



Oxfam International Tsunami Fund
Final evaluation series: Part 3

Oxfam International
Tsunami Fund Final
Evaluation:
Shelter Review
Executive Summary

An evaluation
of Oxfam
International's
shelter response
to the 2004
Indian Ocean
tsunami

by Sarbjit Singh Sahota,
and Dave Hodgkins

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. 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: A mason laying bricks to complete a washroom at a semi-permanent home built with assistance from Oxfam in Deah Baru village, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Credit: Jim Holmes/Oxfam

Foreword

Perhaps the most important assessment of Oxfam's post tsunami shelter programs comes from the thousands of women, men and children beneficiaries, who assessed the shelters built by Oxfam affiliates and partners as relevant to their needs, substantially improving their quality of life, whilst reducing their risk from future disasters.

Some of the critical factors affecting the success or failure of individual programs included technical and social capacity of staff, adequacy of staffing levels, flexibility in project design and partner capacity. In many cases efficiency in implementation of shelter projects in all three shelter phases was impaired by a lack of appropriate and timely decision-making which by-and-large emanates out of the weakness of the existing decision support system for shelter and settlement.

Executive summary

As part of the global response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Oxfam International (OI) affiliates and their partners undertook a considerable amount of shelter work in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India, and worked on a smaller scale in Somalia, Myanmar, and Thailand. The Tsunami Fund response has been Oxfam's largest single humanitarian response, with programmes designed and implemented by a number of different Oxfam affiliates and spending totalling close to US\$300m. Of this, about 19 per cent was spent on responding to the shelter priorities of the affected population and on meeting Oxfam's humanitarian responsibilities. With the official closure of the Oxfam International Tsunami Fund (OITF) at the end of 2008, this review was commissioned to assess lessons from the response that will improve the quality of Oxfam's assistance in future emergencies.

The approach undertaken by the consultants consisted of a 'meta' evaluation and an analytical overview that summarises the principal findings and recommendations through synthesis. The synthesis of information was developed by means of a 'lessons learned'¹ workshop, a structured questionnaire (for results, see Annex 2 in the full report), key informant interviews, and a review

of documentation, with a focus on the larger picture rather than on details. It may be noted that participants in the workshop were essentially operational managers from the field and senior country managers, and so the lessons expressed here give strong weighting to their perspectives. Ideally these perspectives will need to be considered in balance with factors cited by head office decision-makers, particularly with regard to the overall likely degree of OI's engagement in the shelter sector in future large-scale emergencies. However, for various reasons, this review process failed to attract the interest of head office decision-makers.

From the point of view of individual beneficiaries, the post-tsunami shelter work done by OI affiliates and partners across the region was assessed as relevant, being seen to have substantially improved the quality of life of tsunami-affected women, men, and children, while reducing risk to life from future disasters. However, programme planning and management had to overcome some serious capacity constraints. Critical factors affecting the implementation of programmes included technical capacity of staff and their ability to work with the target community, adequacy of project staffing, flexibility in project design, and capacity of partners. In many cases, efficiency in implementing projects in the three shelter phases was impaired by a lack of appropriate and timely decision-making, as perceived by those the ground². Others involved cited the exceptional difficulties of effective large-scale decision-making and planning given the unprecedented scale of need engendered by the tsunami.

The shelter review sets out to examine the recent history of humanitarian response, particularly post-tsunami shelter work in Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka. At present, a number of difficult issues raised by the tsunami shelter response continue to challenge Oxfam's future options with respect to post-disaster shelter work. As part of the corrective actions taken internally within various OI affiliates, senior management initiated a number of investigations, directives, new shelter policies, and so on, which have led to uneasiness at various levels within the organisation. This review is expected in particular to help affiliates see a way forward towards a more predictable and relevant response by OI

to the shelter and settlement needs of disaster-affected women, men, and children, as Oxfam considers its role in the shelter sector overall. The conclusions drawn by this study may be useful in advocating for consolidation of the space available to shelter programme planning within OI policies on disaster preparedness, relief, and rehabilitation. Apart from this report, the other key output of the review is a standalone guidance document entitled 'Under what conditions could/should Oxfam carry out shelter work, if at all?'. For convenience, this document is referred to as the 'If at all' document.

