

The Taiwan 921 Earthquake: Lessons for World Volunteerism

Part I Volunteer Involvement in the 921 Earthquake

At 1:47am, September 21, 1999, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter Scale, centered in Chichi Township, Nantou County, damaged or destroyed more than 50,000 homes, left at least 100,000 homeless, injured over 10,000, and killed more than 2,000 people.

As soon as the earthquake happened, the power of civil society was revealed, as voluntary organizations – including religious, medical, social-service, and other groups – moved into action to take in refugees, donate emergency supplies, give psychological counseling, provide medical services, and rebuild damaged homes.

From then until October 1999, 288 civil society organizations (CSOs) – employed in 660 different locations – participated in the voluntary relief effort, as can be seen in the table below (Fig. 1)

Fig 1 Numbers of CSOs involved in the 921 voluntary effort

Groups	Organizations	Locations
Religious (Christian & Buddhist)	57	151
Medical (Chi Mei Hospital etc.)	20	50
Social Service (Lifeline etc.)	44	98
Others (China Times etc)	107	361
TOTAL (up to Oct 8, 1999)	228	660

There were four main phases in 921 Earthquake relief effort: (1) emergency rescue (in the first 72 hours); (2) giving temporary shelter, supplies, and counseling; (3) long-term building: durable shelters and heritage restoration (4) permanent reconstruction.

Part II Emergency and Medical Aid in the first 72 hours

The mobilization of CSOs during the first phase of the disaster relief effort (the crucial first 72 hours after the quake) is summarized in the table below (Fig. 2):

Fig. 2 Voluntary sector involvement in the first 72 hours

CSOs	Results of Civic Power
Volunteer rescuers, police, firefighters, etc.	Mobilized in the first hour after the quake – immediately saved all those who could be saved
Hsing Tien Foundation	Set up collection teams – raised US\$3M. Adopted schools. Assisted hospitals in supplying ambulances & first-aid teams – went into disaster areas

