

## **Summary of the Independent Evaluation of the Oxfam International Aceh and Nias Tsunami and Earthquake Response**

**December 2004 – January 2006**

### **Introduction**

Indonesia suffered the heaviest loss of life and destruction from the December 2004 tsunami. The waves washed away entire villages and changed the coastline of Aceh forever. An estimated 169,000 people died and 600,000 people were displaced. Three months later, a second powerful earthquake hit the neighboring island of Nias. The tsunami response program across Aceh and Nias is Oxfam International's (OI) largest, employing over 800 staff supporting over 300,000 people with work in public health, water and sanitation, shelter and livelihoods.

The independent evaluation was conducted in January 2006 to assess the first year of the operational (non partner-led) response to the tsunami and earthquake in Aceh and Nias. It forms part of a suite of evaluations of the first year of OI's tsunami programming in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. As a result of this evaluation, major changes were made to the tsunami response program in Aceh and Nias. This document provides an edited summary of the main findings and OI's response to the recommendations.

### **The Evaluation**

The evaluation focused on the impact of the OI operational program in Aceh and Nias, the organizational and management processes underpinning it and factors that affected the response. The evaluation was based on interviews and focus group discussions involving 146 Oxfam staff and 171 beneficiaries, as well as a review of documentation. The evaluation presented recommendations for the Aceh and Nias program, as well as global recommendations to improve future OI humanitarian responses.

The evaluation observes that much has been achieved in terms of outputs; however changes are needed in approach if the program is to have the impact sought by Oxfam. Oxfam's decision to evaluate quality and not outputs has meant that the report's emphasis is more critical than one focusing on achievements at an output level. The Aceh program is bigger than the rest of Oxfam's East Asia programs put together. Creating coherence and learning across the seven project sites in a context in which available NGO skills are limited is a major challenge. The competence of Oxfam's staff in Aceh, the foundations laid and the real commitment of the team to improve their impact mean that further efforts could really increase impact over the next two years and beyond.

Oxfam has demonstrated an ability to innovate and to commit to humanitarian standards and accountability principles. The program is one of the largest in Aceh. Oxfam has a high profile with government and other agencies and is working in Nias and all but two of the eight main tsunami-affected districts. The collaboration,

mechanisms for funding and decision-making and the added value of OI affiliates in the Aceh response was widely viewed as a success and a platform for learning.

Oxfam played a lead role in water and sanitation from early in the response, establishing good links with the government and co-chairing the Water and Sanitation meetings with UNICEF. Oxfam's "outstanding role" was recognized in the DEC evaluation. The prevalence of water-borne related mortality and morbidity has been remarkably low. Communities consistently stated that levels of diarrhea were normal, no higher than pre-tsunami.

Oxfam's livelihoods activities have concentrated on cash for work and cash grants. Cash for work has notably facilitated community return and the re-establishment of livelihoods through extensive clearance of debris, agricultural and fishpond rehabilitation, and bridge and road building. The cash injected into the local economy can reasonably be expected to have enabled many people to purchase, trade and recover assets. Communities consistently praised the cash for work scheme.

At the time of evaluation, 700 community-built houses have been supported by Oxfam, of which 360 are occupied. As with all agencies, progress has been slow. The procurement of (legal) timber and other materials has been extremely difficult. Complex land-rights have been a major constraint.

Communities have been involved in all stages of the design, planning and construction of houses. There have been problems with quality but householders were consistently positive about their involvement in the program, which, unlike most shelter programs, includes water and sanitation and other facilities. Given the external constraints, progress would always have been slow and Oxfam's schedule was unrealistic. Although a key motivation for entering shelter was to provide a credible base for advocacy (achieved), Oxfam could probably have accomplished this with a smaller program.

Shelter-related issues are the main focus of Oxfam's advocacy program. Oxfam has played a leading role amongst the NGOs regarding land rights. Impact includes influencing government policy and housing standards as well as the purchase of land. Oxfam has facilitated links to legal advice which also has potential future impact.

The development of a coherent, appropriate strategy has proved elusive. A relatively wealthy economy hit by wholesale destruction of infrastructure and assets makes it difficult to identify those most in need. The availability of Acehnese staff with experience of community-based approaches is relatively low. The competitive and poorly coordinated environment has undermined a clear assessment of needs. The result is a mix in quality and coherence of programming and weak assessment of impact, including positive ones.

The current team inherited an ambitious program that was over-extended both geographically and in terms of staff capacity. Oxfam sought to put a big budget to good use by "thinking big", innovating and responding in ways normally constrained by lack of finances. At the same time, it created a pattern of expansion, generating considerable pressure on staff to demonstrate outputs. The Aceh management team has since sought to rein in the program and consolidate. What is still missing is a deep revision of programs on the basis of a re-assessment of needs and objectives (rather than the need to close), re-orientating strategy towards impact. Much more specific support is needed for the team in transition planning.

At the outset, Oxfam in Aceh sought to ensure that cross-cutting program “quality” considerations were prioritized and mainstreamed. Specialized posts in accountability were created and a number of innovations tried out. The Humanitarian Accountability Project International (HAP-I) Annual Report pays tribute to Oxfam for its efforts to promote the Principles. The relative newness of mainstreaming HAP-type principles means that some innovations have not always worked well in practice.

Establishing systematic monitoring systems has proved difficult. Awareness of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response is quite high but staff understanding is weak in practice. Gender, too, has struggled to be integrated. All the quality initiatives have found it difficult to assimilate with the operational program from which they are structurally separate. Some staff in the Quality Unit spend little time in the field and focus on workshops, rather than providing coaching. Variable openness in the field to their support has also limited the impact of the quality initiatives.

