

Is it possible that you can have Too much of a good thing?

I am writing this article a few days before Christmas and by the time you read it there is a very strong possibility that we will have seen yet another disaster affecting the lives of tens of thousands on television.

Earlier this week, while I was watching BBC 24 News, the sound bite "Disaster Fatigue" arose. This comes in the aftermath of the Pakistan earthquake - Of the many billions of pounds offered, only a small amount had been received and comparisons were made with the period following the Tsunami on Boxing Day 2004. The report also mentioned the quality of the aid provided, which, in many instances, was falling short of the true need.

My mother, who is a generous giver, was also watching and turned to me and said, "You said that would happen" and carried on reading her book.

I had not been clever. We in Rotary are well aware that this scenario continues to repeat itself and, on some occasions, we are also guilty of not truly assessing the problem in our keenness to act. However, my mother's following action of not watching the rest of the feature, which included children with bare hands and in adequate clothing, short of food and good shelter, standing in snow at eight degrees below freezing, arose because the scenes no longer carried the shock effect. A case of Disaster Fatigue.

Around the world, children in many countries continue to starve, suffer from disease, from non-potable water and poor sanitation. Child labour is still widely seen and children still rummage over waste tips to salvage for food and used needles to sell to addicts. The middle generations in nations riddled with Aids are vanishing, leaving a growing population of orphans. I could go on...

The Trustees of The Rotary Foundation have made the very welcome deci-

sion to lift the embargo on Voluntary Grants next year, thereby assisting those many of you who can find the time to undertake voluntary work in another country. I am aware of an Australian Rotarian who went to Sri Lanka last December to help clear the bodies and, twelve months on, was still there assisting with the rebuilding programme. Your giving is now building schools and homes, re-establishing businesses with Micro Credit schemes and supplying essential equipment like fishing boats and nets.

Not once during this article have I asked that you give to the Foundation, so please reflect on just the following few points:

You have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep - which makes you richer than 75 percent of this world.

You have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish some place, which puts you among the top 8 percent of the world's wealthy.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation then you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

Because you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.

Rotarians are there when the cameras have gone and there are no plaudits other than a smile and thanks given in gratitude for a job well done - 20 years on and we are still immunising children against Polio.

Your charity, The Rotary Foundation, as I am sure you are all aware, never suffers "Disaster Fatigue"

Milton Fray

RIBI Foundation Chairman

