

June 2006

# RESPONSE

The newsletter for Merlin supporters



## EAST AFRICA DROUGHT

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- ▶ Eyewitness account: Pakistan
- ▶ Fighting cholera in South Sudan

**merlin**  
medical relief, lasting health care





Merlin Chief Executive  
Carolyn Miller in Kashmir.

Over the past six months, I have had the opportunity to witness firsthand Merlin's teams providing medical relief for earthquake survivors in Kashmir, and treating malnourished children in drought-stricken northern Kenya.

My visit to Merlin's field clinics in remote parts of Kashmir left me feeling immensely proud of the team's achievements. I was particularly impressed by the dedication of our staff who have endured great hardship, working long hours and sleeping in tents in freezing conditions, to ensure the most vulnerable people get the health care they need.

In Turkana, northern Kenya, the people I met clearly appreciated Merlin's support. At one health centre, I met a girl who was so weak she could hardly stand up. I was so pleased to see her immediately devour her first ration of Plumpy Nut, the food supplement we are distributing to thousands of malnourished children.

While this emergency work was in hand, it was assuring to see that Merlin is also working for the longer term. In this part of Kenya, more than a quarter of the population have HIV, a figure which is five times the national average. Merlin is offering free HIV counselling and testing, and an increasing number of people are using this service.

In this newsletter, you can read more about what we have achieved in Kenya and other countries, and about the people you have helped. Thank you for your continued support and helping to make a difference.

*Carolyn Miller*

Carolyn Miller, Chief Executive

# EAST AFRICA DROUGHT

## Fending off starvation

More than 11 million people across East Africa are facing severe food and water shortages as the region suffers its worst drought in decades. In northern Kenya, the pastoralist communities of Wajir and Turkana districts have been hardest hit. Thousands of cattle have died, and in some areas, 30 per cent of children are malnourished – twice the rate considered critical by the World Health Organisation. Many people are now at risk of dying of diarrhoea and other preventable diseases as they have no clean water and are severely weakened by hunger.

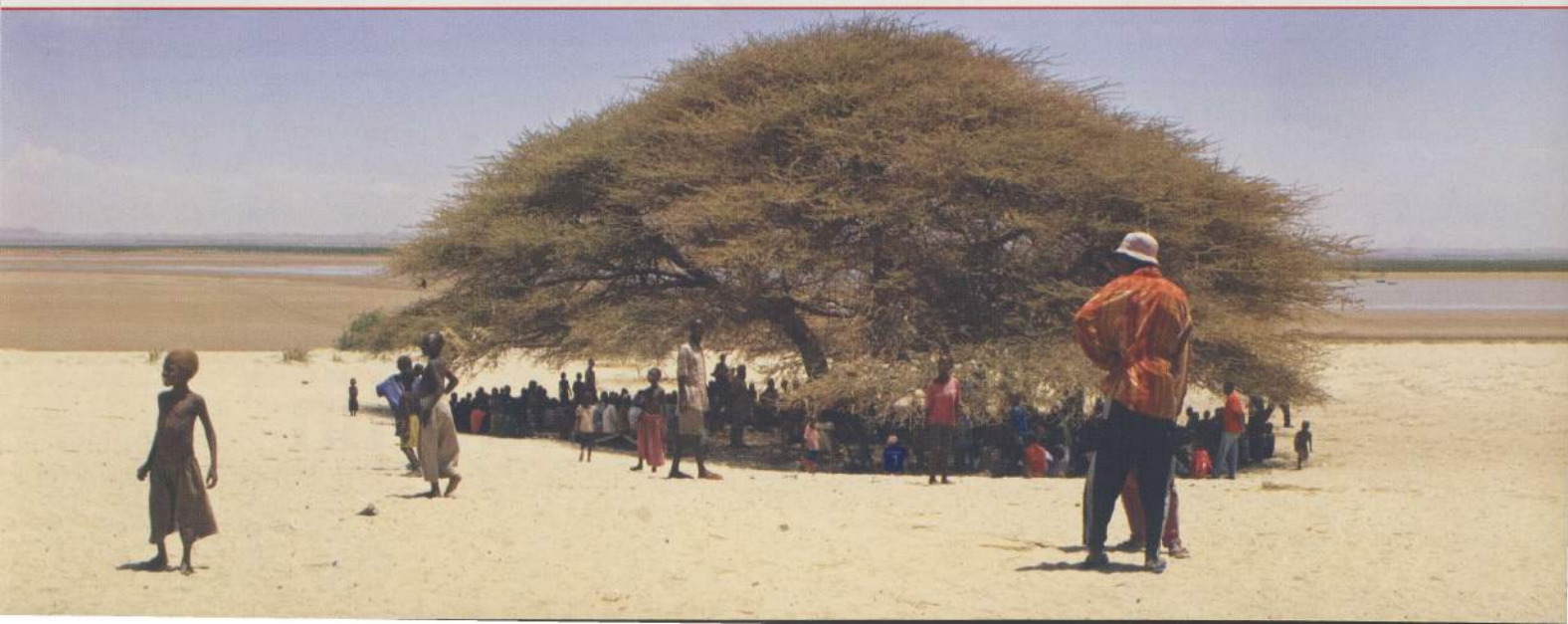
Merlin has been running mobile feeding clinics, training health workers and supporting health facilities in Wajir and Turkana since October 2004. Severely malnourished children with medical