Prime Lesson Learned: There is systemic weakness

Across the tsunami-affected region, OI affiliates and their partners undertook substantial shelter and settlement work in different phases of the response, with mixed outcomes. The immediate impression is that overall a more consistent and perhaps higher output could have been achieved, and that this could have been feasible even given the unprecedented scale of the disaster and Oxfam's relatively thin previous experience in the shelter sector. For example:

- In Sri Lanka, after implementing a reasonably successful transitional shelter programme, a pilot project demonstrating the use of appropriate technologies was implemented quite late in the permanent construction phase, when most agencies had already made their technology choices³. As a learning project, pilot work would have been valuable during the transition phase, when there was the opportunity and space to influence the choice of technology for permanent reconstruction.
- In India, the difficult operating environment engendered by surplus resources and by politicians and government forcefully pushing their own agendas resulted in Oxfam walking away from discussions on the transitional shelter and settlement needs of the affected population. Could the decision-makers have made appropriately informed decisions, as this would have given Oxfam access to the affected population and, in

turn, ensured the population's access to Oxfam services? Similarly, in Indonesia there were problems taking appropriate decisions on the issue of supporting transitional shelter in barracks, a position that was being strongly promoted by the Government of Indonesia (GoI). Oxfam and other NGOs in the shelter sector failed to convince the GoI at the time, although the Government's emphatic decision not to use a barracks strategy following the 2006 Java earthquake has since vindicated the NGOs' position.

Systemic weakness: The absence of a potent structure and decision support system (DSS) with shelter-specific criteria and tools to implement an adequate shelter and settlement response was a very visible characteristic of shelter programmes in all the tsunami-affected countries. General guidance on decision-making does apparently exist within the OI Humanitarian Dossier, or within individual affiliates' guidelines, for watsan in particular, but OI's previously limited body of engagement in shelter and settlement meant that comparable tools were lacking in this sector. A lack of organisational preparedness to implement shelter programmes seriously undermined the capacity of OI affiliates to deliver effectively on their humanitarian responsibilities. An example of the lack of ready means to resolve significant policy differences was the controversial import of timber from New Zealand and Australia to Sri Lanka and Indonesia – promoted by some on the ground and rejected by others, and rejected by beneficiaries in Indonesia. Corruption by staff and partners and seeking out beneficiaries to occupy a newly completed housing project in Somalia were other expressions of the lack of depth and resources in the DSS for implementing shelter and settlement programmes – although, to be fair, the need for an unprecedented scale-up and the necessity of taking on untried staff and contractors were also aggravating factors. In some instances, decision-making logic, knowledge bases, and systems from related fields such as watsan were translated to the shelter sector, with limited success. If OI is to continue as a significant actor in shelter, it needs to build its shelter and settlement planning with a specific knowledge base and intelligence to solve problems that emerge from any emergency situation.

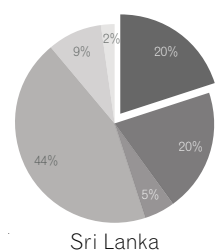
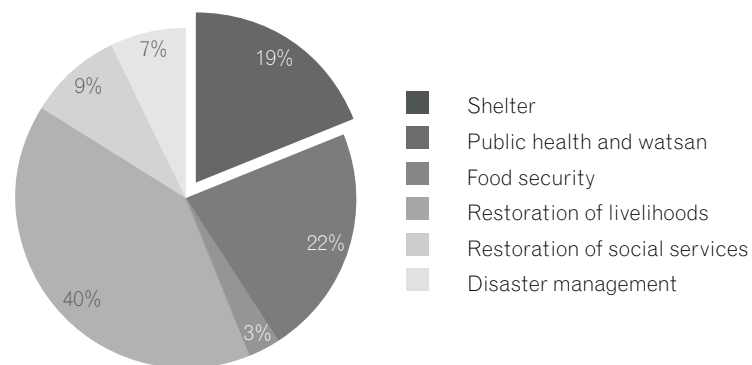
Two important areas are recommended for improvement/change in any future OI shelter response:

- Deployment of adequately trained, experienced, and briefed personnel and the setting up of the necessary support systems to enhance their capacity and capability and to ensure their retention;
- Establishment of a decision support system (DSS) for shelter and settlement planning and implementation with the aim of building an auditable humanitarian response.

