EVALUATION REPORTS

Agenda item 6

For information*

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TSUNAMI EVALUATION: SYNTHESIS REPORT

NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted to the Executive Board for information.

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal point indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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COVERING NOTE

On 23 February 2005, eight weeks after the Indian Ocean tsunami, a group of predominantly humanitarian agencies met in Geneva to create a sector-wide multi-agency process whereby participating agencies would collaborate on evaluations of the tsunami response and thereby work jointly on systemic problems related to humanitarian action, focusing on the policy level rather than the programme level.

Following this meeting, the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) was formed.[1] This independent learning and accountability initiative is the most intensive study of a humanitarian response since the Rwanda multi-donor evaluation in the mid-1990s. The TEC is managed by a core group of agencies; the secretariat is provided by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action.

The TEC has sponsored five joint thematic evaluations on aspects of the response to the tsunami disaster; these form the basis of the TEC's synthesis report, of which the executive summary is here presented to the Board for information as requested at its Second Regular Session of 2005.

The first two of the four main recommendations are particularly relevant to WFP. With regard to the first, WFP recognizes the need to reduce the level of food aid and to support community rehabilitation efforts as the nature of the operation changes in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. With regard to the second, WFP is increasing its disaster-response capacity and improving the linkages with other disaster-response actors.

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[1] The Office of Evaluation participated in the consultative groups of two of the five thematic evaluations and has contributed funding to support the TEC.

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TEC Synthesis Report: Executive summary

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Executive summary

1 The report

This report synthesises the five Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) thematic evaluation reports, their sub-studies and other materials relating to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunamis of 26 December 2004. These five studies are published alongside this Synthesis Report as a set,[1] and their titles are:

• Coordination of the international response to tsunami-affected countries

• The role of needs assessment in the tsunami response

• Impact of the tsunami response on local and national capacities

• Links between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in the tsunami response

• The funding response to the tsunami. The report consists of three main parts: an introduction; sections on the disaster and response; and conclusions and recommendations. It addresses primarily the initial phase of the international response, up to the first 11 months after the disaster. The report has two main aims: to improve the quality of natural disaster response policy and practice, and to account to both donor and affected-country populations.[2] Information on content, methods and constraints are contained in the Introduction.

Background

On 26 December 2004, a massive earthquake off the west coast of Northern Sumatra led to movement along a 1,200km section of the sea floor. This generated a series of tsunamis that killed people in 14 countries around the Indian Ocean. Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, India and Thailand were the hardest hit. Entire coastal zones

were destroyed, with the tsunamis causing damage up to 3km inland in some cases. Over 227,000 people lost their lives and some 1.7 million were displaced. A massive media-fuelled, global response resulted, producing an estimated US$13.5bn in international aid. The total economic cost of the damage and the consequent losses were estimated at US$9.9bn across the affected region, with Indonesia accounting for almost half of the total. In the Maldives, economic damage and losses accounted for over four-fifths of GDP and in Aceh, Indonesia, damage and losses were equivalent to almost the entire GDP of the province.

Pre-existing vulnerabilities, whether socioeconomic, environmental, political, psychological, age- or gender-based, resulted in multiple impacts. Chronic poverty, environmental degradation (such as overfishing and deforestation), displacement, inequalities, weak respect for human rights, and long-running armed conflict compounded the impact of the disaster.

While parts of Indonesia were struck within 20 minutes, it took up to several hours for the waves to hit many of the other affected countries. Wider knowledge of the nature of tsunamis, an alert media, and/or systems for communicating warnings could have saved many lives, as would have disaster-resistant construction. It is notable that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness, though demonstrably cost-efficient and effective if correctly undertaken, receive only a small portion of international aid.

2 Constraints and achievements

The tasks, complexity of situations and scale of the constraints facing locals, nationals and internationals alike in their efforts to respond were enormous. These are explained in The Response section of this report. In the affected region, preexisting weaknesses in disaster-affected national and local capacities were a major constraint. Other constraints included: the ongoing armed conflicts in Sri Lanka and Indonesia; ill-advised, confusing and sometimes bureaucratic official policies and procedures; politicised and centralised decision making, including in beneficiary targeting; and concerns about corruption and distrust of local leaders.

