

**Washington, DC Office:** 1816 Jefferson Place, NW • Washington, DC 20036 • p 202-833-5515 • f 202-833-5540

**Chicago Office:** 211 West Wacker Drive • Suite 1800 • Chicago, IL 60606 • p 312-345-9033 • f 312-332-9915

**New York Office:** 12 Desbrosses Street • New York, NY 10013 • p 646-723-0671 • f 212-226-7186

[www.arabellaadvisors.com](http://www.arabellaadvisors.com) • [info@arabellaadvisors.com](mailto:info@arabellaadvisors.com)

## **Myanmar Disaster Teleconference May 16, 2008**

### **Co- Sponsors**

Council on Foundations

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### **Speakers**

Marcus Prior, United Nations World Food Program, Bangkok, Public Affairs Officer

Jonathon Mitchell, Care International, Geneva, Emergency Response Director

Wyndham James, Save the Children China, Country Director

Ronna D. Brown, New York Regional Association of Grantmakers, President

Regine Webster, Arabella Advisors, Nashville, Disaster Philanthropy Advisors

### **Moderator**

Eric Kessler, Arabella Advisors, Principal and Managing Director

### **Situation Report**

*Marcus Prior from WFP delivered and updated report of the situation in Myanmar.*

This been a very trying time and there is a great need for support to all humanitarian actors. So far, WFP has managed to dispatch \$9.5 million dollars for food and \$50 million for logistics, providing enough food for over 200,000 people, including high energy biscuits and rice & beans. This is progress compared to a few days ago. One of the greatest challenges is moving around and reaching people. The best way to do so is through the waterways. The WFP has been able to get some logistical teams on the ground. They need the expertise of high skilled emergency responders; one of the key factors missing in the situation so far. Access is improving for international staff, but movement within country is limited. As the cluster lead, WFP is an enabler for others and for itself. It is coordinating the efforts of many, including UN.

- Why hasn't the UN invoked its responsibility to cross the border to drop food and aid?
  - On the practical level, we need helicopters not to drop food though. So much of the aid would be lost due to the waterlogged land. Dropping food from the sky is dangerous without teams on the ground and risks humanitarian casualties. However the UN is engaged at the highest level with the politicians. We have seen an improvement in access to people. As more international aid experts arrive on the ground, we are better able to meet acute needs.
  
- What is the status of telecommunications?
  - Telecommunications is essential. We have been able to set up a station in the field that improves communication between the field and office, and are also able to track the dispatch of food, that it is arriving, and being handed over to partners. These systems ensure that the food and other humanitarian items are getting to those who need it most.

### **Vision for long-term recovery**

*Jonathon Mitchell, of Care spoke about the INGO response and plans for long-term recovery.*

Care assessment teams have found desperate situations of people living without food or water. It is currently the hunger season in Myanmar, and the next round of crops have been destroyed. There has been wonderful collaboration amongst the NGO community. It is estimated that 300-500,000 people have been assisted by NGO's so far. Some have been on the ground for several years (CARE, Save the Children, World Vision, Medicine Sans Frontier). These organizations have been able to start early on. It is important for additional NGO's to come in and provide additional support. But with the issues of obtaining visa's, the NGO's are really coming together and joining forces to collaborate on getting supplies into Myanmar and partnering to deliver them to the people. NGO's are also benefiting from WFP coordination.

Care has a plan that looks at immediate relief, transition, and long-term recovery. In the short-term, Care is working with WFP and others to distribute food, healthcare (MSF), providing clean water and access to pumping stations, and temporary shelters. In the longer-term, the focus is on helping farmers and communities rebuild their livelihood – building back better so communities can be better prepared to face this sort of disaster.

Political context is difficult. In addition to direct aid, it is important for the international community to remain engaged and be in solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

- What is the relative impact between large NGOs and local community based organizations (CBO's)?
  - It is a combination. Different types of NGOs have complementary skills and values. Some of the smaller ones are out within the communities. The larger ones gain

significant value by linking up with the smaller CBO's. They are able to link up the aid and support from the outside and they do best working together.

- How would you advise donors in regards to investing in immediate relief and long-term recovery?
  - Most of the attention is focused on immediate relief. It will indeed take some time to reach the long-term plans. Over a 3 year period Care's target is \$10m which includes allocations for both the immediate relief and long-term recovery. Care staff are largely locals. A large part of its work is part of the local community.

### **The latest situation in China and the engagement of the international community**

*Wyndham James from Save the Children in China provides insight on relief and recovery efforts in response to the earthquake.*

There was a massive public response. Because of the openness of the work, people in China have contributed large sums of money and want to volunteer their time to help. The government responded massively and quickly into a difficult area. NGOs are figuring out what they can do to best compliment the coordination between them and the government. A key issue is the impact on children, many of whom were in school during the time of the quake. We are seeing death on a large scale that has really torn communities apart. Important specialists are arriving and we are reallocating the roles. Search and rescue continues, but as the time goes on, the demand for water and food has increased and government is responding.

