

Real Time Evaluation of WFP's Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami

The Indian Ocean Tsunami Crisis

On 26 December 2004 an earthquake with a magnitude of 9.1 struck off the coast of Aceh Province/Sumatra in Indonesia and set off a series of large tsunamis across the Indian Ocean region, devastating to a large extent the city of Banda Aceh and coastal areas of Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Somalia and other countries of East Africa. This resulted in immense loss of lives estimated at 260,000 people (dead and missing), with the highest casualties in Indonesia, and in the displacement of about two million people from their homes and livelihoods.

WFP's Response: Regional Emergency Operation (EMOP) 10405

An EMOP was approved by the Director-General of FAO and the Executive Director of WFP on 3–4 January 2005. Supported by three Special Operations, for logistics, air services and the United Nations Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC), it aimed to assist up to two million people for a period of six months (January–June, 2005) and was later extended for a full twelve months, to end 2005.

EMOP's Objectives: (a) to save lives by preventing the deterioration in the nutritional status of vulnerable children and mothers, and (b) to promote the rehabilitation of housing, community infrastructure and livelihoods.

Total Cost: The EMOP and three Special Operations were valued at some US\$271 million, including 169,315 tons of food stuffs.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

Objectives

To assess the relevance of WFP's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami crisis, to measure its effectiveness and to assess the appropriateness of the phasing down mechanisms and the planned conversion into a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO).

Scope

The evaluation focused on WFP's response at the Regional level and on Indonesia and Sri Lanka¹. On 7–11 November 2005, the report was presented to the WFP Executive Board. A separate "mini" real time evaluation examined WFP's response in Somalia².

Key Findings and Conclusions

Achievement of EMOP's Objectives

WFP food aid made a major contribution to achieving the first objective: few deaths were reported from malnutrition or disease. The second objective was more difficult to achieve in the timescale foreseen; multisectoral rehabilitation was slower than expected, but food aid provided a safety net for people in need and an income transfer for displaced people.

Appropriateness of Food Aid

Where people lost their homes, assets and livelihoods, food aid provided a form of income transfer while institutions were mobilizing resources to facilitate the return to self sufficiency. A complete food basket through general food distribution ensures that people's nutritional needs are met and may prevent them from undertaking harmful coping practices. Once initial needs were met, and markets were starting to function normally, however, a wider variety of responses, including more targeted cash for work programmes could have been considered.

WFP Preparedness

WFP's response to the Tsunami was timely and rapid due to the prompt mobilization of staff, rapid decision-making, good standing relations with the host governments and the presence of an on-going PRRO and Country Programme (in Sri Lanka).

Regional Approach

The regional approach was logical, given the regional (and inter-regional) impact of the tsunami and WFP's regional management structure. It allowed the regional bureau a higher degree of flexibility.

Nutrition and Food Security

The high coverage of vulnerable groups (particularly children) with food and nutrition interventions through general food distributions alleviated the potentially negative effects on underlying chronic malnutrition.

¹ Conducted between January–June 2005

² Findings are summarized in Annex E of the full Indian Tsunami evaluation report

Human Resources

WFP showed itself to be stronger in logistics than in programming and stronger in assessments than in monitoring, due mainly to the inability to quickly mobilise sufficient numbers of staff with programming background.

Security

Stringent security regulations impeded the emergency response. In places such as Aceh, staff could sometimes only work effectively by ignoring them.

Resources and Finance

Huge public interest made the EMOP largely “self-resourcing” and needing no major fundraising effort. Overall, WFP received US\$267.5 million in confirmed contributions by May 2005 against needs of US\$271 million. Private sector’s contributions were also significant. Despite sufficient funding, the absence of a functioning banking system in Aceh/Indonesia caused significant problems in cash flow and cash management at the operational level.

Food Pipeline

During the early phase of the operation, large amounts of cash available for local and regional procurement ensured a reasonably secure food pipeline. The food basket, however, although generally healthy was often incomplete as a result of procurement and shipment delays.

Compliance to International Standards

WFP demonstrated strong commitment to these standards³ by undertaking high quality assessments, providing adequate and good quality food rations for general distributions and contributing to the achievement of most of these standards.

Gender and Protection Perspectives

The tsunami had a greater impact on women than on men. Not only were more women than men killed, problems related to gender imbalance (preferences over men regarding decision-making, income generation and distribution of resources) were also emerging.

Recommendations

Nutrition and Food Security

Continue general food distributions and targeted food aid into the second half of 2005. Address micronutrient deficiencies and other related problems. Provide technical support to government and implementing partner’s. Develop a discussion forum on the tsunami relief operations.

Security

Seek reformulation of Minimum Operating Standards for Security (MOSS) compliance to ensure that it does not unnecessarily impede emergency responses.

Logistics

Develop a private-sector model for logistics support⁴. Develop standard operating procedures for routine emergency responses.

Human Resources

Review the Emergency Response Roster along the line suggested by the evaluation and the HR response to improve future staff deployment. Appoint a Senior Emergency Manager in Rome to ensure rapid and disciplined deployment of WFP assets in a major emergency, oversee preparedness and follow up implementation of actions.

Finance and Cash Management

Review and improve financial regulations, delegations and cash flow.

Gender and Protection Perspective

Deploy gender experts early in an emergency to work together with all other sectors in mainstreaming gender concerns and in assessing the achievement of gender mainstreaming activities. Design programmes and policies that will ensure viable income-earning and learning opportunities as well as protection and promotion of the rights of women and men.

Lessons

Coordination

When there are numerous agencies involved, with large amounts of money available to them and pressure to show immediate results, competition becomes inevitable and coordination becomes challenging. As shown in Sri Lanka, a pro-active overall coordination role assumed by the Government can make coordination of relief responses more straightforward.

Emergency Needs Assessment

To avoid a much larger caseload and longer than foreseen general food distribution, food aid response should follow the recommendations of the Emergency Needs Assessment.

Partnership

WFP should maintain its lead role in food aid distribution. By relying on the Government of Sri Lanka’s existing distribution system, WFP lost its flexibility to adjust the relief operation to meet changing needs.

Food for Work

The experience in Aceh shows that widespread general food rations and alternative cash for work projects make Food for Work activities difficult to start. As markets revive, “Cash for work” could be considered.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the “Real Time” Evaluation of WFP’s Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami are available at:

<http://www.wfp.org/operations/evaluation/>

For more information please contact WFP Office of Evaluation at: HQ.Evaluation@wfp.org

³ Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response

⁴ WFP-TNT (Thomas Nationwide Transport) partnership in Indonesia