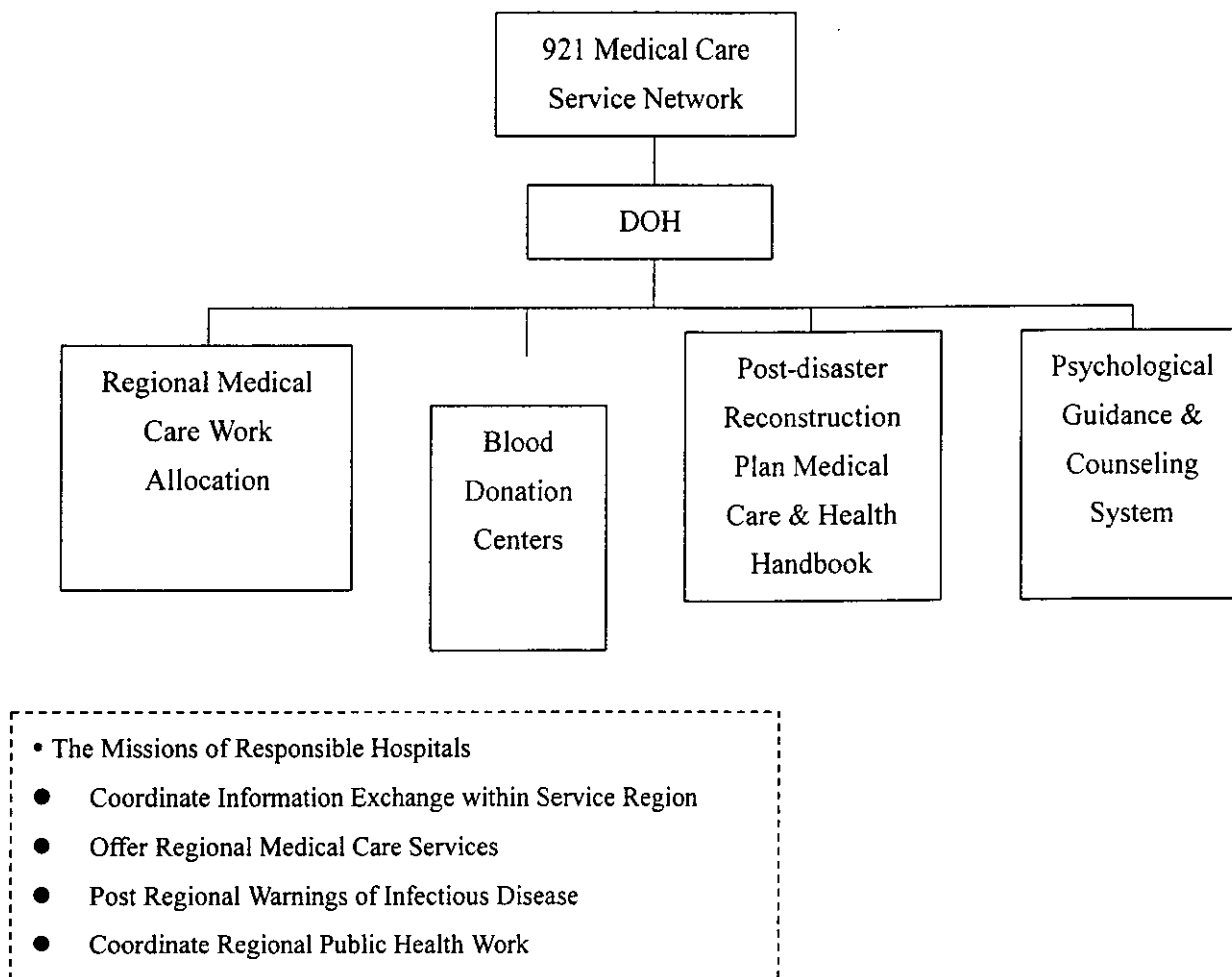
Tzu Chi Foundation	Set up Aid HQs, sent medical teams to 8 worst hit areas. Worked on the front line. Mobilized 20,000 volunteers – raised US\$5M
Fa Gu Shan Foundation	Held religious ceremonies to appease the dead.
ROC Red Cross	Gave on-site first aid and emergency care, catalogued the injured, took them to hospitals. Assisted emergency aid effort and distribution of supplies. Handled missing person applications for relatives of foreign residents, and searched for people through the Red Cross network. Requested aid from the International Red Cross.
Humanistic Education Foundation	Advertised for social worker volunteers to give professional post-disaster counseling.

Department of Health direction of medical aid

1. Building a medical service network

In order to control the vital first 12 hours after the quake, and guarantee the quality of drugs, medical equipment, and the availability of necessary supplies – the Department of Health (DOH) quickly set up a medical service network to facilitate emergency aid. The DOH ordered the establishment of a system to supply disaster hit areas with the necessary medical equipment, swiftly contacted pharmacies, and coordinated with the army to transport the supplies (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Department of Health Directed 921 Emergency Medical Care System



2. Medical care for the seriously injured

Offering services not covered by social security, such as housing, roaming and static therapeutic treatment, and establishing a 'Long-term Care Management Practice Center'.

3. Psychological rehabilitation and suicide prevention

Every district in the disaster area established a mental therapy service center and specific psychological care stations, which undertook activities to promote the mental health of community members. Teacher Chang, Taichung, was commissioned to give psychological therapeutic guidance and organize the 'Youth Life Rebuilding Guidance Camp', and plans to train 50 volunteers to help rebuild the lives of young people.

4. Rebuilding shattered communities

Community related organizations were invited to coordinate with colleges to promote recovery creation work.

5. Disease control in disaster areas

Coordinating the work of public health and disease prevention in 94 prefabricated housing estates, solving the problem of infectious disease spread in mountainous areas.

6. Rebuilding the emergency and medical systems

Founding a team of paramedics, building an emergency response system, and giving financial assistance to medical care facilities.

7. Implementing a high-tech earthquake prevention plan

Calling for medical health related technical research plans

8. Public health and disease prevention

Apart from mobilizing health units on the ground, responsible hospitals and clinics coordinated their efforts with a network of local environmental groups. Furthermore, professors from Taiwan University Public Health Department organized a health information team.

