

Oxfam International Tsunami Fund  
Final evaluation series: Part 14

Oxfam International  
Tsunami Fund Final  
Evaluation:  
Architecture and  
Structure Review  
Executive Summary

An evaluation of  
the architecture  
and structure  
of the Oxfam  
International  
Tsunami Fund  
by Geoffrey Salkeld



## Tsunami Evaluation series

As part of its ongoing aims to learn from experience and to hold itself accountable for its actions, Oxfam has commissioned a wide-ranging evaluation of its response to the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. This comprises 14 thematic evaluations, 12 of the 14 studies have been conducted by independent consultants, while the remaining two conducted by members of Oxfam International Tsunami Fund secretariat (\*)

Recurring issues and key themes from the 14 individual evaluations are brought together in this evaluation summary report 'In the Wake of the Tsunami'.

The reports available in this series are:

Evaluation summary report: 'In the Wake of the Tsunami'

Thematic evaluations:

1. Livelihoods Review (Rajan Alexander)
2. Public Health Review (Pradeep Bharwad & Wim Klassen)
3. Shelter Review (Sarbjit Singh Sahota & Dave Hodgkins)
4. Gender Review (Annette Salkeld)
5. Downward Accountability Review (Ravinder Kumar & N. Raghunathan, Catalyst Management Services)
6. Corporate Accountability Review (John Chilver\*)
7. Advocacy Review (Alasdair Collins)
8. Disaster Risk Reduction Review (Man B. Thapa)
9. Partners and Partnerships Review (Stuart Kenward)
10. Monitoring and Evaluation Programme Review (Catherine Lowery)
11. Communications Review (Alex Wynter)
12. Funding and Finance Review (Clive Surman & John Chilver\*)
13. Management Issues Review (Simon Harris)
14. OITF Architecture and Structure Review (Geoffrey Salkeld)

The evaluation summary report and the executive summaries for the individual reviews can be found on the Oxfam website at [www.oxfam.org/emergencies/tsunami](http://www.oxfam.org/emergencies/tsunami). Full versions of the individual reviews are available on request from the Oxfam International Secretariat via [www.oxfam.org/contact](http://www.oxfam.org/contact).

Philip Horgan,  
Oxfam International Tsunami Fund Monitoring and Evaluation  
Coordinator, December 2009

**Cover image:** Almost the whole of the Banda Aceh fishing fleet was destroyed as the tsunami rushed up the river into the city, carrying with it most of the anchored trawlers and crushing them against the first bridge. Only boats that were out at sea survived. Credit: Jim Holmes/Oxfam

## Background

In response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Oxfam International established a new charity; the Oxfam International Tsunami Fund, with associated new bodies and structures as well as further developing existing organisational structures for humanitarian response. This evaluation reviews the merits of those bodies and structures.

## Executive summary

### Introduction

1. This survey was conducted during November/December 2008. Sixty people were invited to complete a web-based questionnaire: by 16 December, 35 (58 per cent) had responded and 31 had completed the survey. Six individuals with particular responsibilities were asked specific questions by e-mail and/or telephone (three responded). Background documents provided by the Tsunami M&E Co-ordinator were reviewed.
2. This report reviews:
  - Responses to the main questionnaire
  - Contributions from individual respondents
  - The issues raised in the documents
  - Implications and issues for the future.

### Context: the architecture<sup>i</sup>

3. Oxfam<sup>ii</sup> created the Tsunami Fund, Tsunami Fund Management Team, and Audit Committee to meet the practical and humanitarian challenges of a devastating, multi-country emergency and the accountability challenge of an overwhelmingly generous public response. However, these should also be seen in the context of the evolution of Oxfam's structures for responding to humanitarian emergencies.

The perceived need for the Tsunami Fund as a separate legal entity reflects the view that Oxfam had not yet established a system for transferring funds speedily, efficiently, and fairly between affiliates. When the tsunami made such a system necessary, the Fund (and Audit Committee) were created to fill the gap. However, the TFMT evolved out of the Humanitarian Consortium and the HC Management Group, and derived experience and credibility from these bodies. Humanitarian Country Teams, which provided the third pillar of the tsunami architecture, were already in existence, though new and inexperienced. The architecture was therefore partly new, partly an adaptation, and partly a continuation of an existing structure.

