Oxfam International
Tsunami Fund
Final Evaluation:
Advocacy Review
Executive Summary

An evaluation
of Oxfam
International's
advocacy
response to
the 2004 Indian
Ocean tsunami
by Alasdhair Collins

Oxfam
International

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 (Alasdhair 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: Oxfam staff and villagers meeting with the bupati, or district head, at a camp for displaced people from the villages of Pase and Meunasah Lhok in the sub-district of Lhoong, Aceh. Oxfam is supporting the villagers in their request for government assistance in procuring land, as their own land is now permanently inundated. Credit: Jim Holmes/Oxfam

Executive summary

As the advocacy review has progressed, it has become increasingly clear that it is not possible for a review of this scale to evaluate all the individual pieces of advocacy that took place. What this review focuses on is the big picture, the corporate issues relating to the efficacy of Oxfam International advocacy. It has also captured some more specific learning, relating to the detailed execution of Oxfam's advocacy programme, which it was felt was important to record for future reference. This is presented along with the more numerous, high-level findings concerning the big advocacy-related issues.

It is important to emphasise just how much advocacy activity was undertaken, and this review attempts to capture the sheer range and quantity of work. It is also essential to place OI's advocacy work in context, recognising the political, economic, social, and technological environment in each of the tsunami response countries; the post-emergency situation in terms of security, physical damage, numbers of casualties and displaced people, and access to resources; the vast scale (of the tsunami emergency, of the global response, and of Oxfam's own response); and, finally, the state of development of OI as a global affiliated body.

The key lessons and recommendations of the review are:

1. Oxfam's advocacy activity across the tsunami response was significant and in extremely challenging circumstances achieved considerable outcomes and impacts.

Staff at all levels were committed and determined in their efforts on behalf of poor people affected by the tsunami. This should be recognised both internally and publicly despite the inevitable caveats about room for improvement, particularly in the co-ordination and communication of a strategic approach.

2. OI's tsunami response advocacy was not implemented in a corporately co-ordinated or strategic way.

Some of the key reasons for this were:

- Complex OI architecture;

- The failure of OI management structures and processes (TACT and HACT), in particular in the areas of co-ordination and communication;

- The 'emergency mentality', which in practice tended to prioritise practical relief work at the expense of advocacy, especially in the emergency phase.

Recommendation

OI should give further consideration to how it manages the co-ordination, communication, and implementation of advocacy strategy and plans in humanitarian crises. The remit for the Rights in Crisis Campaign Management Team should include the following responsibilities:

- Taking a strategic approach, developing high-level objectives and integrating advocacy into the overall programme design;

- Co-ordinating across affiliates on international-level advocacy, in terms of analysis, planning, and roll-out of plans in collaboration with country-level structures;

- Co-ordination, communication, and sharing of learning from one country to another on country-level advocacy;

- Ensuring ongoing feedback between advocacy staff and operational staff on the ground.

3. There was a poor understanding of advocacy among field staff, especially during the emergency phase.

There seems to have been a poor understanding of what advocacy is and what role it can play among some Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and among a range of operational staff, who felt they lacked advocacy skills and experience. They felt that OI gave more priority to practical relief work, especially in the emergency phase, and were not aware of the advocacy objectives, strategies, or plans at OI, national, or local levels.

Although many field staff were actually involved in advocacy activities, they did not feel that they were acting as part of a co-ordinated, planned effort, which suggests that there were problems both with strategic decision-making and planning and also with induction, training, and communication. Field staff did not feel that advocacy was integrated into the programme.

Recommendations

OI needs to invest further in the training of operational humanitarian staff, to ensure that they have an understanding of advocacy, and in the induction of staff recruited in the wake of a major disaster, to ensure coverage of advocacy principles and that the OI advocacy strategy is applied as part of the response.

The advocacy element must be integrated into strategic planning at both programme and project levels.

Ongoing communication of the developing advocacy strategy and activities must be communicated not only among specialist advocacy staff but also among all operational field staff, with clear guidance on the role that they can play and where they can access support if required.

