

Preparation more effective than emergency aid in dealing with climate-related disasters, experts claim

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Emergency aid provided in the aftermath of natural disasters like floods, earthquakes and tsunamis, has “critical shortcomings” that could be overcome with better preparation, experts say.

Speaking as world leaders gather for the UN Climate Change Conference in Doha, Dr Benedetta Rossi, lecturer of West African Studies at the University of Birmingham, warns that preparing for climate-related disaster is a “substantially more effective approach... than emergency aid interventions developed in the aftermath of crisis”.

Dr Rossi joins an event held in partnership with Islamic Relief, at the University of Birmingham this evening (Thurs) to warn that, while emergency relief is necessary and saves lives, it also has its drawbacks.

“It is not only that emergency aid is more expensive, and therefore less efficient. But it is also predicated on the assumption that the most economically marginal people (who are often the first ones to suffer from the immediate consequences of climate-related disasters) only have a right to food, shelter, and basic social services once they have become victims of severe impoverishment and malnutrition,” she is due to say.

“An emphasis on disaster preparedness recognizes that poor communities and individuals should be helped when they are still healthy and capable to help themselves – that is, *before* they become victims of hunger and acute destitution.”

According to Islamic Relief, climate-related disasters increased 4.1% a year from 1980 to 2010 and in 2010/11, more than 25 million people were affected by a succession of major natural disasters. There were floods in Pakistan; an earthquake in Haiti and typhoons across the Asian countries of Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. Since then, prolonged drought has led to massive food and water shortages across East and West Africa, and there are currently more than 29 million people suffering from chronic malnutrition.

Dr Rossi notes: “A critical shortcoming of emergency aid is that some of its responses tend to shift responsibility for the prevention of famine away from national axes of political accountability. International emergency programmes reach persons who have become anonymous victims in a system of global development governance that is not directly accountable to them. Instead, aid policies should encourage citizens of poor countries to expect their governments to prioritise food security...”

“By increasing the livelihood security of marginal groups, a disaster preparedness approach improves the capacity of vulnerable groups to rely on democratic mechanisms of political participation in order to put pressure on their local and national representatives.”

A spokeswoman for Islamic Relief said: “If more money was invested in resilience and climate-change adaptation programmes, fewer people would die and fewer homes and businesses would be destroyed when the next disaster strikes.”

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Note to Editors

Join the University of Birmingham, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the Director of the World Development Movement and the Associate Editor of the New Statesman to discuss how investment in climate-change adaptation programmes and resilience could save thousands of lives during natural disasters.

Event Date: November 29 2012

Location: Main Arts Lecture Theatre, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston {view [campus map](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/edgbaston-map.pdf) (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/edgbaston-map.pdf>) }

Time: 6:30pm-8:00pm

Free event but booking is essential. Please contact Reyhana Patel at Reyhana.Patel@irworldwide.org (mailto:Reyhana.Patel@irworldwide.org) OR 0121 622 0710 for more information OR please see [poster](http://www.islamic-relief.com/InDepth/downloads/Event_Feeling%20the%20heat_Poster.pdf) (http://www.islamic-relief.com/InDepth/downloads/Event_Feeling%20the%20heat_Poster.pdf) for further details.