



Oxfam International Tsunami Fund
Final evaluation series: Part 13

Oxfam International
Tsunami Fund Final
Evaluation: Study of
Management Issues
Executive Summary

An evaluation
of management
issues in Oxfam
International's
response to
the 2004 Indian
Ocean tsunami
by Simon Harris

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: An Oxfam helicopter with ruins in the foreground in Drienrampak, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Credit: Jane Beesley/Oxfam

Executive summary

- 1.1 This study forms part of the Oxfam International Tsunami Fund (OITF) final evaluation and focuses on the phase-wide management issues pertaining to the different phases of the tsunami response.
- 1.2 The objective of this phase-wide management study was to reflect upon the key management issues surrounding the tsunami response experienced by the different affiliates involved in each of the affected countries, and to draw learning from this which could then help to improve future responses.
- 1.3 Three phases were identified. These were: a) the emergency relief phase, b) the transition phase, and c) the exit phase. Although for the purpose of presentation in this study the phases are dealt with separately, in reality the boundaries between them were often blurred and they often overlapped.
- 1.4 The methodology for this study included a desk review of reports and evaluations, etc., which was complemented by a small number of individual face-to-face and telephone interviews. A greater number of respondents would have been preferred but it is suspected that, as this was the last of the tsunami evaluation studies to be conducted, the study had suffered from survey, interview, and feedback fatigue amongst the potential respondent pool.
- 1.5 The main conclusions from the initial emergency phase were that: a) the deployment of key staff at all levels was critical to the success of the response; b) the realities of working relationships on the ground often exposed the myth of presumed inter-affiliate harmonisation at a headquarters level; and c) there was a significant overburdening of national partners.

- 1.6 The main conclusions from the transition phase were that:
a) positioning staff with the requisite skills for bridging the relief/development gap was critical to the success of transition. Where managers had the skills to connect these phases, the transition process was smooth, but where they lacked such skills the programmes tended to languish for longer in emergency mode; b) although there were positive examples of joined-up programming – especially where research initiatives dovetailed with practice – the notion of joined-up programming did not function uniformly and often depended on the compatibility of management personalities in the different affiliates in a particular country.
- 1.7 The main conclusions from the exit phase were that:
a) early planning and guidance for programmes on the exit process enabled a much smoother exit than was experienced by programmes which delayed planning for this inevitability; b) exiting has had serious implications for the shape and sustainability of partners' organisations as they have had to scale down, having earlier been encouraged to scale up; c) exiting has brought with it a set of ethical and human resource issues associated with the downscaling of local employees. Where such issues have been factored into the planning from the outset, experiences were found to be much more positive than where they had not.
- 1.8 There was some criticism of the Tsunami Fund evaluation itself by those who felt that the process could have gone even further and created additional value by looking at additional components. There were also concerns that, although the exercise might identify the lessons that could be drawn from Oxfam's tsunami response experience, its organisational culture mitigated against these lessons actually being learned or translated into effective changes in policy and practice.

- 1.9 The main recommendations arising from this study were: a) the need for a more realistic sense of strengths, weaknesses, and capacities within each affiliate with regards to their potential to contribute to the response; b) the need to stick to pre-emergency agreements; c) the need for better engagement with local resources; d) the establishment of a dedicated management team to oversee future large-scale responses from inception to exit; e) a separation of back-donor funding from other sources to avoid competition and confusion over resource allocation; f) a better appreciation of the need to focus on exit issues from the very outset of a response; and finally g) the need for headquarters to have a better appreciation of country complexities and dynamics in determining the level of managerial competencies required.
- 1.10 The dissemination of this report included a telephone presentation to Oxfam affiliate senior managers in May 2009.

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Oxfam International and Ucodep Campaign Office (Italy)

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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

Oxfam India: www.oxfamindia.org

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