## Appreciation of the quality of Oxfam's response

4. The majority of respondents to the main questionnaire thought that the quality of Oxfam's tsunami response was up to or exceeded the standard they expected from Oxfam, throughout the response. The majority of respondents thought that the architecture had a positive impact on the quality of Oxfam's response.

## Appreciation of the architecture

5. The impact and value of the architecture were not seen as very significant during the initial phase of the response. Appreciation grew during the middle and later phases. However, during the later phase 'fatigue' was reported, as structures and procedures that had necessarily been put together at speed were still in place two or three years later and under considerable strain.
6. On the whole, 'upstream' respondents (such as TF Board and TFMT members and staff) are more positive about the value of the architecture than those closer to the action (such as field-based HCT members). However, there are exceptions at both ends of the spectrum.

7. Views differ about the need for and value of the Tsunami Fund as a separate UK-registered charity. Some respondents close to the TF question whether it was actually necessary and suggest that the Executive Directors and existing inter-affiliate contractual arrangements could have handled the responsibility that was given to the Fund Board. The Audit Committee is seen by respondents who mention it as a necessary body for ensuring high standards of accountability.
8. There is general agreement on the need for and value of the Tsunami Fund Management Team. No respondent has suggested any alternative means of 'virtual' fund management, allocation, and ensuring accountability. Respondents' criticisms of the TFMT are primarily about specific instances of its performance rather than about the need for such a body.
9. There is general agreement that Humanitarian Country Teams were an essential component of the architecture but that their capacities need to be strengthened. The concept was new and had to be put into practice during the response. Their performance was far too vulnerable to affiliate 'turf' competition and dependent on the qualities of individuals rather than robust systems. Respondents from each of the HCTs express divergent views about their team's performance, some very positive, others critical.
10. Responses to the question about the impact of the architecture on relations with and support for local partners indicate that arguments continue about the merits of working with partners versus direct implementation. Top-level OI efforts to break through the impasse need to be communicated convincingly throughout the confederation and especially among programme staff.

## Other lessons and implications for the future

11. There is general agreement that if a comparable (i.e. exceptional) emergency and similar public response occurred again, extraordinary arrangements would be needed and that some elements of the tsunami architecture should be adapted. Several respondents emphasise the need for readiness, i.e. a robust 'super-emergency' stand-by plan, ready to be put into action. The TFMT model and (greatly strengthened) HCTs should form the core of such a plan. However, opinions are divided about the need for establishing a separate entity such as the Tsunami Fund. It could be seen as having filled gaps which should not have existed.
12. The adoption of the 'Governance Framework for Managing Exceptional Emergencies' makes it clear that an 'Exceptional Emergency Management Committee' would have a remit and composition similar to that of the TFMT, and presumably this Framework would be capable of absorbing the lessons of the TFMT's experience in handling an 'exceptional' emergency.
13. However, there is less clarity around carrying the learning about the tsunami architecture forward to contingency planning about future Category 1 (and 2) emergencies. This is because of two recent policy decisions: the 'step aside' decision by which Oxfam GB is the default lead for all Category 1 emergencies and the 'single management structure' policy decision. Working through the implications of these decisions should take account of the lessons emerging from this and the other reviews forming the Tsunami Final Evaluation. As Category 1 and 2 emergencies are more frequent and numerous than 'exceptional' emergencies, these issues need addressing urgently.
14. The HCTs (perhaps with regional-level backstopping) should be the starting point for reforming the architecture of future humanitarian response, rather than further elaboration of the global-level structure.

## References

<sup>1</sup>The 'architecture' refers to the Tsunami Fund, governed by the Tsunami Fund Board (referred to in the report as the TF), the Tsunami Fund Management Team (TFMT), and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs).

<sup>2</sup>Throughout the report, the term 'Oxfam' is used to mean the Oxfam International confederation, and individual affiliates and OI structures are referred to by name.

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### **Oxfam observer members**

The following organizations are currently observer members of Oxfam International, working towards possible full affiliation:

**Oxfam Japan:** [www.oxfam.jp](http://www.oxfam.jp)

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