complications are treated at Merlin-supported feeding centres at both district hospitals.

In the remote and insecure Somali Region of Ethiopia, the water shortages have become critical. Many wells are broken or have dried up, so thousands of people are forced to drink untreated water from rivers. In Afder Zone, Merlin is starting a new project to construct and repair wells, and to rehabilitate river-based water schemes. This work will ensure that over 130,000 people will have access to clean water for years to come.

Thanks to all those who so generously responded to our East Africa emergency appeal, Merlin has been able to expand its activities to help even more people in need.

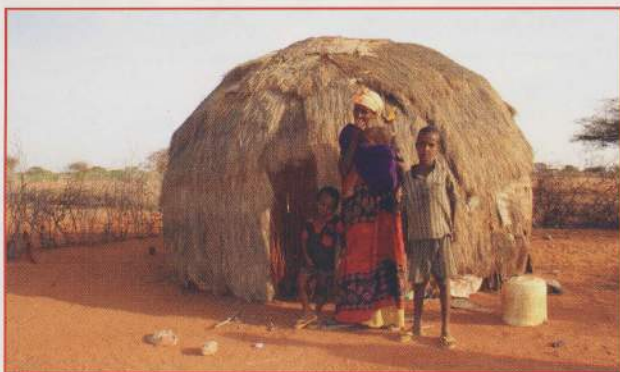
*Patients seeking shade under a tree in Turkana as they wait for Merlin's mobile clinic to arrive. Photo: Andrew Aitchison.*



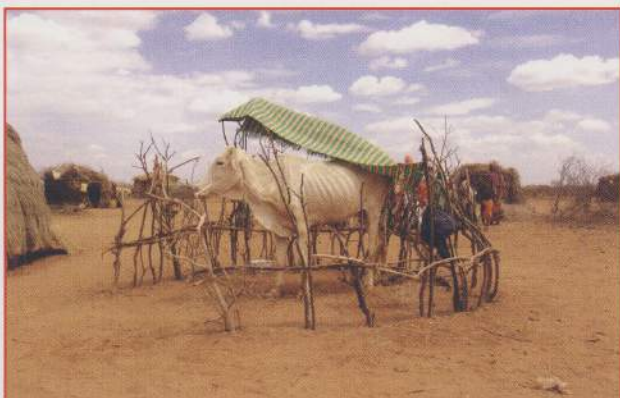




A young boy in Wagalla village having his arm measured by a 'volunteer mother' trained to identify, treat and monitor malnourished children.



Lul Abdi and her family moved to Makaro village in search of water after all their cattle died. Her youngest son is being treated for malnutrition. Photo: Sally Braithwaite.



One of the last surviving cows in Arbijahan village, Wajir.

## Merlin's emergency response

- ① Health centres supplied with water - **26**
- ① "Volunteer mothers" trained to treat malnutrition - **678**
- ① Children screened for malnutrition - **59,863**
- ① Children receiving supplementary feeding in March - **5,151**
- ① Number of villages visited by mobile teams - **232**

## A young life saved

Amina was one of the most severely malnourished children that nutritionist Nuria had ever seen. At just two kilograms, the 10-month-old girl weighed slightly less than an average newborn baby when she was admitted to Wajir District Hospital.

