Summary of Responses to the TEC Survey Questionnaire
January 2007

1   Circulation of the Survey

1.1   Learning from the TEC joint evaluation process is one of the three core aims of the TEC. To enable this, the TEC has facilitated three after action reviews (AARs) and circulated one survey questionnaire (see Annex 1). Two of the AARs involved TEC Core Management Group (CMG) agencies while the third included evaluation team leaders and team members. The survey questionnaire was circulated more widely in order to get feedback from the wider group of agencies who participated in the TEC, but who weren't necessarily part of the CMG or involved in the evaluation teams.

1.2   This short report provides an overview of that survey, which sought to determine people's experiences and views of the TEC around five areas: reasons for involvement; clarity of purpose and scope; TEC communications; costs and benefits; and 'going forward'. It is a simple summary of the responses only, and does not attempt to interrogate respondents' answers – though some observations and explanations are made to assist readers in their interpretation of the responses. It is available on the TEC website at www.tsuanami-evaluation.org. A more analytical reflection will be produced in due course. The TEC will also make available an off-the-shelf presentation for anyone wishing to disseminate this learning more widely, and this will also be downloadable from the TEC website.

2   Circulation of the Survey

2.1   The TEC survey was circulated to approximately 115 individuals across 65 agencies: 27 NGOs / RC; 21 donors; 8 UN agencies; 9 independents; and 12 'other' (eg, research institutes, humanitarian networks and university departments). There was an excellent overall response rate of 25 agencies – or 38%. Broken down by stakeholder group, responses were as follows:

- **Overall response rate: 25 / 38%**
- **NGO / Red Cross:** 8 (30% of total NGO / RC agencies surveyed)
- **Donor:** 8 (38%)
- **UN:** 5 (63%)
- **Independent:** 3 (33%)
- **Other:** 1 (8%)

2.2   Almost all those who responded had multiple involvements in the TEC. Most commonly, agencies were funders (72% of respondents – or 94% of all funders [18 out of a possible 20]) and also involved in either a Steering Committee (SC) or Working Group (WG) (or both) of one of the thematic evaluations, as well as one or more of the 'wider TEC' meetings.

3   Background: Reasons for Involvement

3.1   Respondents were asked to cite their top 4 reasons for involvement (Figure 1). This question drew a 100% response rate, though respondents generally picked between 2 and 6 reasons and did not prioritise these. Examples of each reason included the following (to which some respondents added their own reasons):

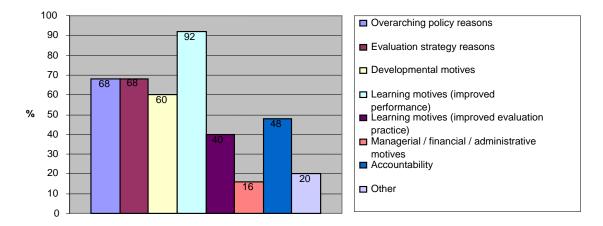|	
Overarching policy reasons Eg, corporate governance decisions about doing more joint evaluations; the desire to do more joint evaluation work as a way toward more effective humanitarian action; external pressure for the same (eg, from the public; media; parliament), etc	**Learning motives (for improved evaluation practice)** Eg, the chance to compare different approaches to the planning and design of evaluations, to the selection of methodologies, and to implementation, including the adoption of reports and dissemination and follow-up, etc
Developmental motives Eg, contribution to coordination and harmonisation in the field of evaluation; avoidance of the danger of conveying to partner countries too many different and often conflicting evaluation messages, which are competing for attention and action and are often hard to reconcile, etc	**Managerial, administrative and financial motives** Eg, a way of redressing a lack of sufficient evaluation capacity within your agency; a way of showing your agency's willingness to assume responsibility for international cooperation; that findings from joint evaluations tend to be more readily accepted by management and decision makers, etc

