Rwanda and the long term struggle in Chechnya to name just a few. The events in Liberia continue to be challenging although not being broadcasted live in the media on a daily basis. While the inputs for each emergency may differ, response on the Balkan where snow and temperatures of -20°C are common compared with Rwanda during the raining season, there is always one common thread being the need for an immediate and appropriate response.

Emergency approach

Driven on humanitarian principles, the United Nations and Non Governmental Organisations are often taking the lead in emergencies. Given their existing local and regional networks, those organisations are well positioned to undertake assessments, define and prioritise the most urgently needed humanitarian support and deliver it to those who are affected. For many years, the trend in emergency preparedness has been to store large stocks of basic supplies at various strategic locations. This can be an

expensive proposition as those relief stocks will deteriorate and pharmaceutical preparations expire or loose their efficacy.

Implementation of emergency response

Rather than investing in emergency stock-piles of basic relief goods that may not even be appropriate for the given disaster, it may be more advantageous to invest in an external procurement infrastructure, offering fast track procurement capacity on an 'when and as needed' basis. Such an approach can capitalise on local or regional networks which are better positioned to assess the situation and assist in defining a response. Working through an experienced procurement agency will help to ensure that best value supplies and equipment are obtained



for the beneficiaries. Financial and quality aspects on one hand and availability and logistics on the other will lead to final decisions of where to place orders.

Circumstances will prioritise selection criteria but all decisions are well documented, following pre-negotiated guidelines and conditions. The process will also ensure transparency and accountability for the donor during the entire decision making process and provide logistical solutions to the most remote areas.

Bob Vlietstra is Managing Director of International Procurement Agency B.V., www.ipa-bv.nl, in Bussum, the Netherlands and USA International Procurement Agency in Canton, Ohio. Trained as procurement professional in the area of electric power and the automotive sector, Bob joined IPA in 1983. Intensive travelling was undertaken in East Africa, Eastern Europe, former Yugoslavia, Russian States and more recently West Africa and the Far East. During the eighties and the early nineties, major support to emergency operations has been provided in various parts of the World. Full attention was also given to business development and the implementation of major procurement contracts. Since the mid nineties, a large number of procurement consultancy assignments have been implemented, including overall procurement capacity assessments. Furthermore, procurement monitoring & auditing assignments are frequently undertaken. Bob is married and has 2 teenage sons.