Vacillating and restrictive national and regional leadership constrained international response

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[1] All reports are also available on the TEC website, www.tsunami-evaluation.org, as well as on an accompanying CD Rom.

[2] This aim will be addressed largely through other outputs based on this Synthesis Report, such as a condensed version of the report written for a public audience, as well as a series of feedback workshops in the affected region to validate and create ownership of TEC findings.

activities in all of the affected countries to a greater or lesser degree. The 'buffer zones', in which residential reconstruction was initially forbidden and later permitted within a particular distance of the shoreline, are a case in point. Shelter reconstruction, poverty alleviation, risk reduction and livelihood recovery are slow, highly complex undertakings that frequently involve factors outside the control (and competence) of international humanitarian relief agencies. These factors can include issues of land rights and availability, national poverty trajectories and environmental considerations.

Constraints are also rooted within international agencies themselves, and include: the quantity and quality of international personnel; inappropriate programme methods and tools; and weak engagement in or management of coordination. The lack of significant, predictable, non-earmarked, multi-year funding for developing appropriate international capacities is also a major drawback and negatively affected the tsunami response in the way that agencies struggled to scale up. A fragmented approach was due in part to the proliferation of international agencies and their insistence on distinct programmes. This limited the effectiveness of international assessments and of recovery activities, as did an evident shortage of relevant expertise, high turnover of international staff, and a general lack of appropriate language skills. The TEC evaluation reports suggest that UN security rules and finance procedures may also have inhibited rapid deployment to remote areas. Slow, overlapping, poorly shared, and imprecise assessments were a constraint for donors in meeting their Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) commitment to fund 'in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments'.

Despite these impediments, generous relief provided affected populations with the security they needed to begin planning what to do next. Large amounts of funding allowed rapid initial recovery activities and some innovative practices, including a wider use of cash grants than has been the case in other emergencies. The gap between relief and recovery[3] that commonly appears in disaster response was avoided. Within a few months there was palpable evidence of recovery. In all countries, children were back in school quickly and health facilities and services were partly restored and, in some cases, much improved. By month six in Aceh, some 500,000 people had a solid roof over their heads (albeit mostly in host families and although some 70,000 were still living in tents). In Sri Lanka, more than 80 per cent of damaged fish markets, boats and fishing equipment was rapidly restored. Tourist numbers are on the rebound in Thailand and in the Maldives. In Sri Lanka, over 70 per cent of affected households are reported to have regained a steady income.

Disaster preparedness, while limited, was carried out by some international agencies, especially in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Thailand. Good practices illustrate how local and national ownership of aid programmes can be supported through patient, discerning and context-sensitive approaches. These include: the judicious use of cash grants; participatory complaints and polling mechanisms; joint projects, capacity building and staff secondments between national and international agencies; respect for national reconstruction standards; training of agencies' national staff; and detailed reporting to authorities. Weaknesses in international operations must be seen against this background of both major constraints and important achievements.

3. Accountability, ownership and recovery

Disaster response was mostly conducted by the affected people themselves. Practically all immediate life-saving actions and initial emergency support in the first few days (and weeks in some cases) was provided by local people, often assisted by the wider national public and institutions, including the national militaries. The role of host families is an under-valued and often overlooked example. The international response was most effective when enabling, facilitating and supporting these actors, and when accountable to them. Overall, international relief personnel were less successful in their recovery and risk reduction activities than they were in the relief phase. More sustainable, context specific approaches, through and with local and national capacities, are required.

In industrialised countries, natural disaster response is managed ('owned') by the affected states and communities. Supporting national and local ownership is a core principle of international development and humanitarian aid.[4] Exceptional international funding provided the opportunity for an exceptional international response. However, the pressure to spend money quickly and visibly worked against making the best use of local and national capacities. TEC studies do not find that many international agencies lived up to their own standards with regard to respect and support for local and national ownership: where local and national capacities were recognised, they were often applied in strengthening international agencies more than local responses. '[L]ocal ownership… was undermined and some local capacities were rendered more vulnerable' (TEC Capacities Report, 2006, p9). Many efforts and capacities of locals and nationals were marginalised by an overwhelming flood of well-funded international agencies (as well as hundreds of private individuals and organisations), which controlled immense resources. Treating affected countries as 'failed states' was a common error (TEC Needs Assessment Study, 2006).

