

Aid agencies jostle for position

MATTHEW WEAVER - Feb 01 2010 13:18

Aid agencies have been accused of "jostling for position" and putting their own interests above those of the victims in the Haiti earthquake.

In a caustic editorial, the respected medical journal *The Lancet* attacked the way charities and other NGOs have clamoured for attention in the wake of the disaster.

"NGOs are rightly mobilising, but also jostling for position, each claiming that they are doing the most for earthquake survivors," it said.

The Lancet did not name any agencies, many of which lost staff members in the disaster, but questioned the way several have claimed to be "spearheading" relief efforts.

"The situation in Haiti is chaotic, devastating, and anything but co-ordinated," it said, arguing that the response to the earthquake has highlighted questions about the competitive ethos of large aid agencies.

The issue has emerged in past emergencies, including the Asian tsunami in 2004.

"Polluted by the internal power politics and the unsavoury characteristics seen in many big corporations, large aid agencies can be obsessed with raising money through their own appeal efforts. Media coverage as an end in itself is too often an aim of their activities," it said.

Worse still, it accused agencies of acting selfishly to the detriment of those they were supposed to be helping. "It seems increasingly obvious that many aid agencies sometimes act according to their own best interests rather than in the interests of individuals whom they claim to help," *The Lancet* stated.

It urged aid agencies to do more to collaborate in response to disasters. "Relief efforts in the field are sometimes competitive with little collaboration between agencies, including smaller grassroots charities that may have better networks in affected counties and so are well-placed to immediately implement emergency relief," it said.

Andrew Hogg, campaigns editor for Christian Aid, rejected the criticism and detailed the collaboration of the charity with other international NGOs and local groups.

"Within hours of being dug from the rubble in Port-au-Prince last week, Christian Aid's country manager, Prosperity Raymond, and programme manager, Abdou Diouf, were liaising with local partner organisations about the provision of relief," Hogg said.

Hannah Reichardt, emergencies adviser at Save the Children, said: "We have a staff of 200 in Haiti only two are doing media work. Our response to the crisis in Haiti is a humanitarian one,

not a media one."

But she added: "It's absolutely vital that we put effort into media work, because it's the thing that drives our fundraising.

"It might seem tasteless to some, but it's about giving people the opportunity to donate money to the people of Haiti."

She also pointed out that the work of the Disasters Emergency Committee, an umbrella group of NGOs that has raised €38-million (about R467-million) for Haiti in the United Kingdom, helps to overcome competition between agencies. -- ©Guardian News & Media 2010

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