9. State health insurance measures to benefit victims

Many charges under the state health insurance scheme were waved. The DOH mobilized fundraising to support health insurance premiums for victims.

Structure of medical aid from hospitals: a case study of Cheng Kung University Hospital

1. Full cooperation with central government (DOH) national disaster orders
2. Collection and distribution of contributions - giving charity an outlet
3. Expeditionary medical teams.
4. Medical teams sent to isolated areas (Nantou and Yuchi).

Structure of medical services from Tzu Chi

1. Establishing medical equipment collection centers.
2. Medical care stations established by Tzu Chi in 13 disaster areas.
3. Partnerships with other organizations: Earthquake disaster emergency fundraising in all the 2,200 7-Eleven stores around Taiwan, and fundraising partnerships with Chinatrust, New Wave Internet Company, and other private businesses.

Part III Material Aid

Donations of emergency supplies

The 921 Earthquake Disaster Civic League efficiently coordinated and systematically delegated aid work, bringing together otherwise scattered civic resources, with the result of supplying emergency and fast aid. Businesses, religious groups, international aid agencies, government departments, voluntary organizations, and individual contributions brought in massive amounts of much-needed supplies.

Fig. 4 Table of emergency supplies

Groups	Supplies	How they were sent/used
Rebar Group	20000 bags of cement.	Rebuilding the disaster areas.
China Airlines	3000 blankets.	
Eva Group	1980 tents, 1100 sleeping bags, 2000 batteries, 1500 blankets, 30 duvets, 200 bed sheets.	
7-Eleven	26 tents, 60000 meals, 10000 bottles of water.	Sent along with other products into the disaster areas – employees worked as volunteers.
Family Convenience Store	Daily free breakfast.	Sent for 14 days via van.
Chinese Lancer	60 4-wheel drive vehicles.	Became a disaster relief team – transporting supplies.
Fubon Charity Foundation	22 boxes of medical supplies, 1000kg of rice, cold medicine, nappies.	
Sampo group	Daily necessities, including batteries, clothing and medical products.	Used over 10 trucks from their subsidiary transportation Company.
Chi Mei Hospital	Seven medical teams.	Organized a system of medical care and treatment deep into the disaster areas.
Jiayun Memorial Pagoda	Free space inside memorial pagoda.	
Civic Earthquake Disaster League	26 Emergency Supply Cooperative Centers around Taiwan collected various supplies, including raincoats, basic medicines, baby food, health products, and dry food.	Transported in over 1000 privately owned trucks and vans, filled with supplies for the disaster victims, and driven by volunteers.
International Fo Guang Association	2500 tents, funeral services	
Presbyterian	Raised NT\$10M on 9/23 alone,	

Church	set up 6 aid stations on 9/22	
World Vision	Purchased basic supplies & survival packs	Mobilized World Vision staff & volunteers to send supplies to remote areas

Apart from donating daily necessities, World Vision, Tzu Chi, and other voluntary organizations, offered temporary accommodation and basic housing for the refugees who were made homeless by the disaster.

Donations of Financial Aid

A large amount of money was also raised, and donated to the needy, by political parties, such as the Kuomintang, the Democratic Progressive Party, and the New Party; by businesses, such as Eva Airlines, Chinatrust Commercial Bank, China Television, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation; and by CSOs, such as Tzu Chi, Fo Guang Shan, and the Red Cross.

Individual Contributions: Collected by various organizations and transferred to the MOI for distribution to disaster hit areas

Part IV Reconstruction of education

Voluntary sector involvement in the reconstruction of education in the disaster hit areas included: (1) adopting damaged schools and rebuilding school hardware, (2) adopting school children, (3) reconstructing school software, (4) supplying food, books, and other services.

Adopting damaged schools and rebuilding school hardware

School buildings proved to be particularly fragile, but schools within the earthquake-affected areas quickly carried out reconstruction plans by putting up prefabricated buildings and temporary classrooms. Volunteers from all over the island offered the material and human resources needed to let the students return to classes as soon as possible.