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[3] In contrast with linkages between recovery and development, which have so far not been particularly successful.

[4] As expressed in various codes of practice for humanitarian response including the GHD initiative.

Information is power. Access to high quality information enables affected people to define and demand accountability, based on their own expectations and standards. It also allows them to plan their own recovery. Yet international agencies frequently failed in the modest objective of informing affected people in an accurate, timely, and comprehensive manner. The TEC LRRD Report (2006) notes: 'A tragic combination of arrogance and ignorance has characterised how much of the aid community… misled people[.]' (p83); 'Poor information flow is undoubtedly the biggest source of dissatisfaction, anger and frustration among affected people' (p73); '[S]ome… interventions may actually undermine future development[.] A lack of information to affected populations about reconstruction plans greatly limits their capacity to proceed with their own LRRD projects' (p10).

Other identified weaknesses include rarely coordinated or shared assessments; 'supply-driven', unsolicited and inappropriate aid; inappropriate housing designs and livelihoods solutions; poor understanding of the development role of income and tax generation; and stereotyping of options for women, smallfarmers and small entrepreneurs. Such shortcomings led to greater inequities, gender- and conflict-insensitive programming, cultural offence and waste. Moreover, aid resources are rarely tracked accurately by the international system. The myth that any kind of international assistance is needed, and now, is fuelled through lack of understanding among the mass media and donor public.

Other problems identified in the TEC thematic evaluations and their sub-studies include: brushing aside or misleading authorities, communities and local organisations; inadequate support to host families; displacement of able local staff by poorly prepared internationals; dominance of English as the working language; 'misrecognition' of local capacities resulting in inefficient implementation; applying more demanding conditions to national and local 'partners' than those accepted by international agencies; 'poaching' of staff from national and local entities; and limited participation of the affected-population.

'Recovery' is context- and location-specific, rather than time-bound. It can also occur alongside relief efforts. Recovery and support to preparedness are embedded in the objectives of humanitarian actors, for example, in the GHD principles, the Sphere standards and the Red Cross Code of Conduct. While it is too early to judge the ultimate success of tsunami recovery efforts – a follow-up TEC LRRD study will be conducted in 2007 which will provide further information on the progress of the recovery effort – indications of initial performance are available. Affected people were appreciative of achievements and good practices, notable in, for example, addressing transient poverty and the rapid move from relief to recovery.[5] Recurrent

weaknesses, however, included unduly short-term approaches; a shortage of appropriate agency 'recovery' skills; and poor understanding of local contexts, including ongoing recovery processes and the dynamics of armed conflicts in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Re-building communities and livelihoods is more complex and takes longer than building houses or distributing goods. The concentration on distribution of assets, especially boats, demonstrated a failure to understand and support diversified and sustainable livelihoods and communities.

Affected people have frequently complained that NGOs deal only with village officials and that poorer people are marginalised. At best, the international response restored the 'status quo ante'. At worst, it strengthened those who were better off and/or more articulate, such as fishermen who possessed boats, while marginalising those who had few assets, notably women and the most poor.

The impact of the international presence on the peace and governance situation in Aceh is deemed to have been positive, albeit not explicitly planned nor commensurate with the scale of funding. This has not been the case in Sri Lanka.

Despite advances in early warning systems, the tsunami response has rarely enhanced local preparedness or significantly reduced longer term vulnerability. How people conceptualise and respond to risk in organising their own recovery has been, so far, inadequately addressed. LRRD is a transition whereby recovery comes to be led by the affected people themselves. Such a shift away from dominance by the international community has been slow to take hold. It would be reasonable to ask 'Whose emergency was it?'

4 Funding

This was the most rapidly and generously funded disaster response in history: US$13.5 billion has been pledged or donated internationally for emergency relief and reconstruction, including more than US$5.5 billion from the general public in developed countries. Private donations[6] broke many records. Governments were flexible and quite rapid in their funding. Reporting of pledges and commitments and the timeliness of official donations has been better than in other crises. In some cases, funds were reallocated due to the wealth of tsunami response resources. Audits and evaluations were often commissioned exceptionally early by implementing agencies.

