Aid Still Required is committed to building consistent streams of funding. In the wake of America’s very own economic crisis, I asked Andrea about ASR’s fundraising challenges. Her reply was refreshingly optimistic: “I believe that people want to give. They just need reassurance that the money is going where we say it will.” To this end, Andrea and Hunter personally travel to the locations in which Aid Still Required sponsors initiatives in order to identify the best uses of donated dollars in each location and to assess progress. They develop personal relationships with the directors of the organizations they sponsor, and prefer solutions in which local populations learn new skills and provide labor in exchange for teaching and materials. This way, both the organizations and the residents of an area are invested in restoring and maintaining it.

In the spirit of “teaching a man to fish,” Aid Still Required adopts a long-term view of the problems it addresses, preferring environmental engineering to simple handouts. Andrea and Hunter have noticed that when news coverage of a disaster fades, the handouts typically do too—but the underlying cause of strife remains. Their goal is to address the issues that lie at the root of various crises resulting from natural disasters, be it desert creep, poor levy construction, or lack of advance warning. To achieve long-term results, the pair needs the support—or at least the tolerance—of local governments. To achieve long-term results, the pair needs the support—or at least the tolerance—of local governments. Cultural and political considerations must be carefully navigated, with the focus remaining squarely on the humanitarian issues. Sustainability, on the other hand, is integral to ASR’s projects, since any solution implemented needs to be low-cost and low-tech in order to be maintained locally for the long haul. ASR’s goal is to help lay the groundwork for future prosperity and safety in devastated regions, which means that the projects need to be maintained by villagers without the need for future infusions of capital or technology. The projects, like the people they are designed to help, need to be self-sufficient in order to be successful in the long term, and sustainable solutions achieve this end by helping villagers to utilize existing resources in more efficient ways.

In order to support and expand upon this work Aid Still Required seeks not merely to repair environmental damage, but to alleviate conflict in this region by “re-establishing prosperity as a foundation for peace”. The pilot project, developed with a local NGO in Northern Sudan, has elements in place for replication throughout Darfur, Sudan, as well as the rest of North Africa. Given tensions in the region, Aid Still Required is in talks with Darfuris and The UNHCR as well as Northern Sudanese to see where the project can best take root and flourish.

The most striking thing about ASR is that it is not a gigantic, faceless organization equipped with jingling bells, collection boxes, a byzantine administrative structure, or bored-looking uniformed workers. It is not a resume-builder for college kids, a space-filler for social calendars, or a platform for political grand-standing. It is the beloved brainchild of two extraordinary people who felt compelled to live lives of service to others. The talents that they have each developed as professionals are coming into play in the creation and development of ASR, and they tell me that they feel as though “everything we’ve been doing has been leading to this.” Talking with Andrea and Hunter Payne about their journey in creating Aid Still Required feels like talking to proud parents about their child’s growth and accomplishments. They are excited—irrespective, even—about the potential of their projects, and remain buoyed by their faith in others’ willingness to help, even as the bleak atmosphere of global recession burdens their donors. They are as keen to educate themselves about the crises they work to alleviate as they are to educate others about them, and they have managed to inspire everyone from NBA players to rock stars to local leaders. For many in Darfur and around the world, they are, in fact, exactly what is required.

Aid Still Required can be reached at 310-454-4646 for inquiries. www.aidstillrequired.org