The baby girl was discovered by Asha, Merlin's Feeding Officer, during one of her weekly visits to remote villages in Wajir where she identifies, feeds and monitors malnourished children.

With her immune system severely weakened by lack of food, Amina had caught malaria and was critically ill. Her mother, Zena, used to collect and sell firewood after the drought killed all their cattle. But when Amina fell ill, Zena had no choice but to stay at home to care for her, losing her only source of income.

Asha immediately referred the child to the therapeutic feeding centre supported by Merlin at Wajir Hospital. The first days were challenging because the baby girl had multiple medical conditions which needed specialist treatment. "Amina had chronic diarrhoea and very low blood sugar which we would normally treat through drip feeding," explains Nuria. "But this would have overloaded her weak organs, so we gave her a sugary rehydration solution, and later moved her on to enriched milk. She was also treated for malaria."

After two weeks, Amina had still not gained enough weight. Her mother was exhausted from feeding her every three hours throughout the day and night, and there were insufficient hospital staff to cope with the huge influx of malnourished children.

In response to growing admission rates, Merlin helped the Ministry of Health to set up a tented emergency feeding centre within the hospital grounds. With new beds and equipment, and a team of specially trained nurses, Amina received the specialist care she needed and gradually recovered.

Now Amina is back at home with her family, and is regularly visited by Merlin's mobile medical team who give her supplementary food and monitor her progress.



Baby Amina being treated at Wajir Hospital.



# A legacy of lasting health care



A legacy to Merlin could help to fund a project that leaves long-term improvements to health care, like this newly refurbished hospital in Harper, Liberia.

As recently as 20 years ago, charities rarely said much about legacy giving. It was thought somehow indelicate to mention the subject; it was reminding people about death after all. The message of charitable bequests was communicated with suitable discretion and dignity to the legal profession and there would be literature available for any supporter who asked for it. Good taste prevailed.

Now all charities ask to be remembered in your Will and there is even a 150-strong alliance of charities – the Legacy Promotion Campaign – which aims to make the charitable bequest the norm rather than the exception.

They have a lot of work to do. No more than six per cent of us mention a charity in our Will. Yet the income from legacies provides almost a third of the total voluntary income of all British charities. Those who leave such a bequest obviously achieve a huge amount of good after they have passed on.

And these days there is a whole new reason for remembering a charity when making or amending that Will. Inheritance Tax is now payable on estates worth more than £275,000 at a whopping 40%. Many older people may not have realised the significance of rising property prices over the last decade and most of us would surely sooner make a direct contribution to doing good in years to come rather than write a massive cheque to the Inland Revenue!

Merlin's need for legacy income in years to come is obvious. As a relatively new charity it has less income from this source than many other organisations in the same field. Yet the need for its work will – sadly – go on and on in the decades to come. War, natural disaster and disease will continue to wreck people's lives and there will be a continued need for the emergency health care and medical assistance we supply.

Just read the following story about the JJ Dossen Hospital in Liberia – this is exactly the sort of project in whose future we could invest if we could be assured of future legacy income.

*Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf met staff and patients at the Liberian Government Hospital in Buchanan in April after officially opening the outpatients department and radiological unit constructed by Merlin. Photo: Luce Sibilla Balzarini.*

## Charles Stewart-Smith

Merlin trustee



"I am fortunate enough to have seen Merlin operating in the field. I can vouch for the fact that money left to Merlin goes where it matters – and that it makes a big difference. When

I was in Congo visiting Merlin's operations, I went to a community of about 3,000 people which had absolutely no health care: no medicines, nothing. Just £2,000 would have provided a clinic for those people. I am pleased to say that it is now up and running, but it made me think just how much difference even a relatively small fraction of my inheritance might make. That thought was with me when I last changed my Will and left something for Merlin."





## How a charitable bequest could make a difference

Jaytay Williams smiles as her baby daughter sleeps peacefully in her arms at JJ Dossen hospital in Harper, Liberia. Five-month-old Sandra had been suffering from a high fever for days. She was rushed to hospital late at night when she started convulsing. Staff immediately spotted the symptoms of cerebral malaria, a severe and potentially fatal form of the disease. A test confirmed the diagnosis and Sandra was immediately given intravenous quinine treatment. Within two days, her temperature had dropped but she was kept on the ward to ensure she made a full recovery.