Most private funding went to a dozen of the main actors. NGOs and the Red Cross Movement often had more funding than did donor administrations or multilateral organisations. The budgetary constraints normally associated with humanitarian action did not exist. 'Good donorship' responsibilities were not, therefore, restricted to official donors. Few

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[5] There was no fixed chronology for this, as the duration of the relief phase varied by sector and location. While relief approaches remained appropriate in some sectors, others moved quickly to recovery.

[6] The term 'private' covers both the general public and private entities such as companies, religious groups or associations – ie, all non-institutional donors. The bulk of these donations came from private individuals.

international agencies tried to halt fundraising when limits were reached. The TEC Needs Assessment Report (2006, p17) sums up the impact of generous funding on implementing agencies as follows:

Generous funding not only exceeded the absorption capacity of an overstretched humanitarian industry and deprived it of its customary excuse for built-in systemic shortcomings, but also led to the proliferation of new actors with insufficient experience (and therefore competence), as well as to established actors venturing into activities outside their normal area of expertise. Finally, the relative excess of funding was a disincentive to assess, to coordinate and to apply the results of the few collective assessments.

Both governments and international agencies failed to ensure that funding was needs-based. Imbalances, non-needsdriven motivations (including supporting NGOs based in a donor's own country, regardless of whether they had any comparative advantage over other NGOs), poor 'end-user' traceability and inadequate monitoring were evident among official donor responses. 'Allocation and programming, particularly in the first weeks and months of 2005, were driven by politics and funds not by assessment and need' (TEC Funding Response Report, 2006, p38). Slow, overlapping, poorly shared and imprecise assessments were a constraint. Some major donors by-passed UN mechanisms, such as the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team, by deploying their own assessments. Also, the allocation of funds was fairly evenly split between relief and recovery. This did not reflect the reality that recovery needs are by far the most important. [7]

Most private funding appeared to be based on media reports. Nor was official funding based on systematic measurement of the relative effectiveness and efficiency of agencies and their programmes. The limited number of agencies with the capacity to absorb the scale of funding available was a constraint, as was the lack of system-wide definitions and standards for reporting of funds. Cascading layers of contracts among international, national and local organisations compounded these problems: the standards of financial reporting among UN agencies, the RC Movement, and international NGOs leave the humanitarian system vulnerable to criticism. (TEC Funding Response Report, 2006, p36).

The flow of financial information locally to affected populations in their own languages was also weak. Additionally, each donor has unique proposal and reporting formats, which makes donor reporting costly, complicates tracking and adds little value. Funding databases such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Development Assistance Database (DAD) were welcome but insufficient tools. While tsunami funding may not have reduced funding for other emergencies, if

more of it had been reallocated it would have increased funding for other emergencies. In the tsunami, total funding was over US$7,100 for every affected person which contrasts starkly, for example, with funding of only US$3 per head actually spent on someone affected by floods in Bangladesh in 2004. The current international appeals system delivers variable amounts of funding bearing little correlation with real needs on a global level.

For example, the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Sudan finds itself forced to cut rations by half in the face of increasing malnutrition, while donors generously fund programmes in Iraq or Afghanistan. This lack of adherence to core funding principles almost three years after the adoption of the GHD principles is striking. There is an urgent need for external monitoring and control of donor accountability and performance. Selfregulation is clearly not working.

5 International relief capacity and quality

The quality and capacity of the international relief system is inadequate given the scale and frequency of modern emergencies. Greater and more consistent investment in personnel, coordination, assessment and quality control, including agency certification/accreditation, is necessary.

The capacity of the international disaster response system to respond to sudden increases in demand (the 'surge capacity') is very limited. The lack of a career structure in general encourages high turnover and recruitment of inexperienced personnel. Despite initiatives within the sector to address some of these issues, relatively few people are adequately trained and few of them are from developing countries. The tsunami response highlighted major weaknesses in international staff profiles, staff quality and continuity. 'Poaching' of staff from national or local organisations can have mixed results: debilitating the contributions of those local organisations to recovery, while perhaps strengthening international agency capacity and developing the 'poached' individuals. Yet international capacity is most effective when combined appropriately with local capacity: 'The engagement of international actors with local capacities was most effective and efficient when it was built on sustained partnerships with the local actors that existed before the disaster' (TEC Capacities Report, 2006, p35).