Evaluation strategy reasons Eg, increased credibility and legitimacy; use of joint findings as an advocacy tool; learning from peers / different stakeholders; looking at issues too sensitive to tackle alone, etc	Accountability Downwards; upwards; laterally
Learning motives (for improved performance) Eg, an efficient way of working toward identifying and distilling lessons learned and good practice (with a view toward improving performance 'next time'), etc	Other

Figure 1: Reasons for Involvement in the TEC

3.2   Only 5 respondents listed 'other' reasons. These were:

- Making links to research.
- Promoting beneficiary feedback as a method and bringing local capacities into policy focus.
- Increasing NGO voice in a 'donor-led committee'.
- Examining overall system performance with an eye to learning, improving and demonstrating joint accountability.
- To put a stop to too many evaluations.

4   Clarity of Purpose and Scope

4.1   Getting Started
4.1.1   It has been recognised elsewhere (notably in the TEC AARs) that the TEC was a little slow to get started. A number of reasons have been suggested for this, including that funding was slow in coming and that there was no full-time coordination and administration until July 2005 (the first meeting was in February of that year). It was surmised that another factor might have included a perceived lack of clarity about the nature, purpose and scope of the TEC, particularly by those agencies not involved in the CMG and / or less familiar with large joint evaluation processes (notably INGOs). The question was therefore posed: Was the purpose of the TEC as communicated at the beginning sufficiently clear? In response, 44% (11) answered 'very clear', 48% (12) 'quite clear', and 8% (2) 'not very clear', and the accompanying written responses seem to refute that any perceived lack of clarity might have made a difference to agency participation (though see comments in 4.1.4 for other reasons for slower INGO involvement). Indeed as one respondent put it: 'It was sufficient to know that it was a large joint evaluation'.

4.1.2   But the question was also asked to ascertain what worked in terms of communication from the TEC Secretariat and CMG to the wider humanitarian community about the nature of the TEC, and what could be done to improve such communication in the future. Generally, respondents mentioned the usefulness of the TEC website as well as the opportunity to discuss the TEC and associated evaluation themes at the ALNAP Biannual in the Hague in June 2005 (the Biannual was also recognised as a key 'tipping point' in the AARs). The various early concept notes and the TEC updates were also appreciated, as was the overall sense of openness: 'Particularly appreciated was the transparency of the process and the strong focus on information sharing that was put in place from the early stages. [It was a] very inclusive, open coalition, allowing at various levels and throughout the process for wide consultation.' This is perhaps reflected by the fact that 80% of respondents felt that they were able to input into the TEC process at times when they wanted to.
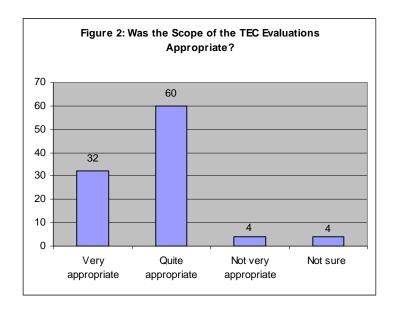
They did this variously through attending meetings, participating in SCs or WGs and commenting on the thematic evaluation drafts and, if not involved in one of these structures, commenting on the draft Synthesis Report. That said, the time taken to input was noted by many and one person observed: 'When documents came they were ridiculously long and dense and more should have been done to sharpen up the communications side of asking for input. [Those asking for input have a] responsibility for producing decent, well-designed consultation and feedback processes [and this] was almost completely ignored.'

4.1.3   Those who identified where improvements could be made in a similar future endeavour did so in the knowledge that any such complex process is bound to be iterative and that 'such a framework will always need to be contextualised so will not be completely clear at the beginning'. Comments focused mostly on process and addressed issues such as: governance structure, eg why wasn't there a single over-arching process as with the Rwanda evaluation; choice of evaluation themes, eg lack of clarity with regard to why the topics were chosen (though in a later question other respondents felt that the TEC had gone through a good consultative process to select topics); and utilisation, eg, the need to have greater participation from, for instance, field staff, so that the evaluations have greater utility at field level. Responses to the questionnaire, and indeed the experience of core TEC Secretariat staff, also attest to the importance of face-to-face meetings with stakeholders at the beginning of any multi-agency joint evaluation process in order to get the relevant people 'on board'.

