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INKWELL

Preventing the Next Disaster



by Nicole Kurokawa
January 14, 2010, 4:23pm

As the devastation in Haiti unfolds, the world's response to this tragedy has been commendable. [Charity organizations](#) have sprung into [action](#), as have [international](#) crisis response teams and [governments](#). At a time of such sadness, to see cooperation across borders is heartening.

When the dust settles, however, individuals and governments would be well-served to think about how best to forestall such disaster in the future. "What does that mean?" you might think. "We can't prevent earthquakes or natural disasters." True... but we can minimize the damage.

[Several examples indicate](#) that more economically developed countries have lower fatality rates from disasters than disadvantaged nations. For things like tsunamis or hurricanes, populations can be notified in advance and moved quickly; in remote areas, disseminating information and mobilizing people is a much more difficult endeavor. How many people are killed by mudslides in the Philippines or Brazil, as compared to mudslide-related deaths in California or Europe?

Accordingly, the United States should encourage policies to help grow poor countries' economies in the long-run. The Cato Institute's annual [Economic Freedom of the World Index](#) points out five crucial areas that affect a nation's economic health:

- Size of government (expenditures, taxes, and enterprises)
- Legal structure and security of property rights
- Access to sound money
- Freedom to trade internationally
- Regulation of credit, labor, and business

Countries that have limited governments, a defined rule of law with strong property rights, a sound money supply with low inflation, free trade, and low regulations are more prosperous than those without such policies. Without interfering from abroad (looking at you, [nation-builders](#) and [foreign aid advocates](#)), we as a nation should emphasize these values. This is not to say that the current emergency relief efforts in Haiti are not merited - certainly, the nation lacks the capacity to help itself at the moment. But our end goal should be a world free from poverty - so when disaster strikes, countries are prepared, the loss of life is not as severe, and the poor are not hurt as badly. Economic freedom is a tried-and-true way for countries to achieve sustainable economic growth, and the only viable long-term solution to minimize such horrific tragedies in the future.

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