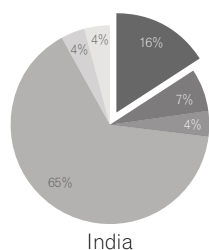
Analysis of post-tsunami spending reveals useful facts as well as avenues that could improve the impact of work done by OI affiliates and their partners:

Over the past few decades, Oxfam's management has been unable to put in place a robust DSS to back its decision to repeatedly expend extensive resources on shelter and settlement work.⁴ This relates partly to incomplete co-ordination and policy alignment between OI affiliates as a whole, but has been particularly marked in the shelter sector, where OI has had comparatively little conscious focus. Excerpts from one relevant report hint at the wider problem: 'The programme's earlier expansion and weak systems have bequeathed a fire-fighting management culture in Banda Aceh. The management structure overloads the reporting line to the Programme Manager for Operations. Senior managers have little time to visit the projects or bring about the complex shifts required for a transition to greater quality and impact. There is a significant perceived disconnect and communication problem between SMT and the field.'⁵

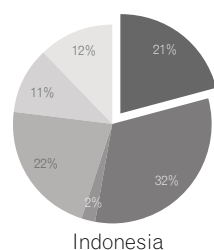
**Breakdown of Oxfam Tsunami Fund expenditure by sector.
Overall expenditure up to September 2008**



Sri Lanka



India



Indonesia

- Oxfam's expenditure on shelter was similar to its expenditure on watsan. In terms of the organisation's internal capacity to implement programmes in these two sectors, the systemic support available to implement watsan is state-of-the-art while the systems, tools, and standards available for shelter are minimal.
- Oxfam's maximum expenditure was on livelihoods. This could provide a big opportunity to synergise and adopt common approaches for implementation and a certain level of integration with the shelter sector.
- There is a great opportunity to incorporate perspectives such as human ecology, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable settlements, etc. into integrated programmes that can

decisively reduce the risk of disaster. In fact, the delivery of integrated programmes could become an organisational priority and could improve OI's overall relevance in the humanitarian sector. A certain level of organisational preparedness is required to implement integrated programmes:

- This may require the establishment of an inter-sectoral group decision support system (GDSS);
- It would be imperative to establish tools, mechanisms, and standards to measure levels of integration.

Oxfam's brand image is capable of attracting strong commitment from donors; funding for the tsunami response was just one example. There is an urgent need to enhance humanitarian performance to create appropriate value for the affected population, supporters, and in the long run for Oxfam itself. As an organisation, OI has all the historic experience and knowledge as well as the right attitude, but probably more focus is necessary in establishing proportionate systems that are capable of handling the workload and of meeting expectations of high levels of performance. Investing to establish robust systems, with a focus on strengthening the human resources component of the system, should be an immediate priority.

References

¹The OI Shelter and Settlement Workshop was held in Chennai, India, 19–21 October 2008

² Post-disaster shelter response is delivered in two distinct phases after the emergency shelter response.

³ Interview with Raghuram Srinivasa Rao, shelter adviser with OGB, May–November 2005, based in the east of Sri Lanka.

⁴ 'At the time of the tsunami, Oxfam had only one full-time person employed to oversee its shelter programmes; the rest of the staff were engaged from time to time on short-term contracts.' – Manish Mehta, Oxfam shelter manager in Indonesia, 2005.

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

Oxfam Japan: www.oxfam.jp

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