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Real time evaluation of the FAO emergency and rehabilitation operations in response to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami

FAO response to the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami

The December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami killed approximately 300,000 people and affected the livelihoods of two million people. The disaster represented FAO's biggest emergency challenge to date, requiring a more varied response and more technical assistance than any previous FAO relief and recovery operations.

A real time evaluation of FAO activities was carried out to provide immediate feedback and guidance to FAO management on strategic and operational achievements and constraints, and to identify unintended outcomes and gaps in the response. The evaluation focused on Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives, where most FAO assistance was provided. It involved desk studies, field surveys and three successive evaluation missions in 2005 and 2006.

Findings

Donors and resources. FAO had raised US \$77 million in support of its tsunami response. Contributions were received from a number of non-traditional donors, including private sector companies. The Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) played a critical role to speed up project implementation and cover strategic though yet unfunded needs (e.g. needs assessments and the set up of emergency response coordination units). The fisheries sector received two-thirds of these funds, a share which the evaluation found appropriate. Half of all expenditures were used for procurement of equipment and inputs. Overall donor support was more flexible than in previous disaster responses. However, FAO had more success in mobilizing resources for its early rehabilitation programmes than for longer-term reconstruction and development activities.

Damage and needs assessments did not sufficiently identify key elements for programme design. They were conducted in a piece-meal way, tended to be released late, and were not well communicated. FAO tsunami atlases in particular could have been disseminated more widely at the country level and through OCHA and ReliefWeb. Early **project designs** were derived from previous emergency project documents, sometimes with limited feed-back from field offices and national governments. Project designs during subsequent phases become more context-specific. **Monitoring** of results and of partners' contractual obligations was found insufficient.

Findings cont.

Operations: The real time evaluation found that the Organization's excessive centralisation of authority, bureaucratic procedures and rigid employment practices lowered the level of operational capacity in the field. Deployment of staff during the first few months was relatively rapid, but during subsequent phases, personnel regulations on contract lengths made it difficult to retain staff. Regarding procurement, the speed of delivery and quality of items varied considerably. Local procurement was found to be generally preferable to international procurement, but required adequate financial management capacity in field offices. Splitting large procurements in smaller quantities which could be produced quickly proved beneficial.

Partnerships: FAO engaged very actively in partnerships at local, national and global levels with a wide array of stakeholders including governments, donors, NGOs, academic institutions, UN agencies and international financing institutions, although cumbersome contractual arrangements sometimes bogged down collaborative efforts.

Sectoral coordination: FAO's coordinating role was generally limited to information sharing and advocacy. This role was strongest in Sri Lanka, where sectoral coordination forums, well facilitated by FAO and co-chaired by the Government, may have surpassed the delivery of physical assistance in terms of visibility and utility.

Impact on beneficiaries: Overall, the FAO tsunami response assisted an estimated 106,000 households. FAO was better able to respond to agriculture sector needs than to those in the fisheries and forestry sectors, reflecting its past experience with agricultural emergencies and a lighter degree of destruction in agriculture than was incurred by the fisheries sector.

FAO performed best in the agriculture sector, which is understandable given the Organization's past experience with agricultural disasters. For fisheries, new modalities had to be developed, tailored to the varied natures of the fishery-based. The best response in fisheries rehabilitation was in Sri Lanka, through a mix of sectoral coordination, technical assistance and the repair and distribution of assets. Contributions to the reconstruction of the fisheries sector were less significant in Indonesia, Thailand and the Maldives where deliverables were few and came at high transaction costs. FAO support to the forestry sector was smaller and also came rather late.

Evaluators found that women did not receive sufficient attention, largely because the FAO focus was on repairing or replacing boats and gear for fishermen. However, support was provided to Indonesian fish dryers, 30 percent of them female, and nutritional training in Sri Lanka reached 2,000 beneficiaries, almost all women. In the agricultural sector, women interviewed during evaluation missions considered they had received their due share of assistance.

In the agricultural sector, communities tended to share assets for self-subsistence activities (seeds, fertilizer, even tractors or cows) with a much larger group of beneficiaries than intended by FAO, as a way to help maintain social cohesion. This tendency applied much less to more competitive activities such as commercial vegetable production, fish drying, and boats and fishing gear, where the tendency for elite capture was harder to resist. As a result, beneficiary selection was on average more contentious and difficult in the fisheries than in the agricultural sector.

Transition to reconstruction and development: In each country, FAO introduced long-term concerns in its emergency and early rehabilitation work and developed a series of relevant project concept notes for longer term reconstruction. However, in spite of significant demand from governments and other stakeholders for a prolonged involvement of FAO, FAO was not able to mobilise significant development resources to follow upon its large tsunami rehabilitation programme.

Recommendations

- **Collaboration and partnerships:** A clearer articulation of corporate-wide goals and strategies would help to promote in-house collaboration between units, and enable a smooth transition from initial rehabilitation to longer-term reconstruction and development. The creation of stand-by partnership agreements could speed up implementation of initial activities. A simpler mechanism for entering into formal partnerships should replace the current Letter of Agreement. FAO should continue to convene national coordination meetings in its areas of competence.
- **Beneficiary targeting:** FAO should live up to corporate commitments to vulnerable groups, women and the poorest, even when that entails providing poor households with assets they may not have possessed before the disaster. A simple beneficiary selection process is sufficient for small or sharable assets, while the selection of beneficiaries for high value assets must be carefully planned, conducted and monitored.
- **Damage and needs assessments:** Initial FAO assessments should cover all areas within its mandate in one consolidated document. Recovery assessments should be made at regular intervals.
- **Monitoring:** Simple reporting systems for monitoring should be developed and the Organization should provide mapping and remote sensing services over a longer period, ensuring wider dissemination.
- **Operations:** FAO should delegate significant authority to FAO Representatives and emergency staff at the national level, and increase investment in the development of national level administrative skills, operational capacity and control mechanisms. In order to retain experienced staff in the field, FAO should offer longer-term consultant contracts and the regulation for mandatory contract breaks should be applied more flexibly, especially as to timing for emergency projects.
- **Resource mobilisation:** FAO should continue to raise the awareness of donors of the usefulness of the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA), stressing the advantages of flexibility and the costs of conditionality. FAO should lobby with other organizations involved in livelihood rehabilitation for longer timeframes in consolidated appeals with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

Management response to the evaluation

Management accepted, with some caveats, almost all the recommendations of the evaluation, noting that many of the recommendations are already being implemented, either fully or in part.

FAO Governing Bodies' conclusions (Programme Committee)

The Programme Committee appreciated the thoroughness and quality of the evaluation and expressed satisfaction with the comprehensive and positive management response. It noted the usefulness of real-time evaluations, but found that an ex-post evaluation to assess the sustainable benefits in terms of livelihoods and capacity building would also be important.

The Committee stressed FAO's comparative advantage in coordination and technical support, while recognising that operational inputs were sometimes important to fill gaps in assistance provided by others. It emphasised the importance of deploying both technical and operational staff quickly when an emergency occurred and the need for management to address operational bottlenecks. The Committee viewed the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities as a useful means of obtaining donor support for more programmatic and timely interventions. It found that moving from relief and rehabilitation to development cannot be dealt with by FAO alone, but should involve the participation of national governments, donors and partners in the field. National NGOs could be important partners not only during emergencies, but also for sustainable rehabilitation.

References

Real Time Evaluation of the FAO Emergency and Rehabilitation Operations in Response to the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, Final Report and Annexes.

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