



Oxfam International Tsunami Fund  
Final evaluation series: Part 10

Oxfam International  
Tsunami Fund  
Final Evaluation:  
Monitoring  
and Evaluation  
Programme Review  
Executive Summary

An evaluation  
of Oxfam  
International's  
monitoring  
and evaluation  
programme in  
the 2004 Indian  
Ocean tsunami  
response

by Catherine Lowery

## 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:** Girls play in front of their tent in Lapang IDP camp in Meulaboh. Children have very few opportunities for activities in the camps, but regular schools opened within months of the tsunami. Credit: Jim Holmes/Oxfam

## Executive summary

### Introduction

The Tsunami Fund response has been Oxfam's largest single humanitarian response, with programmes in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Burma, Thailand, Somalia, and the Maldives, designed and implemented by a number of different Oxfam affiliates and with spending totalling close to \$300m.

The objective of the final evaluation process was two-fold: firstly, to enable Oxfam International to reflect on and learn in practice from its response to the tsunami and therefore to improve OI's humanitarian responses, and, by sharing these findings, to enable OI to hold itself accountable to funders (predominantly the public), beneficiaries, and other stakeholders.

This review is one of several reviews taking place as part of the Oxfam International Tsunami Fund (OITF)'s Final Evaluation. Specifically, the objective of this learning study is to review the M&E framework of the OITF and its effectiveness. The review of the M&E framework and learning mechanism employed the normal range of social science research methods: a comprehensive document review, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The review of the M&E framework was divided into three aspects, namely structure, approach/implementation, and outcome. The structure aspect examines what the M&E framework set out to achieve, and why, and how the structure was set up to meet these objectives; incorporated into this is identification of gaps in the structure. The second aspect covers the overall approach and implementation of the framework to achieve its objective i.e. what happened on a day-to-day basis. Finally, the outcome aspect examines the results achieved by the system in terms of improvement in capacity, sharing learning, and providing a quality response.

## Key findings

Ultimately OI's co-operation in humanitarian response should result in a greater impact at beneficiary level; a joint evaluation is a tool in that direction. The Tsunami Fund was OI's first attempt to put in place a common set of principles and approaches in the form of an M&E framework across a number of affiliates, within the context of an unprecedented disaster. The common evaluations were a key aspect of the framework, as were the significant joint projects, which required the affiliates to work together with each other, in some cases for the first time. Prior to the tsunami, affiliates reported that there was no real sense of working together. Dedicated staff at the OI level made a difference; this was the one role that transgressed affiliate boundaries.

Overall the M&E framework was viewed as imperfect but as bringing added value to the response. Among the key results were that the Red Cross Code of Conduct and accountability were a continual focus throughout the response, as they were a clear intention and commitment of the framework – even though success in these areas was mixed, as seen in the accountability and country evaluations. In terms of the common evaluations, it was generally felt that the OI evaluations would not have taken place if the M&E framework and staff had not been in place; this resulted in changes in management practice and sectoral responses. The results in terms of capacity building rested on individuals: where the M&E co-ordinator in-country was recognised as an expert and was able to develop a good relationship with affiliates, the technical expertise and capacity building he/she provided was seen as one of the major achievements of the M&E framework.

Weaknesses in the M&E framework were linked to:

- Institutional leadership from the Tsunami Fund Management Team (TFMT) in the initial period, due to competing priorities. Managing the fund was additional to the management team's existing roles, and the pressure within the new structure to create solid financial reporting mechanisms resulted in the M&E framework not being prioritised;

- Difficulties faced by the affiliate managing the framework in recruiting key staff members;
- Lack of an operational plan in translating the large-scale principles contained in the Global Strategy to clear output for the OITF M&E co-ordinators at country level;
- The initial management of the framework being external to the fund and its perceived control. This changed when the OITF M&E co-ordinator role became part of the secretariat;
- Lack of an OI structure at the country level, resulting in adoption of the framework being dependent upon individual champions moving forward on key aspects of it. For example, even though the role of OITF M&E co-ordinator at country level was an OI post, where these posts sat within the OI structure at country level was not coherent across different country responses, and M&E co-ordinators were not automatically invited to attend Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) meetings.