Adopting school children

The work of adopting and rebuilding damaged schools was developed through private businesses, as in the Tzu Chi Foundation's 'Hope Construction' project. By January 6, 2000, private groups had adopted 140 schools, 2,846 classes, and 91,458 students; and donated NT\$8.4 billion.

Reconstructing school software

Children affected by the disaster were given financial and educational support by caring individuals who took them in and resettled them. By Jan 6, 2000, 1,622 children were helped in this way.

The National Youth Commission (NYC) organized 473 college students into

working teams that went back to the disaster-hit areas during summer vacation to propose a necessity plan for service groups, give guidance for prefabricated classroom curricula, organize leisure camp activities, give consolatory visits to disaster victims, and double check information. On the one hand, this gave college students from the disaster areas a chance to pay for their tuition fees, and contribute to the rebuilding process in own their communities; and on the other hand, the program help the disaster victims on the road to recovery of their homes and careers.

To prevent students in the affected areas falling behind in their studies, voluntary groups with experience in curriculum guidance – such as the Taiwan Presbyterian Church Community Rebuilding Stations, the Distance Learning Post-921 Educational Network, and some businesses – organized meetings and seminars.

The earthquake destroyed schools; but also broke down the barriers between schools, communities, and civic groups – opening up new opportunities for educational reform. A ‘Creative Educational Rebuilding Plan’ was proposed by a league of various foundations; and Taiwan University City-Township Foundation, in coordination with city reform organizations, formed ‘Creative Educational Rebuilding Plan’ taskforce to recruit volunteers and raise funds. In this plan, the concept of rebuilding did not only apply to replacing school hardware, but involved the participation of parents, teachers, communities, schools, and school boards – because it is idealistic to expect a new school to emerge simply after the facilities have been rebuilt. Teachers also participated in the process of rebuilding the campus, and actively employed new teaching methods and ideologies into the curriculum.

To allow young disaster victims to leave the shadow of the tragedy, the Tzu Chi Foundation called on students in Tzu Chi University, Tzu Chi Technical College, and other young Tzu Chi members in college campuses all over Taiwan to hold summer camps, during their vacation, for over 2,000 children. Elsewhere, NYC, China Youth Corps, and Youth Peace Corps also called on college student groups to join post-disaster counseling for young students by taking them on excursions and studying together – so that their studies were not clouded by the memory of the quake.

Supplying food, books, and other services

Many volunteers helped solve the problem of school lunches by collecting a total of NT\$55 million to send boxed meals to seriously damaged primary schools in isolated areas.

Bookstores and publishers in Taiwan donated reading materials free of charge, and college students, lead by their teachers, catalogued the books, put up shelves, and helped starting up new libraries.

Part V Psychological Rebuilding

Those in need of psychological guidance were survivors suffering from post-dramatic shock syndrome, people who had lost loved ones, rescue workers who had been heavily involved in the relief effort, and other members of the public who could not face the reality of the 921 tragedy.

Voluntary organizations involved in post-921 psychological rebuilding included religious, community, and educational groups. The methods employed by each of these groups are shown in the chart below.

Fig. 5 Methods of Counseling

Group	Method
Tzu Chi	Lantern-lit Gathering
Fa Gu Shan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish 'Emotional Protection Camps' in schools 2. Organized art therapy courses 3. Jointly organized an activity with Taipei MTR 100 days after 921 4. Established a service group 5. Held meditation sessions
Presbyterian Church	Assisted counseling and held pray meetings
Normal University Counseling Center	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trained counselors 2. Trained teachers to give art therapy classes
Taipei Municipal Psychiatric Home	Established a Refuge Center
MOE	Held a 921 Counseling Service Educational Conference
NYC	Disaster relief service: Coordinated volunteer groups and schools near the disaster areas to recruit young people with expertise in education, counseling, and social work to do psychological rebuilding service in the disaster areas.

Part VI Volunteer Recruitment

921 volunteer recruitment work and the formation of volunteer networks showed the value of strength in numbers, as the most suitable services were brought to the disaster areas as quickly as possible. The main resources for volunteer recruitment are shown below (Fig 6).

