

Doctors Without Borders



Médecins Sans Frontières (also known as Doctors Without Borders or MSF) delivers emergency aid to victims of armed conflict, epidemics, and natural and man-made disasters, and to others who lack health care due to social or geographical isolation.

MSF was founded in 1971 by a small group of French doctors who believed that all people have the right to medical care regardless of race, religion, creed or political affiliation, and that the needs of these people supersede respect for national borders. It was the first non-governmental organization to both provide emergency medical assistance and publicly bear witness to the plight of the populations they served.

A private, non-profit organization, MSF is at the forefront of emergency health care as well as care for populations suffering from endemic diseases and neglect. MSF provides primary health care, performs surgery, rehabilitates hospitals and clinics, runs nutrition and sanitation programs, trains local medical personnel, and provides mental health care. Through longer-term programs, MSF treats chronic diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, sleeping sickness, and AIDS; assists with the medical and psychological problems of marginalized populations including street children and ethnic minorities; and brings health care to remote, isolated areas where resources and training are limited.

MSF unites direct medical care with a commitment to bearing witness and speaking out against the underlying causes of suffering. Its volunteers protest violations of humanitarian law on behalf of populations who have no voice, and bring the concerns of their patients to public forums, such as the United Nations, governments (in both home and project countries), and the media. In a wide range of circumstances, MSF volunteers have spoken out about forgotten conflicts and underreported atrocities they have witnessed—from Chechnya to Angola, and from Kosovo to Sri Lanka.

MSF is an international network with sections in 18 countries. Each year, more than 2500 volunteer doctors, nurses, other medical professionals, logistics experts, water/sanitation engineers, and administrators join 15 000 locally hired staff to provide medical aid in more than 80 countries.

Logistical Expertise

MSF has built a strong logistical capability to support its medical expertise, enabling its volunteers to work in the most remote or unstable parts of the world. At the onset of emergencies, teams arrive at a project site with pre-packaged medical kits so they can begin working immediately. Custom-designed by MSF for specific field situations, geographic conditions, and climates, a kit may contain a complete surgical theatre, for example, or all the supplies needed to treat hundreds of cholera patients. MSF kits have been replicated by relief organizations worldwide.

Bearing Witness and Speaking Out

Bearing witness to the plight of populations at risk is part of MSF's mission, in the United States and worldwide. Whether giving testimony at the United Nations or conducting an educational campaign aimed at schoolchildren, the organization works to raise awareness of the plight of the populations it serves. Through its Access to Essential Medicines Campaign, MSF is confronting the difficulties faced by people in the developing world in obtaining affordable, effective treatments for infectious diseases. The organization has also launched public education projects to raise awareness of the trauma faced by children in a war zone, the devastation caused by malnutrition, and the plight of refugees.

Volunteerism

MSF is an organization based on volunteerism. In helping to relieve the suffering of others, the MSF volunteer not only gives freely of his or her humanity, but creates a link of solidarity from his or her own community to a population in need. At times the sole international witness to a crisis situation, the MSF volunteer plays a critical role in the communities where he or she works. It is the independent nature of the volunteer's commitment that gives special legitimacy to the testimony provided by MSF and that ensures the organization's continued dynamism.

Financial Independence

To maintain its operational independence and flexibility, MSF relies on the general public for the majority of its operating funds. Other financial support is provided by foundations, corporations, non-profit organizations, the U.S. and other governments, and international agencies. The MSF international network collectively strives to direct at least 80 percent of its expenditures to program activities.

For more information, check out
www.doctorswithoutborders.org