Implementation of the M&E framework was not prioritised in the first year of the response by the OITF TFMT, for a number of reasons. This resulted in slow progress and development of the framework in the initial period.

In India and Sri Lanka, the role of the OITF M&E co-ordinator was an additional role brought to the response, independent of the direct implementation undertaken by affiliates. It provided a valuable resource for affiliates, helping to co-ordinate their M&E work to a greater extent than would have otherwise occurred. However, the effectiveness of this role was hindered by the high turnover of OITF M&E staff. There was also confusion between the needs of the OI communication function and the reporting needs of the OITF M&E framework. The information requested by the communication function in the OITF secretariat was perceived as a need of the M&E framework. This confused affiliates as to the purpose of the framework: to provide evidence of impact in what they perceived as a simplistic form, or to set in place key principles to be adopted across the tsunami response. This meant that the communication needs of the secretariat resulted in driving the M&E data collection practices of some affiliates.

## Best practices

### ***Location of country M&E co-ordinators***

In Sri Lanka the M&E co-ordinator moved around between the offices of different affiliates and was based in each office for part of the week. This allowed an informal exchange of ideas, the building of trust, and an opportunity to provide regular/informal technical input.

### ***OITF M&E co-ordinator's role within the HCT***

In Sri Lanka the M&E co-ordinator attended all HCT meetings and so was able to engage with senior management staff and persuade them to address and move forward on key aspects of the framework. The co-ordinator provided a neutral and independent OI perspective that was not always forthcoming from individual affiliate members. This increased the buy-in of affiliates, which in turn trickled down to the affiliates' offices.

### ***Follow-up on common evaluation***

After the two evaluations that were common across affiliates in India, a follow-up plan was developed. Updates were then shared regularly at HCT meetings, led by the M&E co-ordinator. This role ensured a focus on issues highlighted in the evaluation recommendations that might not have occurred otherwise.

### ***Resourcing***

An important aspect of the framework was that it established a precedent and a benchmark for properly resourcing M&E, having allocated 0.5 per cent of the fund's income to this function. This level of funding allowed this review and others to take place.

## Lessons learned

It was generally felt that the outputs from M&E produced lessons. However, the degree to which learning was incorporated and spread across the different affiliates during the tsunami response was dependent upon the overall structure across affiliates being enabling. The lessons learned documented here offer Oxfam an opportunity to improve M&E systems for future emergencies.

This learning can then be taken forward and incorporated into wider policies and procedures within OI and applied to other humanitarian responses.

### ***A more comprehensive strategy***

To ensure success of the M&E framework, a more comprehensive strategy needs to be developed, including potential tools, guidelines, and principles. These will be resources that affiliates can access during an OI emergency response, and must be applicable in a variety of operational contexts. This will ensure that it is clear to all affiliates what needs to be done and will include mechanisms on how to move forward, as the existing framework left it open to affiliates that had existing operational priorities and limited experience of working together. Consequently, the lack of a comprehensive strategy made the success of the framework highly dependent on the skills of the co-ordinators and the willingness of affiliates to engage.

### ***Skill pools of OI emergency staff***

The OITF M&E framework was slow to get started, meaning that it was not embedded into the structure of affiliates' programmes. This slowness was in part a result of slow recruitment; coupled with this, many of the OITF M&E co-ordinators at country level did not have the necessary skill set required. As all emergency responses are considered OI responses, the M&E post should be included as a key post in a skills pool of emergency staff.

### ***Clearer role for the OITF M&E co-ordinator at the country level within the HCT and at the global level within the TFMT***

As the fund developed, a clearer role for the OITF M&E co-ordinator developed in relation to the TFMT. The co-ordinator reported directly to the TFMT, providing feedback on programme quality issues. At the country level, the co-ordinator's position was best placed as being part of the HCT, providing technical advice on the HCT meeting its OI M&E obligations. The country-level co-ordinator's clearer role and responsibilities in relation to the HCT also contributed to overcoming the previous inability to get things implemented, as they had a clearly recognisable role and the support of the other HCT affiliates.

