



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

BUREAU FOR CRISIS PREVENTION & RECOVERY

The Post-Tsunami Recovery in the Indian Ocean

Lessons Learned, Successes, Challenges and Future Action

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1. Successes, Current and Future Challenges

Managing the transition from relief to recovery is a critical concern for the future. The pace of transition to recovery will vary from country to country and different approaches will be required. There was an early need for care in managing the phase out of military assets and their replacement by civil capabilities and a continuing concern that assistance gaps that have occurred in other transitions, such as Bam, where, for example the withdrawal of emergency health provision dramatically reduced access to much-needed care, would not be repeated. Managing the transition smoothly entails identifying those gaps that would cause harm to the recipients of the aid and ensuring a handover of responsibility, failure to do so can damage both the perception of a largely successful relief programme as well as to the recovery programme itself. It is expected that the post-disaster recovery phase will require concerted focus at all levels. Below is a discussion of the issues and challenges that have surfaced in the recovery phase to date.

An early focus on recovery

Addressing recovery in parallel with the ongoing relief effort helped to prevent gaps between the humanitarian and rehabilitation and reconstruction phases: in Indonesia, United Nations recovery experts working in parallel with national and international response teams were able to speed up the transition of displaced populations from tents to temporary shelters and initiated *in-situ* reconstruction. The early attention to reconstruction also helped local populations get back on their feet by providing them with an opportunity to re-establish their former livelihoods. For example, in Indonesia, UNDP rubble removal operations undertaken under the concept of “cash for work” enabled to reduce the psychological stress of the population while injecting cash in the local economy.

However, the access problems to affected areas, particularly in conflict stricken countries, continue to hamper the provision of humanitarian assistance as well as recovery operations. In addition, in the Maldives, access to and communication with widely dispersed outer islands has been a major problem. The distances that recovery and reconstruction materials have to pass are immense and the transportation of construction material is a time consuming and costly affair.

Coordination

Coordination mechanisms established during the emergency phase must be maintained and enhanced during the recovery process. Continuing a strong coordination will constitute a permanent dialogue and consensus building mechanism with governments, civil society, cooperation agencies, donors and lending institutions. This ensures the strong, inter-sectoral coordination required to facilitate the coordination of a large number of initiatives at the local, regional and national scales, allowing multiple stakeholders to work together with synergy while ensuring transparency and accountability and participation of the affected population.

Coordination issues remain a challenge despite good achievements to date. Given the magnitude of this disaster, a series of new players have emerged often surpassing the traditional actors in terms of resources available. Much attention will need to be placed on extending coordination arrangements with new partners.

Early government ownership

While relief operations were largely driven by international humanitarian organisations and military units, recovery efforts were quickly focused on providing surge capacity to government planning bodies in the early phases. This included UNDP support to planning, mapping, governance, shelter and employment, as well as to provincial and district authorities in Indonesia and support to needs assessment and information collection on the impacts of the disaster in Sri Lanka. In India, post-tsunami humanitarian and recovery operations were boosted by the well-established UNDP Disaster Risk Management Programme which has been implemented in close collaboration with the Government of India and local communities. UNDP also facilitated the redeployment of Indian UNVs to assist the recovery programming and implementation in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, who reportedly have been instrumental in accelerating early recovery efforts.

As the recovery effort goes forward, important opportunities for capacity building in the initial post-disaster phase must not be missed. External support must build upon and not duplicate existing capacities, knowledge and strengths and fill gaps where needed through technology transfer, know-how and awareness raising in topics such as contingency planning, recovery planning and programming, risk reduction and multi-hazard risk assessment and disaster reduction planning, programming and implementation.

Civil society engagement

The contributions from civil society both during the humanitarian assistance and the recovery phase have been unprecedented in many of the affected countries. Thailand, for example, possesses a strong civil society which has been able to respond spontaneously and rapidly to unmet emergency needs. Civil society groups in Thailand have also been essential for organising recovery operations in cooperation with local governments and national authorities. Such participation has also benefited from the work of the Save the Andaman Network, which has helped to coordinate the efforts of NGOs, government and donors.

While it is widely understood that recovery programming must be based on the sound and participatory assessments of needs and capacities of the affected population, the realities on the ground have not always ensured this. In Thailand, the Maldives and Sri Lanka concerns had been raised by the affected populations about a lack of involvement in recovery planning. This led the Government of Thailand to reconsider its approach. With the support from UNDP, other United Nations agencies and civil society organisations, decentralised capacities that promote participatory approaches to recovery are now being strengthened. In this way, it is hoped that sensitive issues regarding land rights, as well as the special vulnerabilities of minorities and migrant populations can be addressed.