Fig. 6 Volunteer Recruitment

Recruiting Organizations	Targets for Recruitment
Religious Groups	Church and temple goers
Other CSOs	Nursery Garden Plan-advocated by the Moral Rebuilding Youth Taskforce
Formosa Volunteer Group	Average white collar workers
921 College Student Reconstruction Teams	College students and other young people
921 Gay Relief Alliance	Gay community
NYC	Service groups were organized into service teams, that recruited 5,000 young people, trained them, and sent them to the disaster areas to participate in the emergency rescue

Part VII Voluntary Service Law

Meeting public expectations

At present in Taiwan, voluntary service has no basis in law, and the organizations responsible for voluntary work are central government bodies, such as NYC and MOI, private businesses, and many voluntary groups – which is a case of too many cooks. The need for rationalization was shown after the 921 earthquake, when numerous volunteers rushed to the disaster areas, only to find a lack of coordination and communication – which seriously affected the efficiency of their work. In terms of recruitment, well-funded organizations, like Tzu Chi, have large numbers of volunteers; but there are many more poorly funded disadvantaged groups that need voluntary assistance, but no one wants to help. To encourage the general public to join the ranks of voluntary service workers, Legislator Chiang Yi-wen, with sixty of her colleagues from the Legislative Yuan, brought together voluntary service associations from all over Taiwan to write a letter to ROC President Chen Shui-bian.

Introduction to the Draft Voluntary Service Law

The letter proposes a ‘Draft Voluntary Service Law’, in the hope that voluntary work will be rationalized by an established ‘Voluntary Service Law’, which will give those people who are willing to become volunteers a chance to contribute all they can to society, under proper guarantees and encouragement.

Furthermore, the ‘Tax-break for Voluntary Service Hours’ clause in Voluntary Service Law proposes that once a volunteer has accumulated a certain number of service hours, he or she will get a tax break – which will encourage the general public to enter volunteering, and allow volunteers to receive a small return for the sacrifices they make to society.

Volunteers: social capital of the new millennium

According to figures released by NYC, the more people involved in volunteering, the more unnecessary social costs are cut, and the resulting surplus of human resources in government can be put to work to build up considerable prosperity for society and the nation. Taking the US as an example, voluntary labor produces a surplus of US\$180 billion, while in Canada, the value of voluntary work exceeds the combined value of grain and livestock production, and is eight times the income generated by the national transportation system. Other research has shown that 24% of Canadian young people think the skills they learn in doing voluntary service can help them find a job. As a result, we hope that an energetic voluntary law can let the collective power of business enter voluntary service work.

Voluntary service work that is practically organized will develop social caring and participation, and give a platform to raise the elite and leadership of society. In other words, participation in voluntary work makes a major positive contribution to growth and social development. Voluntary work not only helps the development of the volunteer by building character and fostering talent, but – during the process of service – practical steps are taken for the good of society, and in this expression of caring and invigoration, society becomes more peaceful and stable. More importantly, everyone can do his or her part as a global citizen, with an expansive international vision, to make the whole world a better place.

Part VIII Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities for a Volunteering Taiwan on a Global Track

For the Taiwanese people, the 921 quake was a natural disaster that tested the capacity of government and civil society to the brink. The quake not only rocked central Taiwan, but also shook up government departments and voluntary organizations. During the disaster, voluntary organizations were on the front line of rescue operations – assisting the emergency medical treatment of the injured, donating supplies, and educating and counseling the needy. The rapid response of voluntary organizations made up for the times when the government was over-stretched, and at the same time, the 921 quake awoke voluntary organizations in Taiwan to the challenges and opportunities that they face. Taiwanese volunteerism is opening up to new visions and is moving on to a global track.