### ***Development of protocol and guidelines: dossier and RTE guidelines***

The M&E co-ordinator incorporated some of the learning from the M&E framework's structure into the Humanitarian Dossier. The Dossier existed before, but it was revised after the tsunami, making it clear that the lead should also be responsible for M&E. In addition, individual TF staff members fed into the Real Time Evaluation (RTE) guidelines. This was an example of where learning was institutionalised.

### **Day of reflection**

In the Yogyakarta earthquake, a day of reflection was incorporated into the programme cycle six weeks into the response. This learning opportunity came from the experience of the Aceh programme.

### ***Communication needs versus M&E requirements***

There was confusion between reporting on communication needs and reporting on the OITF M&E framework. The M&E framework was not intended to place additional reporting requirements on affiliates. However, the request for information from the communication function in the secretariat, in the form of a quarterly report, placed a burden on M&E co-ordinators in-country, and confusion resulted within the affiliates as to the overall function of the M&E framework. This was evident in the fact that a number of affiliates referred to the quarterly report as a reporting requirement. A representative quote from one affiliate was that, 'Sex-disaggregated data were not requested in the reporting format', although they were needed to show evidence of progress. In other M&E frameworks, reporting requirements are used for other purposes such as fund-raising and communication. In the case of the OITF, the information needs came directly from the communication function in the OITF secretariat and were included within the role of the M&E co-ordinator in-country, as data collection is naturally included within this role.

### ***Common frameworks***

Developing new ways of working in a large-scale emergency is difficult, as the natural reflex is to revert back to a common way of working i.e. to get operations going by oneself. This can make the adoption of an OI approach difficult, as once affiliates have started doing things in a certain way, change is more difficult.

## Recommendations

1. Clearer OI management structures should be developed at the country level to determine how any OI staff relate to the HCT and to the structures of affiliates, rather than depending on individual relationships for the success of the framework.
2. An operational plan should be developed to accompany the framework. The business plan would provide a more comprehensive framework, including clear benchmarks against which to measure the adoption of principles and clear guidelines on how to take the framework forward at the country level.
3. The M&E co-ordinator should be task managed by the HCT in-country and work plans should be designed and approved through the HCT. Overall responsibility for this role should rest with the overall M&E co-ordinator to ensure that the principles of the framework are addressed within their work plans.
4. To ensure independence and neutrality of an OI framework, the overall M&E co-ordinator should report to the TFMT through the secretariat.
5. OITF M&E co-ordinators at country level need to be experts in their field to ensure that they bring relevant expertise and credibility to the framework.
6. In the initial period, awareness of the framework's objectives needs to be clearer to all affiliates. This can be achieved by making clearer guidelines available and by increased networking between the OITF M&E co-ordinators at country level.

7. There should be clearer distinction around reporting lines between the M&E framework and other information requirements to avoid confusion around the role of the framework.
8. Any OI post or initiative needs to be managed within an OI structure to provide neutrality and independence from any affiliates, in order to build trust.
9. Working protocols should be established within OI structures prior to an emergency, so that affiliates are not attempting to establish working principles when operational priorities during an emergency take precedence.
10. OI M&E co-ordinators need to operate as a team to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of the key principles and the operational plan for the framework. This will enable them to be 'OI M&E champions' when working among affiliates and to encourage learning and sharing across affiliates.
11. A balance needs to be found between ensuring that OITF M&E co-ordinators at country level are linked with some decision-making authority to enable the adoption of best practice, while not resulting in them looking like 'police'.
12. Provision of resources from OI needs to be matched by the commitment of resources from the affiliate's side, so that the M&E obligation does not rest on an overworked manager and so that additional OI resources and skills provided through the framework are utilised adequately.

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