4.1.4   Respondents were also asked if the 'ground rules' governing their agency's participation were sufficiently clear. All 25 respondents answered this question, with 48% saying 'yes', 36% saying 'no', and 16% being 'not sure' or answering 'not applicable' (notably the independents). Perhaps significantly it was mostly the INGOs that answered 'no', perhaps as it has been mostly donors and UN agencies that have been involved in joint evaluations in the humanitarian sector. Certainly in the start-up phase the INGOs were slowest to engage – in large part due to resource constraints (personal communication and answers to the questionnaire) but also due to lack of clarity about the potential benefits of such an exercise (personal communication), especially one that was perceived by many as UN and donor-led (personal communication and answers to the questionnaire).

4.1.5   Accordingly it was mostly INGOs who responded when asked what might have made their participation easier. Answers were diverse, ranging from the need for greater communication and buy-in at field level (2 out of 7 respondents) to the issue of lack of lead time (3 out of 7 respondents). This led one person to reflect: 'To be fair, it is not necessarily the lack of ground rules, but the circumstances…' while another noted that: 'At the field level there was a lot of confusion about who TEC was and the purpose of TEC. In the midst of overwhelming implementation demands participating in TEC was not considered a top priority, and the lead time for organising field visits was not long enough to make the most of joint learning potential.' These answers, however, perhaps reflect a tension between the attitudes and views of different stakeholders in their perception and interpretation of the aims of the TEC, as well as their different operational realities and approaches to evaluation.

4.2   TEC Evaluations
4.2.1   Overall, 44% of respondents felt that the focus of the TEC evaluations – ie, the topics selected – were 'appropriate', while 48% felt this was 'quite appropriate' and 4% 'not very appropriate'. Interestingly there was a more or less an equal split in CMG agencies' opinion on this matter, though notably 6 donors felt the topics selected were 'very appropriate' in comparison with only 2 INGOs; conversely 6 NGOs answered 'quite appropriate' against 2 donors in this category.

4.2.2   Respondents were asked to comment on why they answered 'quite appropriate' or 'not very appropriate'. The most common response pointed to the lack of focus on impact (5 out of 11 responders); lack of focus on accountability was mentioned by two people, while two others mentioned the complexity of the somewhat 'top-heavy' study design that led to unnecessary overlap and complexity. It was also suggested that risk reduction was missing, and that country specific studies rather than thematic studies might have been more useful. However, when assessing comments such as these, readers of this and other TEC reports might usefully recall that the TEC was designed to focus efforts on recurring systemic problems in humanitarian action, with analysis concentrated more at the policy rather than programming level. This tendency toward policy focus is in fact common in much joint evaluation.

4.2.3 When asked if the scope of the TEC evaluations were appropriate – ie, the range of issues in each evaluation, as well as the geographical coverage – the following responses were received (see Figure 2):

Figure 2: Was the Scope of the TEC Evaluations Appropriate?

Category	Value
Very appropriate	32
Quite appropriate	60
Not very appropriate	4
Not sure	4

4.2.4 As with above, comments from respondents focused on the lack of attention to impact, accountability, and risk reduction, as well as the need, perhaps, to look at fewer issues in more depth and also to have considered India and Thailand given their initial refusal of international aid. That said, it was also acknowledged that: 'this is a very difficult methodological issue, and I am not sure that anyone is really an expert in how to best capture the geographical and agency scope for such a large response'. Readers who are interested in a more in-depth discussion about how such a study might be better designed in the future should also refer to the report of the AAR carried out on 14 February 2006 and available on the TEC website.