The appointment of a high profile UN Special Envoy for the tsunami response was seen as a positive step. Also, coordination (of both UN/international actors and internally to the RC Movement) showed a marked improvement in late 2005. Nonetheless, the TEC reports show numerous examples of poor coordination. Three issues stand out: the proliferation of agencies made coordination more expensive and less effective; generous funding (especially private) reduced agencies' need to coordinate; and the perceived need for quick, tangible, agency specific results fuelled competition for visibility, 'beneficiaries' and projects. The

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[7] It should be recognised, however, that some donors strongly favoured recovery or reconstruction over emergency relief activities.

absence of agreed field representation mechanisms for (well-funded) NGOs and poor coordination skills among some managers complicated coordination. These were compounded by lack of clarity between coordination at the operational level (who does what) and coordination at the policy level (including joint advocacy).

The military played a key role in the disaster response. They will most likely, despite their high cost, continue to do so globally. There is, however, little joint planning and training between the military and traditional humanitarian actors and field coordination between them remains weak.

Just as there was a profusion of agencies, there was a profusion of assessments. Most were conducted by agencies for their own needs and did not influence collective decision takers. Media reports had a large influence on donor policy, thus taking the place of more formal assessments. Almost all international assessments relied on data culled from national and local sources. Better national and local preparedness would have made a big difference. A single, authoritative joint-assessment, at least between the UN, the RC Movement and the authorities, was sorely missing.

Humanitarian agencies have much to learn from the successful approach adopted by the IFIs: expedient cooperation among all partners (above all, the national governments), significant influx of expertise and visibility, and use of teams of analysts to reconcile and compile the various sources of information. (TEC Needs Assessment Report, 2006, p12)

Quality and capacity are closely linked, and all major relief responses have raised questions about the quality of the response. Several quality initiatives have emerged in the last decade, mostly in response to the Rwanda evaluation of the mid-1990s. Despite important steps, the lack of quality enforcement mechanisms means that the same problems keep reappearing in emergency responses (the Rwanda, Kosovo or Mitch responses, for instance). There is general agreement, for example, that there were far too many agencies of all types in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, be they NGOs, bilateral, multilateral or RC Movement agencies. Actors whose primary institutional motivation is not humanitarian also proliferated, such as the military and commercial enterprises. One reason for this is the ease of entry of inexperienced and incompetent actors into humanitarian operations.

The recurrence of many of the problems seen in the Rwanda response as well as other emergency responses, and the failure of agencies to meet their formal commitments to, for example, Sphere or the GHD principles, suggest that the various quality initiatives are not having a sufficient impact. The quality delivered by a normal business is driven by its customers. The same model of quality control does not operate in the aid sector. The biggest potential driver for quality should be feedback to the donor public on the quality of an agency's operations. Public knowledge is often limited, however, to the materials produced by agencies'

communications departments and/or media that concentrate either on these agency sources or on single dramatic issues rather than presenting a comprehensive analysis of the situation. This lack of information flow from the affected people to the donor population on the quality of the response means that there is little *external* pressure for improvement in the humanitarian sector.

If there were significant external pressure for change, many of the problems within the sector would not have been left unresolved for so long. The limited impact of the existing, voluntary quality initiatives suggests that we are unlikely to see any major improvement in the quality of humanitarian response. A regulatory system is needed to oblige agencies to put the affected population at the centre of measures of agency effectiveness, and to provide detailed and accurate information to the donor public and taxpayers on the outcomes of assistance, including the affected populations' views of that assistance.

6 Summary recommendations

Four main recommendations emerge from this Synthesis Report. In line with the TEC reports, they are aimed primarily at international actors. Section 5 of the Synthesis Report presents these recommendations in more detail, explaining the rationale behind them and analysing their implications. Annex E further presents a list of 'enablers' for the recommendations, broken down by international actor. The recommendations are:

1   The international humanitarian community needs a fundamental reorientation from supplying aid to supporting and facilitating communities' own relief and recovery priorities.

2   All actors should strive to increase their disaster response capacities and to improve the linkages and coherence between themselves and other actors in the international disaster response system, including those from the affected countries themselves.

3   The international relief system should establish an accreditation and certification system to distinguish agencies that work to a professional standard in a particular sector.

4   All actors need to make the current funding system impartial, and more efficient, flexible, transparent and better aligned with principles of good donorship.

Tsunami Evaluation Coalition: Synthesis Report