The NFO role in China is not the emergency relief; the government has mobilized significant aid in this regard. So our role is to focus on children and families and how to support them, including: child friendly places, schools, fostering community, support grieving of parents and assisting them in their search for food and water, as well as health and sanitation work.

- Where is the charitable giving in china going?
  - Local Red Cross in china. Charities, corporate foundations, newspapers are also running appeals – not sure where they will channel their money to.
- There have been mixed reports on environmental damage – will the new found openness of the Chinese government in approach to this tragedy, be extended over into their openness to discuss the environmental and health concerns?
  - Don't know. They did report that a train has been burning oil for several days and have reported the threat and danger of damaged roads and dams.
- How have politics with Tibetan region played out in the response?

- There aren't any political issues surrounding response to Tibetans. No sign of politicking around supporting them. The political agenda is separated between humanitarian response and politics.
- How would you advise donors?
  - We are confident about our contribution that can be made here. We are already having conversations about the longer-term, 12-18 month period. It is important to be realistic about what you will do. We are expecting to be there for some while; not just an emergency relief program. In addition to looking at the short-term 2-10 week period, we are simultaneously beginning to plan for future efforts. We want money now to enable us to get up and going, but also confident that there will be program beyond that and will be looking for a second phase of funding.

### **How philanthropists can effectively support the relief and recovery efforts**

*Ronna Brown, President, of NYRAG spoke from her experience coordinating New York's philanthropic response to Hurricane Katrina.*

NYRAG released an excellent publication just last month entitled Best Practices in Disaster Philanthropy, available at [www.nyrag.org](http://www.nyrag.org). The report came from interviews with funders and nonprofits who worked in response to the gulf coast. A few of the best practices noted are:

1. Funders with real knowledge in the area sharing their information with other funders, with great specificity. Not just who, but the kind of grant, the contact information and the foundation contacts lets other funders come in and learn from their experience.
  2. Critical role that large organizations play in collaboration with smaller organizations.
  3. It is very important, when people are thinking about support, to consider the long-term. Gaps may not be identified for months or years.
- What is the message community foundations can give their local communities to support response
    - We are encouraging people to work together in a collaborative way. Be in touch with those who have been working for a while in the region.

Lesson we learned from philanthropist in the aftermath of Katrina:

1. We had to create a group of people who recognized they cared about this and put into place communication tools. It is important to have this in order before a disaster, so we are not spending energy post disaster in its coordination.
2. Looking internally at foundations, it is important for them to be realistic, avoid making nonprofits go thru the normal hoops, and be willing to go beyond the normal funding area. We should all think about putting these systems in place to be more responsive in the face of a disaster.

### **Disaster response and recovery plan**

*Regine Webster, Arabella Disaster Philanthropy Advisor spoke from experience on the components of a high impact disaster recovery response and recovery plan.*

Components of a high impact disaster response and recovery plan?

1. It takes commitment from all players including the affected population, NGOs, and donors.
2. Understand the local cultural context. The actors on the ground need to be attuned to differences.
3. Attention should be paid to affected populations and their participation in the recovery process.
4. Take into account all of the different sectors that come into play (health, agriculture, trade, education, etc).
5. Efforts should be geared toward getting local markets back up and running, including cash for work programming and microfinance programs.

Regine is directing grants out of the Arabella Advisors Disaster Recovery Fund. That fund is focused exclusively on long-term recovery efforts. Sam Worthington of Interaction, John Davies of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Valerie Lies of the Donors Forum of Chicago, Rick Purnell of the UNFoundation, and others are all serving on the advisory board of the Disaster Relief Fund.

Regine notes that we are not ready to identify grantees yet as so much of the crisis has yet to unfold. The international organizations working with CBO's are focused on immediate relief efforts. Organizations are working very hard on immediate needs now. It would be premature to point to a grantee at this point.

It is important for early warning, disaster risk reduction strategies be built into recovery planning. And it is imperative that donors commit to playing a role in the recovery process. We all have a role to play and should all commit to the recovery in Myanmar.

Details about the Disaster Recovery Fund and the link to sign up for future updates and notices of future donor briefing calls are at [www.arabellaadvisors.com](http://www.arabellaadvisors.com).

Arabella Advisors would be pleased to continue our efforts but want to know that they are of help to philanthropists. If you would like us to hold another call as more information and recovery plans become available, please let us know by sending an email to [Myanmarrecovery@arabellaadvisors.com](mailto:Myanmarrecovery@arabellaadvisors.com).