4.2.5 One of the main criticisms of the TEC has concerned lack of affected-country involvement. This has been recognised in all of the AARs. Survey respondents were therefore asked for their ideas about how such a future joint evaluation could better involve affected country stakeholder groups. These suggestions are included as Annex 1.

5 TEC Communications

5.1 The TEC's attempt at good practice has been to host a website and to issue regular Updates on the progress of TEC work. TEC Updates are emailed roughly every 8-10 weeks and also kept on the TEC website. Survey respondents were asked about their use and opinion of both the website and the Updates, their strengths and weaknesses. The following are the responses:

WEBSITE	Often	Occasionally	Never
Use of the TEC website	12%	84%	4%
	Agree	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Disagree**
The website is accessible & easy to use	76%	24%	
The content of the website is useful & informative	84%	16%	
TEC UPDATES	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
The TEC updates are easy to read & written well	76%	20%	4%
They come out often enough but not too frequently	56%	28%	16%
The content is useful & informative	72%	28%	

5.2   ***Comments on the website***
5.2.1   While the majority of respondents only use the website occasionally, it is clearly appreciated and much of the written feedback was very positive. Suggestions about how to strengthen such a website in the future include:

- More obvious links to other similar learning and accountability initiatives – ie, in this case to other tsunami-related initiatives
- More obvious direction to useful texts
- Inclusion on the website of workplans for each of the evaluations, particularly if a decentralised and distributed model is used in the future
- Inclusion of a feedback system for commenting on the reports, with a view to getting more comments from affected country stakeholders in real time
- Greater information on follow-up
- A final collation of lessons learnt – along the lines of other ALNAP lessons learned briefing papers

5.3   ***Comments on the TEC Updates***
5.3.1   Again, feedback on the Updates was generally very positive. They were felt to be useful and informative, timely, well-targeted, easy to access (by email and from the website), as well as easy to read and navigate. The internal hyperlinks to key documents were appreciated, they were mostly seen as focussed and 'straight to the point', and importantly recognised as contributing to 'institutional memory' in agencies with a high staff turnover. Three-quarters of those who disagreed with the regularity of their frequency wanted more rather than less (only one person said they came out too often); and only two people thought they were too lengthy and technical. One person asked that key decisions taken be made more explicit.

5.4   ***Other useful communication tools***
5.4.1   Respondents were also asked which other tools they found useful. Those most mentioned were the CD Roms (36%). The lessons learned papers were also mentioned (24%). Interestingly two people thought to mention the TEC communications strategy and events calendar, which are available on the TEC website.

6   Costs and Benefits of Involvement in the TEC

6.1   Alongside the direct costs of a joint evaluation are the indirect costs. These usually encompass three main categories of expenditure: (i) the staff time of the evaluation unit (and perhaps of other branches in the agency); (ii) the cost of travel to the meetings of the evaluation governing bodies and also to workshops, seminars, field visits; (iii) the employment of consultants and/or the hiring of services necessary to cope with the additional work requirements posed by a joint evaluation. Respondents were asked which, if any, of these indirect costs did their agency have to bear – with a view to ascertaining whether or not agencies thought their participation was 'worth it'.

6.2   Fifty-six percent of respondents mentioned staff time; 60% cost of travel; and 24% employment of consultants. Of note, and as also mentioned in the AARs, a more efficient way of financing future studies of this nature needs to be found as this took up considerable time in the commissioning agencies. (This has also been the experience of the TEC Secretariat in managing multiple budgets centrally.) Overall, however, these costs were considered normal under such circumstances. As one respondent commented: 'I wouldn't see it as a problem as it is really a matter of personal / organisational choice.'

