



11 December, 2025

EVENT REPORT

DISASTER AND THE FIRST 72 HOURS

Local, National, and Global Reflections



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WHY THIS CONVERSATION MATTERS?

Disasters today are no longer isolated shocks; they are a defining feature of a new and enduring global reality. Over the past five decades, the number of reported disasters worldwide has increased nearly fivefold, with the United States now experiencing billion-dollar disasters as a routine occurrence rather than an exception. These trends place growing strain on emergency systems, communities, and institutions tasked with responding under increasingly compressed timelines.

Yet disasters cannot be understood through statistics alone. Each event represents families displaced overnight, livelihoods disrupted, and communities forced to rebuild under extreme pressure. The most consequential decisions occur in the first 72 hours, when information is incomplete, needs are overwhelming, and time

is the scarcest resource. While formal emergency systems are essential, they are often stretched thin, requiring nonprofits, volunteers, and local actors to step in and fill critical gaps in shelter, food, health, logistics, and care.

That is why this Policy Cafe on Disaster and the First 72 Hours focused on the mechanics of effective early response. Bringing together experts from across the disaster response ecosystem, the discussion examined how preparedness, coordination, trust, and locally embedded capacity shape outcomes in moments of crisis. Drawing on U.S. and global experiences, the conversation underscored a central insight: effective disaster response is not improvised in the moment; it is built long before a crisis begins.

HOSTS



Srikanth Gundavarapu

Entrepreneur and civic leader based in Atlanta. Former Chapter President and key leader during Sewa International's COVID-19 relief efforts, contributing to large-scale emergency food distribution initiatives.



Rakhi Israni

Vice President of Marketing and Public Relations, Sewa International USA. Attorney and entrepreneur based in California, bringing expertise in public policy, legal frameworks, and nonprofit leadership.

MODERATORS

Gitesh Desai

Former President and official spokesperson of Sewa International USA, he has led large-scale disaster response during Hurricane Harvey, Texas Hill Country floods, and major emergencies nationwide.



Devashri Khadke

Engineer-turned-policy analyst based in Washington, D.C., with graduate training in Electrical Engineering and Public Policy. Her work focuses on the intersection of technology, governance, and international relations.



THEMES

THEME 1:

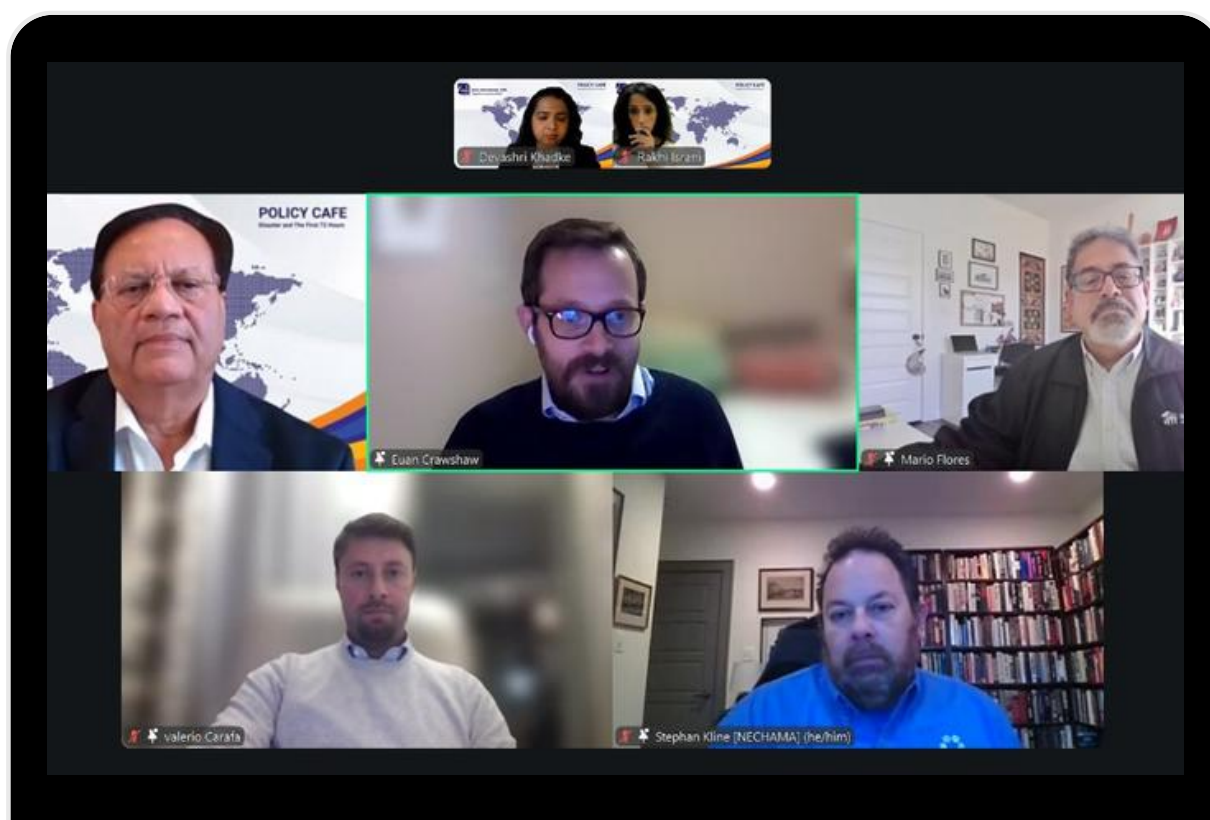
Mobilising People in Times of Crisis

THEME 2:

Working Together When It Matters Most

THEME 3:

Organizational Structure for Effective Disaster Response



MEET OUR PANELISTS



Euan Crawshaw

Director of International Programmes at Shelter Box, specialist with extensive experience managing early-phase disaster response in complex, high-pressure environments.