Patients like Sandra can now get medical treatment, including emergency surgery, 24 hours a day at JJ Dossen. It was a very different picture when Merlin first arrived in Harper in 2004. The hospital was barely functioning, with chronic shortages of staff, medical supplies and equipment. Many of the wards remained closed and were left cluttered with broken equipment. Like most health facilities in Liberia, JJ Dossen was stripped bare by looters during the war. Midwife Elizabeth Toe describes how she and her colleagues struggled to cope after the war ended in 2003. "There was nothing left at all, no mattresses and no instruments for delivery. We just had to put patients on rusty iron beds. If we had a complicated pregnancy, we had to transfer the patient to Monrovia by a UN helicopter. But many patients died on the way."

Health officials in Harper had asked Merlin for help in May 2004 following a major outbreak of cholera. The team quickly set up a cholera treatment ward and began chlorinating wells to ensure the community had clean water. The outbreak was successfully contained but Merlin realised that there was much more work to be done.

The team soon began to renovate the buildings, to bring in new equipment and medical supplies and to recruit more staff. The hospital was officially re-opened in January 2006, with all services fully functional and free of charge, serving a population of 220,000.

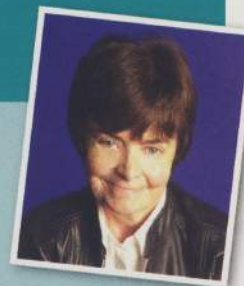
Today, Merlin continues to support JJ Dossen and 21 other health facilities in Liberia. It plans to do so for years to come.



Jaytay Williams and her baby Sandra.

## Elaine Rhodes

Merlin supporter since 1994



"As a long term supporter of Merlin, I have always had confidence that my donations go straight to people in desperate need. When my husband and I were reviewing our Wills recently, we realised that there would be a sum left over after we had taken care of bequests to family and friends. We have made Merlin one of the main charities to benefit, certain that our hard-earned money will be well spent."

## Making or changing your Will

An extraordinary number of people die without making a Will at all and, as we have said, very few of us make a charitable legacy when we do. It's a great pity because there are so many ways to make that legacy. You can leave a specific gift item such as shares or even a property. You can leave a set sum of money – a pecuniary legacy. Or, best of all, you can make a residuary legacy – a share of your estate, what is left in it after all your dependents have been provided for. If you have already made a Will, then you can leave a gift to Merlin just by adding a codicil – it's just a document that adds to or alters a Will.

Making a Will is something we should all do. But amending that Will at regular intervals should also become a habit – our circumstances change dramatically in later years. Most of us are genially surprised when we do value our assets, especially if we are home owners. And most of us are quite appalled when the scale of potential Inheritance Tax is revealed.

You will need professional advice, of course – from a solicitor, an independent financial advisor or from your bank. But, once you have made or amended that Will, you will have earned considerable peace of mind. And, if you have included a bequest to Merlin, you will know that you have made a real difference to thousands of people in the years and decades to come.

For more information about legacies, please call 020 7014 1711 or email [supporter@merlin.org.uk](mailto:supporter@merlin.org.uk).

- ▶ **£5,000** could train five nurses
- ▶ **£12,500** could buy 2,500 bed nets to prevent malaria
- ▶ **£28,000** could run a hospital ward for a year in South Sudan



## Eyewitness account: Pakistan

**Paula Sansom, Merlin's Health Director in Pakistan, describes a winter helping survivors of last year's earthquake:**



The earthquake left thousands of families stranded in remote villages with little or no shelter. When I reached the stricken region of Kashmir, Merlin's medical teams were already at work treating casualties and evacuating the most seriously wounded by helicopter. I had to work out how Merlin

should respond to the onset of winter. People were on the move everywhere and for a while it was hard to predict where the need would be greatest. We decided Merlin should set up tented clinics in mountain settlements so that those who remained there would have the best possible health care.

At New Year the first heavy snows arrived. Four feet fell at one site and many of the tents collapsed. We started to take in cases of pneumonia, but the widespread outbreak that I was dreading didn't occur. I think this was because our medical teams were helping families to maintain their health.