The limited presence of experienced Oxfam staff means that the Aceh advisors and coordinators need, above all, knowledge of Oxfam’s principles and approach in order to inform program strategy. It also means spending more time in the field, following a clear work plan. The evaluation suggests a rough working rule of 50% in the field and 50% in Banda Aceh.

A major constraint for all agencies, Oxfam included, has been recruitment of experienced staff. Oxfam was unable to match staff to its budget and program plans. As well as persistent gaps in key posts, there is an incredibly low proportion of staff with previous Oxfam experience, or any NGO experience at all. Induction has been limited, undermining competence. Many staff are not aware of Oxfam’s procedures. The challenges of recruiting, inducting and training over 870 staff cannot be over-estimated. Training needs are phenomenal and arguably impossible in the short term. The evaluation suggests the need to “seed” each team with a sufficient number of staff with Oxfam experience. This critical mass was rarely achieved.

Recruitment for logistics in the first phase of the emergency was slow and the need for senior, experienced logisticians was recognized late. The increasingly strong logistics team is working hard to establish good systems. The head of logistics should be on the Senior Management Team.

Oxfam established a dedicated partner program team immediately. The unit has supported 56 partners and at the time of evaluation was continuing support to 28. Staff overwhelmingly commented that the partner program has been almost entirely separate from the operational program. It has been difficult to identify opportunities for an integrated approach, partly because partners do not share the same sectoral focus as operations. There are also partner capacity building needs which are often not feasible to fulfill in the first few months. Recently, the partner program has succeeded in increasing its links within the program, most notably in livelihoods. There are real opportunities now for closer collaboration on community-based monitoring.

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 the Senior Management Team and the field.

Three project locations are planned to close this year (2006). Closure is a high risk process in any context, all the more so in Aceh; it needs to be managed and supported intensively by the organization as a whole. Exit strategies must also be created with full participation from Oxfam GB Indonesia. The expectation that these project sites can responsibly complete this year is probably unrealistic.

### **Key Recommendations and OI's Response**

***Each project should urgently map commitments, create detailed time plans and check them against capacity and remaining time, exploring all possibilities to hand over or renegotiate commitments and if necessary, postpone closure.***

This recommendation has led to a significant refocusing of the OI program in Aceh and Nias. Mapping of commitments and work plans undertaken in all project offices identified areas where performance was on track, where capacity gaps were evident, and provided definition and direction for program exit strategies. In some areas this resulted in restructuring human resources. In other areas, where Oxfam's resources were overstretched, we responsibly handed over housing, water trucking and public health activities to other organizations so that commitments to communities would still be fulfilled.

In this handover process, Oxfam's commitment to transparency continued. We conducted joint visits with organizations to which we were handing the obligations, and held formal meetings with communities to clearly discuss implementation delays, activity handovers and exit processes.

***Urgently review new cash grant programs prior to implementation. This requires analysis of existing and emerging trade, livelihood and market patterns, vulnerability and capacity***

In some sites, cash grants have been phased out. At others, improvements have been made to ensure that only the most marginalized receive cash grants. Grant payment and tracking procedures have been tightened. Payments are now made in the presence of an Oxfam finance staff member. A committee has also been formed to review the use and impact of the first installment of cash grants before the second installment is distributed.

***Consider an intensive program revision period, supported by advisors from the region, Oxford and Jakarta, with expertise in transitional program design and exit strategies***

This has essentially been achieved by significant revisions in program direction, based on recommendations from this evaluation. The program mapping undertaken as a result of the first recommendation has been a major contributor to the redirection. Exit strategies have been developed in all project locations. Where there is added value, local partners will form a major part of these exit strategies.

***Decentralize Program Quality Liaison Unit and review the job description to create one-stop integrated posts***

The Program Quality Liaison Unit has been integrated across the program to have maximum impact on program quality.

### **Global Recommendations**

***In major emergencies, transition should be supported by intensive senior management, multi-sectoral technical advice or review and field-based assessment and design. This would usually demand a program "pause" to allow it to re-plan and change direction.***

Oxfam agrees with this recommendation. This will be included in the Oxfam (GB) Humanitarian Handbook and examples of good practice will be shared. The first of these was the reflection day held one month after the Yogyakarta earthquake in June 2006.

***Review and integrate policy accountabilities between OGB's Policy Unit, HD and RMC***

No formal restructuring is planned by Oxfam (GB) but the development of the Humanitarian Advocacy Team during 2005 has led to greater clarity on the role of Country Program Director in crisis management. Agreement on particular policy and advocacy actions is included in the standing agenda for Crisis Coordination meetings.

***Clarify Oxfam's shelter strategy and invest in capacity accordingly.***

Oxfam's policy document, "Shelter and Oxfam, beyond bricks and mortar" was released in December 2006. The "Shelter day" at the annual public health forum in June 2006 discussed strategy for its implementation. Oxfam's policy on shelter has also been finalized.

***Clarify the objectives of a partner program in first phase emergencies (to scale up implementation or build capacity in civil society?) and match with the capacity in-country***

In the acute phase of an emergency, the role of any program element is to respond to acute needs. Capacity building may be undertaken to support future phases. This will be defined more clearly in the Oxfam (GB) Humanitarian Handbook.

***Generate a rough critical mass rule of thumb for large programs of the ratio between staff with Oxfam experience and new staff (e.g. at least 1:10) and monitor against it***

Given the very different nature of crises, Oxfam will not be implementing this recommendation. Pre-setting a ratio of Oxfam-experienced staff and new staff is not feasible in various contexts. The Oxfam (GB) Minimum HR standards in emergencies specify that all the C and B level roles if possible should be Oxfam staff or staff with Oxfam experience.

***In very large emergencies, consider mass inductions with a tailored program***

Oxfam accepts this recommendation. Human Resources are currently designing and piloting mass inductions.