

Oxfam International
Tsunami Fund
Final Evaluation:
Partners and
Partnerships Review
Executive Summary

An evaluation
of partners and
partnership
issues in Oxfam
International's
response to
the 2004 Indian
Ocean tsunami
by Stuart Kenward



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*)
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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. Full versions of the individual reviews are available on request from the Oxfam International Secretariat via www.oxfam.org/contact

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

Cover image: Oxfam staff and labourers help to construct an Oxfam T11 water tank in CTB camp, Kinniya, Trincomalee District, eastern Sri Lanka. Previously water was provided to approximately 128 families from five small tanks around the camp, but this 11,000 cubic metre tank will provide water to tap stands, making life easier for people living there. Credit: Tori Ray/Oxfam

Executive summary

With the ending of the OITF in December 2008, it is appropriate to undertake an evaluation of Oxfam's Tsunami Response. This report is one of several reviews that make up the final evaluation. Its focus is on Oxfam's work with partners; its specific objectives are to:

- 'Document the management and programmatic approaches to partners and partnerships work;¹
- Identify processes, practices, lessons which have scope for influencing practice and policy of Oxfam and other humanitarian organisations in humanitarian responses.'

The report is based on data that have been collected from a variety of sources using a range of tools, including email questionnaires, workshops, and a range of documents, as well as targeted emails. It looks at partnership work in each of the tsunami response countries, focusing primarily on Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India and to a lesser extent on Somalia, Burma, Thailand, and the Maldives.

During the tsunami response Oxfam has worked wherever possible through partners. It is recognised that local partners are likely to have a better understanding of the local context and consequently partnerships have been developed with some 200 organisations of varying size. Oxfam affiliates² only implemented programmes directly where partners did not have the capacity to meet the needs of the affected population or where affiliates had no local partners. In some cases Oxfam affiliates chose to work through contractors or adopted a range of options (including contractors, local partners, and an operational approach) to implement their programmes. Factors influencing the approach included the capacity of civil society, affiliate history within the country, the affiliate's own organisational capacity, and the sector itself. Some affiliates have a tendency to work with certain types of partner. For example, Oxfam Novib and Intermon Oxfam tend to work through larger NGOs such as BRAC and do not implement programmes themselves, while Oxfam Australia tends to favour working with community-based organisations (CBOs).

Affiliates employed a variety of approaches, followed different processes, and used a combination of criteria to select new partners. The rigour with which partner capacity was assessed did vary. Understandably, there was probably more rigour during the latter phases of the response compared with the emergency phase, but on the whole partners had the capacity to undertake what was asked of them.

Almost all partner organisations that were questioned on the subject indicated that their partnership with Oxfam had improved the managerial and technical capacity of their organisation. Management capacity was particularly enhanced in the areas of accounting/financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting.

Approaches to building the capacity of partners varied by affiliate and included training workshops, secondments, and in the case of Aceh, Indonesia the development of a Partnership Support and Liaison Unit (PSLU). The PSLU had as one of its functions to build the capacity of local organisations and therefore ‘...to contribute to longer-term civil society development in the area’.³

According to those affiliate staff questioned, ‘most’ partner organisations are now in a better position to respond to future emergencies. Capacity has been enhanced not only as a result of learning-by-doing but also as a result of capacity building provided through Oxfam affiliates. This is illustrated by Oxfam’s work with partners in India to develop contingency plans for future emergencies. Oxfam has also collaborated with RedR India to help 24 NGOs to develop rapid response plans and build up their emergency capacity.

The operating environment has had an impact on Oxfam’s approach to partnerships as well as the effectiveness of partnerships. The most significant contextual factors include the security situation (particularly in Indonesia and Sri Lanka), government policies, the amount of funding available and the state of civil society. For example, in Sri Lanka the northern and eastern districts were most affected by the civil war, which meant that Oxfam had to work through its network of CBOs, who had access. In Indonesia the large amount of funding provided great

opportunities, but it also created challenges, such as the rapid recruitment of staff who did not always receive proper inductions or training, leading sometimes to an inconsistent approach.

On balance, partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs) have been effective and capacity has been enhanced. There have, however, been a number of more challenging partnerships which have broken down, largely due to allegations of financial impropriety. A total of six partners were found to be either mismanaging Oxfam funds or were found to be guilty of fraud. All six partners came from India. Oxfam has recognised that ‘oversight of financial management in partner programs in India was sometimes inadequate’.⁴ However, Oxfam always investigated suspected mismanagement and/or allegations of fraud with haste and objectivity.

The review outlines a number of lessons and recommendations that can be applied in future emergencies. These are contained in the final section of the report.

References

¹ OITF, Terms of Reference, 080908.

² ‘Oxfam affiliates’ refers to the organisations that make up the Oxfam confederation, for example Oxfam Australia, Oxfam GB.

³ From the project description of PSLU as a project, OPAL IDSA57, in the Aceh-Nias programme, approved as PIP 00225.

⁴ Oxfam International Tsunami Fund, End of Program Report, December 2008.

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