

2010 Final Report

Asia Assessment Summary



Prepared by:

Emma Taylor,
Media and Marketing Director
European Disaster Volunteers

Andrew Chaggar,
Executive Director
European Disaster Volunteers

European Disaster Volunteers is an
England and Wales Registered Charity.
Charity number 1132011. Company
Limited by guarantee number 6985659

Asia Assessment Final Report Summary

Page |
2

The full Asia Assessment Final Report seeks to provide a comprehensive, detailed picture of our assessment and how it revealed that with our limited financial resources a deployment in Asia would not have positively impacted the lives of disaster survivors and therefore would have been financially irresponsible.

Because the full report is very long, this document provides a brief summary of its key contents and gives an overview of our assessment's findings. This summary makes no attempt to cover all the facts and findings of our Asia Assessment. For the full details of the information discussed here, please refer to the appropriate section of our full Asia Assessment Final Report which can be found here:

http://www.edvolunteers.org/sites/default/files/AP_Full_Final_Report.pdf

As discussed in the "Essential Background" on page four of the Full Report, we responded to the disasters which struck Asia and the Pacific in the autumn of 2009 because our research and experience indicated a need for long-term aid which would reduce the vulnerability of communities in an extremely disaster prone part of the world. The typhoons which struck Vietnam and the Philippines particularly drew our attention because these countries are struck by up to twenty typhoons every year and are consequently particularly vulnerable to disasters.

Our assessment team, made up of Executive Director Andrew Chaggar and Media and Marketing Director Emma Taylor, spent almost three months exploring how EDV might be able to respond to these disasters in a way that would reduce community vulnerability for the inevitable 2010 storms. The team produced technical reports on both countries detailing their day-to-day activities and findings which are available in the Full Assessment Report on pages seven and twenty.

These findings confirmed what EDV's research and experience indicated prior to assessment - that many communities are indeed trapped in a cycle of losing their homes and livelihoods in the yearly disasters and could benefit hugely from long-term, volunteer-driven aid. Further, while on the surface many communities have recovered from the most recent typhoons, the recovery is only skin deep. The underlying vulnerabilities remain.

These findings demonstrate that although we did not deploy EDV's understanding of the need for long-term support in both Vietnam and the Philippines was essentially correct.

However while assessment revealed need, it also revealed huge challenges which eventually crippled EDV's ability to deploy. In the end it became clear that deployment was impossible without significantly more start-up funding than EDV possessed.

That funding insufficiency has its roots in a number of factors which interacted to create a situation where affordable projects were few and legally complex. With these affordable projects out of reach, the remaining projects required large amounts of start-up funding which EDV simply didn't possess. The details of these projects in both Vietnam and the Philippines are contained in the technical reports on those countries.

The factors which introduced the very high degree of legal complication centre on the nature of the disasters and the way in which they impacted both Vietnam and the Philippines. Some of the most important factors are outlined in the bullet points below. As these factors also provide excellent opportunities for EDV to learn and grow, they are more fully explained in the “Opportunities for Organisational Learning” section of the full report on page 27 and in the individual technical reports on Vietnam and the Philippines.

Page |

- 3
- **Time scale:** When unusual and extremely destructive disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis occur, there is an explicit need for aid for many months, even years, after the event. This means that a delayed deployment, which begins many months after the initial disaster, will likely find fertile ground. As our directors’ prior experience has all been in earthquake and tsunami zones, we anticipated that the disaster zones in Vietnam and the Philippines would operate by similar models. This was not the case. In a disaster zone caused by recurring disasters, like the yearly typhoons which affect Vietnam and the Philippines, delayed responses are much more complex and are not guaranteed to encounter the unconditional welcome afforded to international aid groups after more unusual disasters.
 - **Attitude toward disaster:** Interlinked with the above point, recurring disasters are not perceived in the same way as the unusual and singularly catastrophic disasters our founding members had responded to previously. In the case of recurring disasters, the urgency to address their long-term effects is simply not as apparent as in a catastrophic disaster zone. This business as usual attitude combined with cultural context creates a difficult operating environment.
 - **Nature of the disaster impacts:** The catastrophic disasters which form the basis of our experience were geographically concentrated, presenting an area of highly concentrated damage. Typhoons, on the other hand, can affect a very large area with long term damage isolated in small pockets. This presents a difficult and expensive operating model.
 - **The need for greater start-up funding:** Our estimates of how much start-up funding we would need were based on our research prior to assessment and our founding members’ years of experience. However, much of this experience proved difficult to relate to the nature of the disasters in Asia. This led to an underestimation of how much funding we would need in typhoon-affected Asia. In the end our start-up funding was insufficient. We remain convinced that, with more funding, we would have been able to deploy in Asia.
 - **Registration and legal requirements:** The timing of our response, the nature of the disasters and the attitudes toward those disasters resulted in an operating environment where the authorities did not afford us the flexibility we had enjoyed on deployments with similar organisations in other disaster zones. This more restrictive environment meant that EDV was obliged to go through a lengthy and expensive registration process which both delayed any deployment and consumed funds.

It’s important to note that had only one or two of these issues been presented to EDV deployment would have gone ahead. However, when considered together, they made the situation untenable.

In the end, the nature of the disasters led to continuous delays and financial burdens which we did not anticipate. We found ourselves in a situation where, had EDV started any projects, we would have run out of funds within a few weeks.

This would have let down the volunteers, the disaster affected community, and betrayed the trust of survivors. Betraying that trust but could have actually undermined the community's future willingness to work with international aid groups and done long-term harm.

Page | Faced with our inability to provide sustainable support the assessment team made the difficult decision to
4 withdraw from Asia

Plans for the Future

While we acknowledge that this is a difficult blow for EDV, we also believe that by withdrawing from Asia we are demonstrating EDV's commitment to sustainable disaster recovery.

Our decision not to deploy was made because we could not provide meaningful aid that would have left communities better able to meet their own needs. Therefore our presence would not have been useful and could actually have caused harm. Making the decision to leave Asia demonstrates our awareness of the larger issues always present in disaster response.

Choosing not to deploy also reflects our commitment to honouring our donors' wishes. EDV is committed to investing in projects which will make the most of donated money by funding sustainable recovery and not just an operational response by EDV. As our funding was insufficient to drive projects which would make a sustainable impact in Asia, any investment would have been equivalent to putting our donors' money toward unsustainable projects and would have been an irresponsible use of funds.

So while donors may be surprised and disappointed that the money they donated to our Asia Pacific Disaster Recovery Appeal has not been used as they had initially expected, we hope they can be reassured by the fact that their money has not gone toward projects which would have proved unsustainable.

Moving forward from Asia, we are looking into possible responses in other disaster zones which would allow a more flexible and less resource intensive start to operations. We're also tapping into new funding sources, pursuing new advertising and media partnerships to raise awareness about EDV, and continuing to develop our Disaster Awareness scheme which aims to raise awareness about how the choices we make at home affect lives half a world away.

We believe that these on-going schemes and the strengths we showed in Asia will carry EDV forward in good stead. We may not have deployed, but in not deploying we demonstrated a commitment to our mission statement, our goals in disaster response, and our obligation to use our donors' money honestly and responsibly. As these are the foundations of a successful and long-lived charity, we are now moving forward with confidence and excitement.

If you have any questions about the findings in this report or any other aspect of EDV and our Asia assessment, please email executive@europeandisastervolunteers.org.