By February we had five clinics up and running, treating about 2,500 people every week. We also set up a 'flying doctor' unit in order to get to some higher villages that were hard to access, even on foot. I remember one five-year-old boy who appeared all on his own at our tent in the tiny settlement of Telgran. He had a very nasty head injury, but sat quietly and patiently while I patched up the wound and then re-united him with his family. I wondered how they would have coped had Merlin not been there.

Our clinics will be maintained well into the summer when we will start to hand over responsibility to the Ministry of Health. For now though, I think people are just thankful that they have made it through the winter.



Five-year-old Mukhparahmed is treated for a head injury at one of Merlin's clinics. Photo: Belinda Lawley.

## Fighting cholera in South Sudan

In February, a suspected case of cholera was reported in Torit Town, one of Merlin's project sites in South Sudan. Two weeks later, up to 25 cholera patients a day were being admitted to Torit Hospital.

Cholera is a waterborne disease which causes vomiting and severe diarrhoea, and can be fatal if not treated within 24 hours. Merlin responded quickly by supplying drugs and equipment to the emergency treatment centre at the hospital. It is now supporting 18 cholera treatment facilities around Torit county and has treated more than 700 people.

The disease has spread quickly partly because large numbers of displaced people are travelling all over the region. Due to the chronic lack of access to clean water, people are also contracting the illness by drinking from unsanitary local rivers.

Mother-of-six Rose Achola recently lost her five-year-old son to cholera. "I did everything I could to save my son, but he wasn't strong enough to fight the illness," she says. "He died so quickly, before I could even get him to hospital."

Rose herself contracted cholera and was brought to a treatment centre by her husband. "As soon as I was put on a drip, I started feeling better," she says. "Now I don't feel as weak, and I hope to return home to my other children soon."

*A cholera patient being admitted to hospital.*





## Six months in Myanmar

**H**elen Abnett describes her experiences after returning from Myanmar (Burma), where she worked for six months as Assistant to Merlin's Country Director:

Although much of my role was office-based in the capital Yangon, I managed to set aside a week to visit Laputta Township, where Merlin is supporting two hospitals and 50 rural health centres. There are serious health needs in Laputta, particularly in the southern region of Pyin Sa Lu, which was affected by the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami.

In Laputta town, Merlin supports the main hospital which serves the entire township population of approximately 300,000. Despite the positive and dedicated attitude of staff members, the hospital only has the capacity to provide rudimentary care. The facilities are

*A community health worker trained by Merlin conducting a health education session.*



*Arriving at Gant Eik, one of the villages in Laputta where Merlin works.*

basic, with inadequate medical supplies and no clean running water. This is one of the 52 facilities that Merlin is renovating across the township. Merlin is also training health professionals, and supplying medical equipment and drugs. Getting to these health centres can be challenging because this is a delta region; most of them are only accessible by boat and some journeys take up to seven hours.

Access to safe drinking water is limited, so diarrhoeal diseases are common. Merlin aims to provide clean water all year round at a number of sites across the township, and has already rehabilitated nine rainwater collection tanks.

During my visit, I saw a water tank being constructed at Laputtalob village school. I also observed how Merlin works closely with village representatives to ensure that their needs are met, and it was clear how much the community appreciated this.

I was pleased to see what Merlin had already achieved, and to feel assured that people in Laputta will have better health care and access to clean water for years to come.

## Strengthening midwifery skills

**T**his year on World Health Day, April 7, the World Health Organisation highlighted the chronic global shortage of health professionals that has resulted from years of underinvestment. Although Merlin often sets up new programmes in response to emergencies, it aims to stay as long as is needed to build up an even better health service. Training medical staff is a key aspect of this approach.

In Aceh province, Indonesia, Merlin arrived in the wake of the 2004 tsunami disaster to provide emergency relief. Now, in addition to rebuilding or renovating health centres, Merlin is strengthening the skills of health professionals through training and workshops.

Zakiah Ismail, a midwife from Bireuen, attended a course in basic safe delivery – her first training opportunity since she qualified. For years, her village was at the heart of a violent separatist conflict. "In the middle of the day, there was gunfire, so people did not want to go anywhere," she explains. "When

we were called at night, we were afraid to go out to the patients and they were afraid to come out to us." But since the Free Aceh Movement and the Indonesian Government signed a peace agreement last August, Zakiah and her colleagues have been free to move around without fear.

