Language Kills.

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There are over 400 natural disasters globally, every year, of which over 70 require significant external input of humanitarian aid. The number of people affected by these disasters is growing. Coordinated poorly, each disaster event has the potential to set back the attainment of the MDGs as resilience and coping capacities among affected populations erode. Ongoing reform of the humanitarian sector led by the United Nations demands that aid expenditures are as efficiently and effectively used as possible. This infers that cost-effective and appropriate relief interventions have been planned for, based on local assessment of needs, capacities, priorities, and solutions.

Yet, the very people who know their needs best – those who have been directly affected by disaster – become disenfranchised because in too many cases they do not speak the same language as the international aid community that has arrived to support them.

As a result of this disconnect, it is estimated that a significant percentage of humanitarian aid is squandered through poor appreciation of the need and consequent misallocation of incorrect relief supplies.

Internationally-recognized "good practice" guidelines for disaster response stipulate the inclusion of the affected population into the policy formulation and operational decision-making process. Yet, every recent evaluation of external humanitarian assistance specifically cites the language barrier as one of the major constraints to achieving this.

International humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations system, recognize the problem, acknowledge the need, and are increasingly asking for provision of language services.

> "Lack of translation and interpreting services is a vital missing link in our ability to coordinate humanitarian aid effectively"
> Chief, United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Haiti (2010)

Companies whose business is communications and whose corporate philosophy is socially responsible could help bridge this "communications gap" inexpensively, quickly, and effectively in collaboration with the not-for-profit sector.

The aim is to provide cluster coordination mechanisms in the field with a consistent and high quality translation and interpreting service using stand-alone portable systems and web-based applications managed by local humanitarian enterprise initiatives.