

## Responding to Disaster

Author: Rob Hay, interviewing Fiona Wilson, International Coordinator, Integral

**Abstract:** *The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) has the largest pot of money ever raised in the UK but just what is it? You may be surprised. It has a longer history than you might think. Integral is a new exciting Christian alliance that was just being birthed as the wave rolled in. Find out more about both of these organisations in this article written from an interview with Fiona Wilson, formerly of Tearfund, a DEC member agency, now the International Coordinator of Integral.*

Yesterday was the first month's anniversary of the Tsunami. It was also the day that the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) announced that they had received over one quarter of a billion pounds. That is two hundred and fifty million pounds. This was by far and away the largest amount of money ever raised for a single relief effort. To give some context, Band Aid and Live Aid only raised £40 million. The fact that this amount was raised in just 31 days (that is almost one million pounds per day) makes it all the more remarkable. So just who is the DEC? Who is this organisation that has received so much of the public's money?

The DEC began life in 1963 when Lord Astor, Chair of the British organisation for Aid to Refugees proposed that organisations like the British Red Cross, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (now Oxfam), Inter Church (now Christian Aid), the Foreign Office and others should devise a mechanism for co-operation enabling a joint response to large scale disasters (at this time there was no government department for overseas aid as there is now (Department for International Development). Its main role was initially to simply exchange information and then also to obtain logistical support to respond to disasters from organisations like the Armed Services and medical and surgical help from the British Medical Association and The Royal College of Surgeons. Co-operation on fundraising appeals and mobilisation of TV and radio to that end was postponed for later discussion. The British Red Cross agreed to provide the co-ordinating role and the DEC was born.

By the time of its first appeal for the Turkish Earthquake in 1966, the BBC and Independent Television had signed agreements to allow the DEC free time for appeals, and banks and the Post Office had agreed to waive charges on money donated via their branches. Since then the DEC has launched an appeal on average every nine months. Recent ones include the Indian Earthquake of 2001, Liberian Crisis of 2003, and the Sudan emergency in July last year. However before the Tsunami appeal the largest amount raised was the Kosovo Crisis appeal of 1999 when £53 million pounds was raised.

DEC comprises 12 member agencies: Action Aid, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care International, Christian Aid, Concern, Help the Aged, Merlin, Oxfam, Save the Children, Tearfund and World Vision. Over the years its structure and processes have been reviewed and revised but it now operates with a speed and efficiency that is rare in the world of partnerships, alliances and joint working. If a disaster occurs, any member agency can bring it to the attention of the DEC for potential appeal status. This is done via the Secretariat, a small staff who facilitate the partnership from Great Portland Street in London. Each member agency then submits a response indicating if they would support the disaster becoming a DEC appeal, what resources they have in the area and available to respond, and what capacity they have to use any funds raised. It takes a positive response from five agencies to launch an appeal and only those that have indicated at the outset that they will participate, will receive funds. The funds raised are divided up on the basis of the agencies capacity to spend and so an agreed division of funds in terms of a percentage of the total raised is agreed and documented before the appeal begins. This whole process is done by fax and teleconference and often takes just a matter of hours. How does it work so well?

Simplicity and impartiality seem to be the key. The reliance on simple, well tested technology of fax and phone coupled with having a single contact person in each agency and a rigid policy of treating all member agencies equally. Technology comes in later when the detailed resources of each agency are mapped on a secure shared web server.

This participative partnership approach has affected many areas of DEC's working, with agencies using each others strengths to respond effectively to disasters e.g. if one agency has a better record of gaining visas for workers they will assist another agency who may be new to a particular country. The partnership is also built on trust: Once an agency has committed to a DEC appeal they agree not to run their own individual appeal. Gifts given to an individual agency can be retained as usual but not appealed for. This trust and degree of partnership does not happen by accident or inaction and is largely achieved by all agencies understanding the need to work together to raise funds for the immediate needs following any disaster situation. The Chief Executive of DEC, Bendan Gormley works with a combination of tenacity and diplomacy to minimise gossip and competition between agencies, who in fundraising from the British public can be seen as competitors.

Tearfund UK has been a member of the DEC for many years, and the advantages are manifold; the ability to appeal to a wider audience, to be seen as part of a unified relief and development effort rightly gains respect and demonstrates integrity.

At the same time that the DEC was co-ordinating a UK response to the tsunami, so was a very new global alliance called Integral. Integral is made up of 12 Christian relief & development agencies from 11 of the richest funding nations. Tearfund UK is the only UK member agency. Its mission statement explains its purpose: 'To work in collaboration as national relief and development agencies committed to maximising the holistic impact of our Christian response to the poor worldwide.'

The desire to see whole life impact of the relief & development work of the member agencies inspired the choice of the name as integral means 'one whole that cannot be divided'. Integral formally came into being in November 2004 when Doug Balfour left Tearfund UK after nine years as its General Director and took up the post of Executive Director followed shortly afterwards by Fiona Wilson who worked as Doug's Research Assistant at Tearfund. Fiona is Integral's International Coordinator.

Integral seeks to bring the member agencies together in four main areas – firstly in underlying philosophy, mission, vision & values, secondly over programmes – both relief & development, thirdly in marketing & fundraising, & finally in the support areas like human resources & IT. Talks about forming an alliance began in April 2002, & since then, agencies have worked together to respond to crises in Iraq & Liberia.

January 2005 was meant to have been a month where Fiona and Doug worked on formalising the policies of the new partnership so that they would be ready for the next crisis. Boxing Day changed all that. Integral is already up and running, providing a coordinated response to the Tsunami with the member agencies that have resources on the ground receiving support, funds and assistance from other member agencies. Integral is working in Sri Lanka through Stromme Foundation as the co-ordinating agency, in India through Tearfund UK as the co-ordinating agency, & operationally in Indonesia through World Relief US. It is a steep learning curve and a testing time for a young new alliance but it is exactly the situation it was created to respond to.

Integral's strapline "Christian agencies united to combat poverty" captures its overall vision, & the member agencies all want to see more collaboration and learning, project level coordination, effective use of funding and having a Kingdom impact. The demonstration of unity was welcomed by bodies like the UN when the alliance worked together in the Iraqi crisis & in the future it is hoped that Integral's embodiment of unity should help with working alongside bilateral donors and international organisations such as the Department for International Development, the UN and the European Union.

The roles of the DEC and Integral are different and certainly not mutually exclusive but it is fair to say that there are a number of lessons that Integral can learn from the DEC and it has already benefited from Brendan Gormley's advice as they have started their journey. What about the scriptural principle of unity – such a powerful demonstration of the kingdom – e.g. Jesus prayer in John 17.20 – 'I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me & I am in you.' With scripture warning us that the poor will always be present in this world it seems that Integral have a long-term task ahead but the focus of having a Kingdom impact is refreshing. Like the history of the DEC, Integral will undoubtedly make mistakes and need review and refinement but it is an exciting attempt at making Christian impact more effective in an increasingly complex and globalised world.

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