In a nation with high rates of pregnancy-related deaths, Zakiah is keen to update her skills and gives an example of what she learnt on the course. "Now, right after a mother gives birth, we give her the hormone oxytocin to ensure there is no haemorrhaging," she says. "Before, we only gave it if they started bleeding."

Zakiah hopes more opportunities will come her way. "We need more training and we want more training," she concludes.

Photo: Jacqueline Koch.





## ► The challenge of a lifetime

In 2005, I decided that I needed a challenge. Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro – the highest mountain in Africa – seemed like a good idea, especially if I could also raise money for a worthwhile charity.



Sam, my husband, is a trustee at Merlin, a charity we both feel very strongly about. It ties in with my past medical training, and Sam was so impressed when he visited Merlin's project in Sri Lanka.

I formed a group with three other crazy women and two brave men and we put together an itinerary which involved an eight day climb. At the same time, I set up a sponsorship page on [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com) which is very easy to do and allowed my supporters to donate directly to Merlin. It also deals with Gift Aid, which meant, in most cases, Merlin got an extra 28p from the Inland Revenue for every £1. I also sent everyone a letter, explaining what my adventure and Merlin were all about, to add the personal touch.

We started our adventure on 24th February. All of us were a bit intimidated by the task ahead and could not really think or talk of much else. We walked for anything between four and nine hours a day. The first few days were fine apart from disturbed sleep by others snoring in the camp!

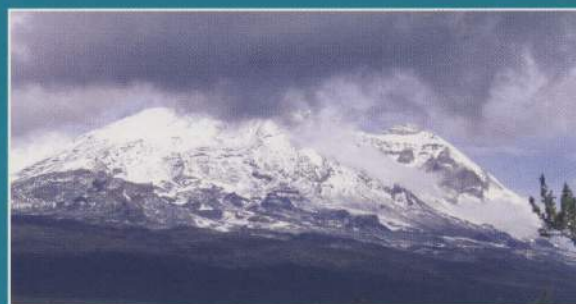
After six days, we reached the top camp where two of our team went down with altitude sickness. The rest of us set off for the summit at around 11.30pm. It felt quite magical looking down and seeing the torches of other climbers. Unfortunately, a blizzard struck which stayed with us all the way to the top. It was a long slow night. Without a doubt, it was the thought of all those people back home supporting me which kept me going.

At Stella point, two of my group felt satisfied and turned back. That left only me and one other person who carried on to the main summit of Uhuru peak – 5,895 metres above sea level. We could not see much apart from snow but we had done it! I was absolutely exhausted but it had been a fantastic journey.

Thanks to all the support back home, I managed to raise just over £25,000 for Merlin, which is a truly great feeling.

## Kilimanjaro Trek 2007

Would you consider taking on the challenge of a lifetime, to scale Africa's highest peak while raising vital funds for Merlin? We are inviting teams of two to four people to join a Merlin expedition from 15th to 24th June, 2007. To find out more, visit [www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk) or contact Tony Thompson on 07803 148194 or [tepeeconsult@btinternet.com](mailto:tepeeconsult@btinternet.com).



## Spring Dinner raises over £100,000

Thank you to all those who helped to make our Spring Dinner on 9th March such a huge success. More than 300 guests attended the glittering event at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London, raising more than £100,000 for Merlin. One of the evening's highlights was a special quiz with familiar faces from the news world taking part, including BBC news presenter Natasha Kaplinsky, Channel 4 presenter June Sarpong, BBC Radio 4 presenter Ed Stourton and former war correspondent Martin Bell.



L-R: Ed Stourton, Martin Bell, Nicholas Owen and Simon McCoy taking part in the Merlin quiz. Photo: Shoreline Imaging.

### Cover image:

A young boy being treated at one of Merlin's field clinics in the Neelum Valley of Kashmir. Merlin has provided medical relief for more than 60,000 people in the region following the devastating earthquake last October. Photo: Belinda Lawley.



Merlin is the only specialist UK charity which responds worldwide with vital health care and medical relief for vulnerable people caught up in natural disasters, conflict, disease and health system collapse.

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