4. There was a pre-existing lack of a strategic approach to and preparedness for advocacy in emergency contexts in general.

Advocacy guidelines on OI's intranet (the 'dashboard') were not accessed by field staff as they seem not to have been aware that such guidelines existed, and communication around this was weak. What was available did not include practical tools such as survey methodologies and templates. Similarly, there was no systematic, accessible institutional memory store or learning base, a place where past experience and lessons could be stored and made accessible in a user-friendly way. This was exacerbated by a lack of skilled advocacy specialists around the organisation who could be deployed in an emergency situation.

Recommendations

Create a range of practical advocacy tools and templates which could be adapted to specific circumstances, and publicise the existence and whereabouts of these, and the advocacy guidelines, to all permanent humanitarian staff and to those recruited as part of an emergency response.

Create a learning bank to hold relevant documents concerning lessons learned from previous humanitarian advocacy, and publicise its existence.

Maintain a register of internal people across all affiliates with advocacy skills and experience in humanitarian contexts, as well as a register of external contacts with similar attributes.

5. Allocation of human resources in some countries was a reflection of the relatively low priority given to advocacy and was sometimes insufficient.

For example, in India there was no advocacy voice (with decision-making power) on the HCT and the advocacy function was carried out by one person.

Recommendation

Ensure that the advocacy function is resourced with specialist staff, in central country office roles and directly in the field, in a way that is commensurate with the size of the response and the amount and complexity of advocacy that is likely to be required.

6. There was poor communication between field staff and advocacy staff.

Field staff in Sri Lanka and Indonesia felt that there was little connection between them and their day-to-day experience and what the specialist advocacy staff were working on. Both field staff and advocacy staff felt that they were just not sufficiently aware of each other's roles. This meant that field staff were not easily able to feed in their experience to enhance advocacy work and did not know how to access support on advocacy issues.

Recommendation

Create a specific mechanism (such as advocacy briefing meetings, advocacy briefing emails) to ensure that advocacy staff in central, specialist roles and field staff communicate clearly and regularly about advocacy, so that each group is aware of what the other is doing and knows how to access and provide relevant support.

7. Poor communication across affiliates and countries.

There was poor transfer of knowledge, experience, and learning from one country to another, leading to duplication of effort and missed opportunities.

Recommendation

When a humanitarian response is being managed simultaneously in more than one country or region, OI needs to put specific measures in place to enable the transfer of learning and experience from one country to another – such as conferences, web forums, or an online learning resource centre.

8. Advocacy objectives were not clearly articulated or communicated to field staff and partners.

Many staff said that they were not aware of what the advocacy objectives, strategies, or plans were in their area of operation (across all countries). In India, where advocacy was carried out very much through partners, an additional problem was that public health objectives were not very well understood by partners.

Recommendation

Ensure that clear, SMART, advocacy objectives are not only formulated but are communicated both to specialist advocacy staff and also to field staff and partners.

9. Some specific lessons were highlighted by staff during the course of workshops and interviews:

- Advocacy is more effective when based on evidence-based research and analysis, focused on specific policies and targeted at specific actors.

- Early assessment of public health needs, especially hygiene promotion, is important for advocacy as government agencies tend to miss these issues.

- Inter-agency co-ordination is essential: lobbying with others is more effective and more efficient.

- Advocacy must be carried out at different levels, from community, district, and regional levels to national government and authorities.

- To achieve lasting change, Oxfam must engage constructively with government; an effective approach is to provide technical assistance to government.

- Oxfam needs to be better at sharing information on advocacy (topics, objectives, etc.) with communities.

- Staff (in India) felt that effective strategies used during the response included: working through rights-based community groups, empowering communities on advocacy, sharing information with government, and translating the Sphere handbook into local languages.

- Staff (in India) felt that unproductive strategies used during the response included: projecting partners into the lead advocacy role, with Oxfam only taking a mentoring role, and providing a forum for partners to come together and identify common issues for advocacy.

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