

Oxfam International
Tsunami Fund Final
Evaluation:
Disaster Risk
Reduction Review
Executive Summary

An evaluation
of disaster
risk reduction
in Oxfam
International's
response to
the 2004 Indian
Ocean tsunami
by Man B. Thapa



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: Marina Beach in Chennai was devastated by the tsunami.
Credit: Rajendra Shaw/Oxfam

Cover note

This report is one of a number of studies that make up the final evaluation of the Oxfam International Tsunami Fund's tsunami response. Oxfam International has some concerns over the depth and breadth of the analysis in this report, and feels that the consultant may not have represented all of Oxfam's DRR-related tsunami work due to a variety of reasons, including limited access to relevant information. This report is being published as part of the series of evaluation studies, for the sake of transparency and respecting the independence of the consultant, and will be followed up in 2009 and 2010 with additional analysis by an internal Oxfam DRR network.

Philip Horgan, December 2009

Background

The Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 was one of the world's worst natural disasters, with a confirmed death toll of almost 300,000. Nearly 90 per cent of deaths were in Indonesia, with Aceh province bearing the brunt of the disaster.

The response of the world community was overwhelming, with huge amounts of time, resources, and logistics being donated to rescue survivors, provide food, water, and health services, clear debris, and undertake rehabilitation and reconstruction work to restore the livelihoods of the affected population. More than US\$2bn worth of support was rapidly mobilised from around 40 countries. About one million people in Indonesia and 700,000 elsewhere had to be fed and supported over a period of many months. Providing fresh water was a priority task, as sources had been contaminated by seawater and rendered undrinkable.

The Oxfam International Tsunami Fund (OITF) response was the largest single humanitarian response in Oxfam's history, 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 a budget totalling close to US\$300m.

Executive summary

Evaluation objectives

The objectives of the disaster risk reduction (DRR) evaluation were to:

- Contribute to organisational learning on DRR interventions as part of Oxfam's humanitarian response, both at the programme and policy levels, by gathering key information on DRR work done by Oxfam (either stand-alone or mainstreamed) across the tsunami response countries.
- Assess the mainstreaming of DRR components into the different relief sectors upon which OI focused (shelter, water and sanitation, food security, and livelihoods) as part of its tsunami response.

Observations

1. In the three main response countries of India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, DRR activities were implemented separately, in isolation, and were not integrated with other ongoing activities such as livelihoods support, shelter, etc. There were examples where activities would have been much more effective had they been designed and implemented with the concept of DRR built in. One example was the construction of houses: in many locations, houses were constructed without raising the height of the plinth, so most of them flooded even during normal rainfall. Similarly, most livelihood activities were implemented without considering the impact of a possible future disaster in the area.
2. Even after four years of presence in the field, the various activities implemented are not in a position to withstand future disasters or their negative impacts. This observation was derived from the group discussions covering Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India at workshops held in Chennai and Colombo, where none of the participants or the groups they represented were confident that the ongoing activities initiated by OI would withstand shocks from future disasters.

3. The concept of 'build back better' was completely missing (as was the opinion of workshop participants, illustrated above).
4. Initiatives to increase the capacity of government actors were noticeably lacking at all levels. Few training sessions on DRR were organised for actors at any level of participation e.g. community members, government authorities, etc. No assessment was carried out on the need for DRR training programmes at different levels or for different participants; there was no baseline and no clear understanding of what other actors were doing or what the gaps were. This meant that the training activities that were organised lacked a long-term impact perspective. Similarly, no significant support (e.g. policy, guidelines) was provided to government organisations to enable them to continue to scale up DRR activities.
5. Except in Sri Lanka, there was no tangible or substantial support to government for the development of DRR policy, guidelines, or frameworks. In Sri Lanka, along with other actors, OI supported development of the Road Map for Disaster Management.
6. OI worked on DRR largely in isolation from partner organisations, including government at all levels. In each of the countries affected by the tsunami, a number of government and non-government organisations were working in the field of DRR. Reports show that OI did not have strong or visible working relationships with other organisations in India, Indonesia, or Sri Lanka. To sustain DRR-related activities and to mainstream DRR into development work in order to reduce risks from future disasters, all organisations must work with like-minded partners, such as the local Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, appropriate government agencies, etc.
7. There was no long-term vision as to how the staff trained or groups formed would be sustained in future, or how OI would liaise with them in future activities.
8. The DRR activities implemented by OI had no significant visibility in any of the three countries studied.

9. Programme reports and studies conducted to date provide no concrete suggestions on how to improve ongoing or future DRR activities or on how to mainstream DRR into such initiatives.
10. The 2004 tsunami appears to have been a lost opportunity for OI in terms of building a DRR perspective into its activities. However, a consultant is still in the process of investigating what was accomplished in Aceh by OI in the field of DRR and attempting to ascertain current and long-term impacts in reducing disaster risk.

Recommendations

Based on the available reports, interaction with workshop participants, telephone interviews with a small number of experts, and the consultant's personal experiences in the region, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For any future programmes in India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, and in any other country prone to disaster where OI is working, OI should explore possibilities to integrate DRR into all of its activities as a cross-cutting issue in order to sustain its activities.
2. OI can play a significant role in assisting government at all levels to develop appropriate DRR policies and also in strengthening institutional mechanisms, capacity-building activities, and networking with like-minded organisations at all levels.
3. At the country level, OI must have a strong working relationship with decentralised government agencies at all levels. In any country, local government understands what specific development challenges it faces and how to overcome such challenges. OI's role as a development agency is to establish how and where it can fit in to manage the development gaps, rather than creating its own paradigm. Therefore, to address the real needs of any society/ community, direct and indirect linkages and the building of networks with local government are imperative.

4. Future DRR initiatives must have significant visibility. Many DRR activities initiated by OI in its tsunami response were not visible. Similarly, OI should explore more avenues in terms of working with local communities, authorities at local/community level, and administrative or government authorities at other levels, so that the activities it initiates will have visibility and can be sustained in the long term. Similarly, support for the development of policy, guidelines, and strengthening of institutional mechanisms should be more visible, compared with capacity-building activities.
5. OI should continue to support functional groups formed to link with government authorities at local and provincial/ district levels for different activities. In developing countries, such groups can play a significant role in mobilising local communities, including community participation, linkages between communities and (I)NGOs, utilising local resources, monitoring community activities, etc.

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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

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