1. Sustainable development of volunteerism

The long-term aspect of rebuilding after the 921 quake has motivated voluntary organizations to think about voluntary work in revolutionary new ways. Reconstruction is not only about ‘literal’ rebuilding, but also applies in a figurative sense to the development of voluntary organizations, and the reeducation and renewal of volunteers – so that volunteers rise from simply *becoming* a volunteer to *being* a volunteer. In this way, volunteerism will be an integral part of life in a *convenient* volunteering society, and volunteering attitudes will shift from *credit-earning* volunteerism to *civic* volunteerism.

Voluntary sector involvement in 921 went beyond charity work, as voluntary groups not only took the lead in advocating the ‘Temporary Statute for 921 Earthquake Disaster Reconstruction’, to speed up the recovery process; but also demanded reconstruction be democratic, charitable, and transparent; and encouraged the preservation of Taiwanese local culture and the natural environment. Meanwhile,

the government pushed its policies of 'social service in place of military service' and 'work schemes instead of charity' to build new lives for the victims of the tragedy. Furthermore, civic and legislative bodies energetically promoted 'Voluntary Service Law' to raise the service quality and complete the structure of the voluntary sector. In his inaugural address of May 20, 2000 President Chen Shui-bian expressed his desire to build a 'Volunteering Taiwan on a Global Track' in the new century.

2. Building a network of voluntary cooperation

The only fly in the ointment of the 921 aid operation was a lack of coordination. Apart from the need for government and voluntary organizations to strengthen their partnerships, voluntary organizations should also extend laterally to make partnerships with similar groups. As for government departments, the 'Executive Yuan Post-Disaster Reconstruction Promotion Committee' was quickly set up, in cooperation with teams of college teachers from psychology and guidance departments, to assist schools in affected areas; and the NYC established a voluntary recruitment and cooperation center, which brought together voluntary groups to assist the rescue operation and give psychological guidance. As for civic voluntary groups, many of them formed the National Alliance for Post-Earthquake Reconstruction, which not only oversaw the emergency aid process and distribution, but also coordinated with civic resources to promote efficient and sustainable reconstruction. The 'Association for Resource Coordination of Social Service Organization Specialist Social Workers' was convened by specialist social workers in social security offices around Taiwan to assist aid work. Furthermore, 7-Eleven, Chinatrust Commercial Bank, New Wave Internet Company, and other businesses cooperated to fully utilize fundraising.

3 E-age volunteer network

The government set up a central web site to release the latest disaster relief bulletins and regulations from all areas. The Internet media played the vital role of quickly distributing information on aid work. Furthermore, many voluntary groups had 'virtual volunteers' – from academic organizations, businesses, to individuals – who offered suggestions, advice, and information on rescue work in the disaster hit areas to all quarters. Apart from passing on information, the Internet also functioned as an online aid distribution and management tool through the use of rapid electronic message boards, which displayed the different requirements and situations of each area – thus efficiently planning and controlling the distribution of supplies. High-level government officials used videoconferences to instantly understand what was happening on the ground, and direct the administration of the disaster relief. E-generation volunteers encouraged the use of satellite, infrared, and even microwave communications technology to send information to, and communicate with the

outside world – which not only helped put people’s minds at rest, but also speeded up aid work efficiency. At the same time, township administrative centers used microwave transmission and other means of communication that were not easily disrupted during the emergency, so damaged townships were able to update the central government and rescue services with the latest situation and injury reports. In the earthquake affected mountainous areas, the Internet provided fast connection through tools such as PDA cell-phones and new WAP technology. Disruption of education in the disaster areas, caused by damaged school hardware and software, was also alleviated through distance learning and virtual classrooms. To sum up, the practical applications of Internet technology met the spiritual and material needs of the 921 disaster affected areas. How to be better prepared in the future to minimize the damage of a similar disaster, and decrease the time needed for recovery, are the key questions for the e-generation of ‘virtual volunteers’.

Taiwanese volunteerism has a long history, and voluntary associations have already displayed a startling amount of civic power. In these changing times, Taiwanese voluntary service is striving to be more diverse, more specialized, more efficient, and more suited to modern needs. The experience of the 921 quake for Taiwanese volunteers was a tumultuous education that revealed the challenges and opportunities of a ‘Volunteering Taiwan’ on a global track.