Mario Flores

Disaster response leader at Habitat for Humanity, specialising in housing stability, displacement prevention, and community-centred recovery.



Valerio Carafa

Emergency Operations Officer (Supply Chain and Logistics) at ISRA AID, expert in global field experience, focusing on supply chain design, adaptive logistics, and rapid deployment under crisis conditions.

Stephan Kline

Disaster response and recovery specialist serving as CEO at NECHAMA with deep experience working alongside nonprofits and community organisations in early-stage emergency settings.



Cora Nally

Global health and humanitarian leader with 20+ years' experience leading rapid emergency responses and health systems strengthening across Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, prioritizing locally led, dignified, high-impact interventions.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED



"First responders carry more than supplies; they carry expectations, responsibility, and the determination to turn urgency into action."

”

Euan Crawshaw | Shelter Box

Euan Crawshaw described the first days after a disaster as a convergence of competing pressures: assessment, logistics, security, public expectations, and decision-making, often unfolding simultaneously with incomplete information. As disasters increase in scale and complexity, responders must make rapid choices that shape the trajectory of recovery.



"When disaster strikes, needs rise faster than capacity. Logistics is what keeps hope moving truck by truck, family by family."

”

Valerio Carafa | ISRA AID

Valerio Carafa emphasised that logistics is not a back-end function but the backbone of emergency response. With logistics accounting for a majority of response costs, effectiveness depends on pre-positioning, lean teams, flexibility, and the ability to adapt plans as conditions change daily.



"Organizational readiness isn't optional. Trained volunteers and adaptable plans are the first lifeline in any disaster."

”

Mario Flores | Habitat for Humanity

Mario Flores reframed emergency shelter as a cornerstone of dignity and recovery. Preventing displacement, he argued, protects families' most valuable asset, their home, and enables faster stabilisation of daily life, from schooling to livelihoods.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED



“Nonprofits can move fast when others are slowed by rules, ready to help when it matters most.”

”

Stephan Kline | NECHAMA

Stephan Kline highlighted nonprofits’ unique value during early response: rapid assessments, specialised services, and advocacy for those most likely to be overlooked. Their relative flexibility allows them to act quickly, while their proximity to communities enables them to identify needs that large systems often miss.



“Coordination works best when systems are practiced, relationships are trusted, and local responders are fully integrated into the decision-making process”

”

Cora Nally | Humanitarian Practitioner

Effective emergency coordination depends on strong national systems: practiced government–NGO collaboration, clear communication tools, and empowered local actors. Where these exist, responses mobilize rapidly; where absent, responders improvise, delaying protection for vulnerable communities globally.

KEY INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Preparation Over Reaction

Effective disaster response is shaped long before a crisis occurs. Investing in community preparedness, training, and contingency planning enables faster decision-making, clearer role allocation, and more effective early response when time and information are limited.



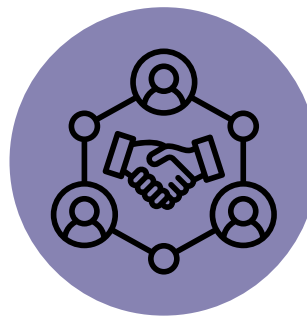
Creative and Adaptive Logistics

Logistics is the backbone of disaster response, not a back-end function. Mapping supply chains in advance and enabling operational flexibility allows responders to adapt when standard systems fail, routes are disrupted, or needs shift rapidly on the ground.



Nonprofits as Essential Second Responders

Nonprofits are essential to early disaster response, reaching vulnerable populations and delivering specialized services faster than large systems. Their agility and community proximity must be embedded in preparedness planning.



Coordination Across Systems and Actors

Effective disaster response depends on clear coordination between government agencies, first responders, nonprofits, and community groups. Pre-established relationships, role clarity, and trust are critical to ensuring speed, equity, and continuity of response during the first 72 hours.

NEXT STEPS



01

Developing a Long Form Report on Disaster Management

Synthesize insights from the Policy Cafe into a concise sectoral report that captures field-based lessons, operational challenges, and policy-relevant takeaways on disaster response during the first 72 hours.

02

Informing Sewa's Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Programs

Apply national and international reflections from the discussion to strengthen Sewa International USA's disaster preparedness and recovery initiatives, ensuring programs are informed by global best practices and locally grounded experience.

03

Advancing Global Disaster Response Collaboration

Advocate for stronger collaboration across Sewa International's disaster programs globally, enabling shared learning, coordinated response strategies, and faster action in early disaster response.

THANK YOU!

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