6.3   Having been asked to think about costs, agencies were then asked 'Is it possible to determine the extent to which your agency benefited from its involvement in the TEC evaluation?' Eighteen out of a possible 22 answered this question (it was clearly irrelevant for the 3 independents who responded to the survey), with 12 affirming a strong 'yes'. All donors who answered this question responded in the affirmative, as did all bar one UN agency (note that it was clear that some who answered this question had discussed it internally before responding, while others had not). Notably – and again perhaps not surprisingly, given some of their previous answers – most of those responding on behalf of the INGOs felt unable to assess whether or not it was 'worth it': while no INGO answered with an outright no, responses were certainly equivocal. Concerns raised by INGOs often repeated points made previously: questions about benefits to field staff; their peripheral involvement; difficulty in pinning down benefits for an individual agency from a system-wide joint evaluation; and whether or not the 'results' merited the cost.

6.4   Those who answered in the affirmative largely focused their comments on the following:
- Joint evaluation strengthens the credibility of evaluation findings / recommendations

- The main issues are relevant to other humanitarian operations – and indeed to the overall 'system' ('It is not the benefit to us alone that counts, it's the benefit to all actors')
- It allowed agencies with a limited evaluation budget to be involved in an important piece of work that, in some instances, meant they did not have to undertake 'any additional fieldwork'
- A belief, related to the above point, in joint evaluation
- That the reports will be a 'valuable resource for the future'
- That the process encouraged professional development and built social capital

6.5   Many of these comments were reflected in responses to a final question about the overall opportunities and benefits of the TEC versus the problems and challenges. These can be summarised as follows:

Opportunities and Benefits
The TEC achieved results that no single agency could have achieved on its own; the overall result was greater than the sum of its parts.
The pooling of resources meant that some agencies did less evaluative work of their own in the first year. It also led to greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency.
Joint evaluation increases the credibility of reports and therefore increases the likelihood of action being taken. This means that the TEC has more chance of 'making a difference' at a high level; the synthesis report is a 'great advocacy tool' and makes a useful contribution to ongoing humanitarian reform. It should translate more quickly into management action.
The TEC allowed for a broader view – not only of the tsunami response but also of the system as a whole. Its findings are relevant for the wider humanitarian community – for example, it made a useful contribution to the ongoing work on GHD and is an important reference for responses to natural disasters.
There was good buy-in. Many agencies appreciated the opportunity for networking and partnership building and the TEC is seen to have strengthened the concept of partnership and collaboration. Not only did it build 'social capital' in this way, but it also built skills as agencies learnt from each other.
Linked to the above, the TEC was an important learning process – both in terms of substance and also process; and both for individual agencies and the sector. It produced useful lessons for future responses.
It raised the profile of both humanitarian evaluation and joint evaluation, and provided useful lessons on joint evaluation.
The TEC has been 'the best example of knowledge management for a recent disaster'.
The quality of TEC communications and its reports were high.

Problems and Challenges
It was a time-consuming and top-heavy process. Possibly, therefore, inefficient in cost terms? At times it was perhaps 'too participatory'.
Some of the reports were too long and the recommendations a bit vague. How, therefore, to get the main messages and recommendations out – both to the humanitarian community as a whole but also to the general public?
Multiple evaluations (TEC, DEC + others) confused field staff and led to evaluation fatigue. Field evaluations lacked coordination. Overall the TEC left a heavy 'footprint' [yet some agencies reportedly reduced evaluations they undertook due to their involvement in the TEC].
The evaluations were generally not geared toward agencies' concerns and needs, which could erode confidence in the utility of joint evaluations. Limited capacity also meant it was difficult to engage over the longer term and the consultation processes were more tailored to UN agencies and donors [INGO responses].
There was insufficient buy-in from the regions. Some agencies had problems in maintaining the interest of field staff.
There were insufficient linkages to other initiatives, including the current palette of reform initiatives.
Some tension between learning and accountability.
The TEC suffered from the lack of an impact study; lack of emphasis on primary research; questionable evidence base.
The evaluation was disseminated a long time after the data collection, which meant that some aspects of the report were perceived as out of date.