Flexible and innovative fund raising

Past experience suggests that money that is easily forthcoming when the issue dominates the news later dries up as attention wanes. That was the case in the December 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran and the October 1998 Hurricane Mitch, where only a small percentage of hundreds of millions of dollars in pledges has been paid out or in the case of the Bam earthquake, where reconstruction funding has fallen far short of needs. Failing to invest in post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation neglects the economic needs of the affected population and ignores a potentially valuable development and risk-reduction opportunity.

Due to the flexibility of the Flash Appeal, it was possible to close the funding gap between the relief and recovery phases, and raise resources for shelter, livelihoods, micro-infrastructure and the environment allowing the implementation of recovery plans and programmes without delay. On 6 April 2005 a Mid-Term Review of the Flash Appeal revised the original requirements to US\$ 1.1 billion – including recovery funding – and extended the time frame until the end of 2005.

High levels of interest from the private sector have also generated innovative resource mobilisation strategies beyond the Flash Appeal. In the Maldives, where UNDP with support from the Government of the Maldives, proposed direct private sector support to communities to rebuild their homes by participating in the Adopt an Island initiative. The Banyan Tree Resorts Project in the Nalafushi Island in the Meemu Atoll is one such “adoption,” where private grants cover the cost of purchasing and delivering essential construction materials like cement, steel, timber and tin. Island rebuilding teams have been established and paid through the programme, generating the much needed income opportunities for many islanders.

However, experience has shown that the flash appeal mechanism has not been the ideal vehicle for mobilising resources for recovery purposes. India and Thailand which had response capacities in place and therefore did not participated in the flash appeal, have reported great difficulties with raising resources for recovery purposes. Alternative mechanisms are needed to fill this gap.

A focus on recovery fund raising must also be matched with efforts to improve reporting and monitoring measures, as there is only a limited absorptive capacity within many government sectors. While the Province of Aceh in Indonesia managed a national development budget of US\$300 million before the tsunami, the current rehabilitation plan amounts to US\$4-5 billion. The limited local technical, procurement and administrative capacity to absorb such huge resources led to an approach focused on contracts-driven delivery likely to exclude local economic workforce and to create even greater corruption. Also international actors, such as UN agencies and International NGOs will be faced with the issue of absorptive capacity and will be required to show high diligence, transparency and accountability for the resources received. UNDP, in consultation with the Asian Development Bank, is currently working to customize the Donor Assistance Database (DAD) used successfully in other countries to the specific requirements of the following Tsunami-affected countries: Thailand, Maldives and Sri

Lanka. This will also include a regional tracking system which facilitates the aggregation and analysis of information from across the affected countries.

Early incorporation of risk reduction measures

An important principle for a sustainable recovery processes is to reduce overall vulnerability to disasters by incorporating disaster risk reduction measures. All of the affected countries have been struggling to balance the need for rapid recovery with the importance of protecting their citizens from future disasters and to avoid the “tyranny of rush” where too often, societies affected by a major disaster tend to seek rapid and visible solutions to restore normalcy, frequently at the cost of more sustainable and durable solutions that truly address the root causes of the disaster.

Reducing disaster risk also involves a focus on early warning and disaster preparedness, areas that have rightly received much international attention. However, discussions on early warning systems have mostly focused on improving forecasts and warnings. This, however, needs to be matched with equal, if not greater, emphasis on building national and local capacities for an end-to-end early warning system. Basic measures in preparedness and early warning are the only way of ensuring effective and timely response to hazard warnings and the reduction of future risks. As the example of Samiyarpettai village in Cuddalore, India shows, such a strategy is very effective in saving lives. Villagers from Samiyarpettai had received training under a UNDP funded Government Disaster Management and Mitigation Project which included survival skills, the establishment of rescue teams, mock drills and general disaster awareness training. Only 22 lives were lost in the tsunami as compared to a similar neighbouring village, Pudukkuppam, where death toll reached 102. Pudukkuppam had not been involved in the programme.

While UN system capacities for disaster response and humanitarian assistance are widely recognised as well developed, there is currently a vacuum in terms of capacities and accepted system wide mechanisms for post-disaster recovery, particularly those with a risk reduction focus. Gaps in areas such as suitable assessment methodologies for identifying early recovery needs, predictable mechanisms for the deployment of technical experts to support recovery planning and programming and for funding key recovery and vulnerability reduction interventions in a timely fashion have been identified as major shortcomings in the efforts to close the gap between relief and development

2. Future Action and Recommendations

The importance of preparedness, early warning and the development of pre-disaster recovery plans (national and community level) The tsunami must be considered an exceptional event with a recurrence of every 200 years only. Although it is generally accepted that it would have been almost impossible to be prepared for an event of this magnitude and impact, such rare events are instrumental in uncovering underlying risks and vulnerabilities and to highlight the need to empower communities at risk to protect themselves and their property from the impact of disasters.

It is now widely recognised that the adoption of an Early Warning System could have saved thousands of lives. A regional system, however, will only work if supported by local warning and emergency response systems that ensure that the warning is received, communicated and acted upon by the potentially affected communities. Without these local measures in place, a regional EWS will have little impact. Focus on the local level to help communities take simple disaster mitigation measures and the put into place elementary warning systems can ensure that information reaches people. Moreover, the tsunami has highlighted the need for strengthening early warning systems over a range of other hydro-meteorological hazards and the ability to carry out comprehensive multi-hazard risk assessments.

However, this needs to be matched with equal, if not greater, emphasis on building national and local capacities for an end-to-end early warning system. The United Nations will therefore focus its capacity building efforts at the local level and at ensuring linkages with national efforts, such as programming and policy advice to develop suitable institutions and legislation.

Enhancing UN System capacity for recovery (assessment tools, resource mobilization mechanisms, international surge capacity to support regional and national capacity) To address the challenges pertaining to the lack of sound and predictable assessment, deployment and funding mechanisms, UNDP and other UN agencies, donor and programme countries have embarked in the establishment of an International Recovery Platform (IRP), to function as an international repository of knowledge and clearing-house mechanism for recovery that currently does not exist within the UN system. The IRP will promote a shared vision and common approach and strategies for its members, thus avoiding fragmented, isolated and uncoordinated interventions that have frequently characterised the recovery process in recent disasters.

A key activity of the IRP will be the design of a post-disaster needs assessment methodology, following the lines of the UNDP-World Bank Post-Conflict Needs Assessment, to serve as a common entry point for all external interventions, to help coordinate and harmonise approaches of all stakeholders. The methodology will move away from the strict damage assessment type to serve as a tool for capacity assessments and recovery planning where comparative advantages of stakeholders can be capitalised upon to maximise impact.

Need for commitment and investment in reducing vulnerability and risk

When countries fail to factor hazard and vulnerability considerations into their development policies, strategies and plans, economic growth and social welfare becomes eroded by large-scale disaster loss, while increasing demands are made on national and international humanitarian assistance. Each natural disaster leaves in its wake an overwhelming volume of evidence of how planning and investment decisions contribute to vulnerability. Every, school, road, bridge hospital or housing settlement destroyed by the tsunami was once a development project. The location of a housing development, how it is constructed and how land use affects the natural environment are all factors that contribute significantly to the damage inflicted during a hazard event.

In spite of the compelling evidence of the linkages between risk reduction and sustainable development, however, funding for capacity building and investments in reducing vulnerability and risk continues to be a challenge. This area continues to receive much lower levels of resources from the donor community as compared with funding levels available for humanitarian response and conflict situations. Disaster reduction efforts need to be increasingly promoted as a solid investment towards saving lives and reducing loss, fundamental to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development in general.

The tsunami as other recent major disasters have rendered one overarching lesson to the international community: *development is the key to disaster resilience*. Long term support of sustainable economic development, resulting in strong civil societies as well as sound infrastructure, will ensure that nations are prepared to weather the shocks from natural hazards and economic change. Poverty contains many risks, and for disaster risk reduction to be effective, it must be part of development strategies that manage all of the risks, both economic and environmental.

Need for policy development to guide recovery activities

Recovery programming must be based upon a sound, participatory assessment of the needs and capacities of the affected population, so that local initiative, resources and capacities are fully understood and utilized. National consultation mechanisms - involving decision-makers, technicians and local actors, - and priority setting activities such as national workshops, contribute to building consensus around recovery priorities, roles, responsibilities and resources. This ensures country ownership for the recovery process and form a central point for UNDP involvement. Local level recovery activities best begin as early as possible after the disaster, which is essential for avoiding the rebuilding of risks.

The lessons learnt from the Indian Ocean tsunami and other recent major disasters must be captured, processed and disseminated in the form of policy advice and good practices to guide future post-disaster interventions and to continue advocating for the establishment of an integrated institutional framework for recovery that links with the relief operations and at the same time organises the overall recovery effort with a risk-reduction, sustainability focus.