

# Rising cost of fuel, food prompts adjustments by relief groups

June 6, 2008

With oil trading at about \$130 a barrel in New York and London markets and gas at the pump inching toward \$4 a gallon in the United States, some international relief agencies have found the task of getting assistance to hurting people more challenging than ever.

“For one thing, it’s getting more difficult to get airline tickets,” said Dick Talley, logistics coordinator for [Texas Baptist Men](#). “There are fewer flights with fewer seats available.”

Airlines that may have provided special discounts to nonprofit humanitarian groups in the past are less likely to give up potential revenue when operating costs are high.

“Supply and demand means we have to buy more expensive seats on planes to get our people on the field,” Talley said.

What’s true for passengers also goes for cargo, Talley noted.

Rising costs of shipping equipment to areas for disaster relief or economic development projects has forced providers to find other ways of providing water purifiers, well-drilling equipment and other materials to remote areas.

For instance, in the Congo, Texas Baptist Men discovered a village could only afford to operate equipment that provided pure water for residents for two hours a day because it was powered by a diesel engine, and diesel fuel

costs topped \$10 a gallon.

To meet that need, TBM found a source that could provide solar panels to operate the equipment.

Food shipments create a different set of challenges. Global food prices nearly doubled in the last three years, the Washington-based Bread for the World organization noted. Prices of basic commodities—rice, wheat, corn and soy—have spiked in recent months.

Already, high oil prices contributed to the cost of producing, packaging, storing and shipping food.

Droughts, cyclones, typhoons and other natural disasters in some parts of the world make the situation even worse, Talley noted.

“Myanmar was the rice bowl of the world,” he said, pointing to the loss in agricultural production expected following a devastating cyclone.

When possible, Baptist relief groups purchase food locally or regionally—both to stimulate the economy in the area needing assistance and to eliminate long-distance transportation costs, said Joe Haag of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission, who administers the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger.