

# Final Report

## Learning about Transition Programming in Aceh & Nias

### Drivers and Inhibitors of Transition from Emergency to Recovery and Development in Oxfam International's Aceh and Nias Programme

*A report written by the review team:*

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## Executive Summary

How did the current Oxfam Aceh-Nias team shift a £48 million Tsunami programme out of emergency and into recovery and development? The experience of this major challenge - and eventual success – led the team to commission a learning review “to assist the wider organisation to learn from the process of transition programming” by exploring “*what drives and what inhibits organisational transition down the continuum from emergency to recovery to long term development*”. The review was carried out by a team of Oxfam staff and independent consultants and included a documentary review, interviews and three workshops in which a total of 130 people participated. Issues identified during the review were clustered into hypotheses, enhanced and discussed in the workshops. The resulting hypotheses, linked to what drove and inhibited transition, are described below and form the basis of the main report.

### ***Big Money: the sheer volume of funding inhibited Oxfam’s ability to redesign and programme in line with its values and programming principles.***

The money enabled staff to “think big”. Oxfam quickly grasped the opportunity to respond to needs, offer a range of options, inject large amounts of cash into the economy and take on the kind of infrastructural work that it would not normally be able to afford. Oxfam recognised the opportunity to innovate and expand beyond operational work, using its size and influence effectively in policy and advocacy and its considerable resources for partner NGOs’ recovery and development work.

Unfettered by budget constraints, the ability to say yes also led to over-expansion during 2005 and a loss of focus and control. Staff talked of the “emergency mindset” that the money (unintentionally) created. The money also made Oxfam unusually vulnerable to demands from government and communities. The DEC and OI time limit and the rapid spend in 2005 reduced the programme from an early vision of five down to three years. This had a profound impact on the team’s ability to plan developmental work. Different ‘business’ approaches too were required for a programme of this size which progressively demanded out-sourcing and private partnerships rather than community-based action, particularly in shelter and public health engineering. Despite the inherited challenges, the Oxfam team regained its focus, reined in the emergency work, created new technical partnerships and from mid 2006 threw itself wholeheartedly into consolidation and quality.

### ***Intense pressure from a complex external environment inhibited transition***

Transition depends on a well-informed analysis of the context and population and close engagement with local actors. Oxfam’s understanding of the pre-Tsunami context was limited. Engagement with local actors, themselves affected by the Tsunami, was itself a challenge and was not always viewed as a priority by emergency-orientated managers. New or unstable communities did not necessarily have an appetite for community collaboration and longer term goals. In a post-conflict and post-Tsunami context, communities had evolving needs, making planning even more complex.

All agencies experienced intense pressure from the Government’s coordination body to build houses, greatly reducing their latitude to adapt to new needs beyond that of shelter. The timeframe and tsunami-only focus of the DEC further constrained longer-term planning. Planning difficulties were intensified by the phenomenal impact of the media and the expectations of government and communities. Aceh provides stark lessons about media management and the need to protect staff from such pressures, demonstrating the essential but unrealised potential of all the agencies to assert their own mandates, lobby the DEC and BRR and take charge of the context rather than be driven by it.

### ***Was it really possible to match staff capacity to demand in the time available?***

In the first few weeks of the emergency, there was an unprecedented willingness by the whole organisation to resource Aceh with many of its most experienced emergency staff. Oxfam did match staff capacity to programme demand in this phase. Difficulties were encountered a few months into the programme when many experienced staff left and the programme rapidly

expanded: between March and August 2005 staff numbers increased by a further 200%. At this time, the programme became a mix of emergency, recovery and development work and demanded a complex staff skill set. Transition is driven by staff with recovery and development profiles but Oxfam could not recruit the number required. Nor was it possible to create capacity in-country in the time available. This perpetuated the recruitment of emergency staff and the implementation of emergency projects for too long. With time the team succeeded in stabilising recruitment, increasing capacity and continuity and enabling transition.

***Oxfam GB's organisational structure and management support mechanisms are not designed to support and guide transition***

Support to the Aceh programme spanned the entire organisation. Leadership was clearly held in the Regional Centre when the Regional Director (RD) line managed Aceh, but advisory support, recruitment and logistics expertise remained largely in the Humanitarian Department (HD). Within Oxford, responsibilities for strategy and post-emergency recruitment were unclear between HD and the Programme Policy Team; there was no clear handover. Aceh's Senior Programme Manager (SPM) was line managed by the RD until June 2006 and thereafter by a new Regional Programme Manager dedicated to Indonesia. Although plans were made early on to integrate Aceh with the Indonesia programme, it continued to be line managed by the region until January 2008. Aceh initially received high levels of RD engagement. However, limited capacity in the Regional Centre (RC) and Aceh's isolation from normal country-regional relationships reduced support and deepened the uncertainty about the programme's future, despite the assurance of multi-year funding.

The effectiveness of Aceh's senior management to lead transition was overly dependent on individuals' skills and/or relationships rather than institutional support. More exploration is needed of flexible management support mechanisms such as high level advisory groups that transcend traditional line management and an emphasis on an *emergent leadership model* that recognises the need to support and develop capacity.

***Despite Oxfam's strong commitment to quality, the outputs-driven nature of the operational programme and a centralised Quality Unit inhibited transition.***

Quality is a significant driver of transition and Oxfam recruited advisors at the outset, providing in-house leadership in each of the cross cutting and technical sectors. But despite some notable successes, the impact was never fully felt in the field. The team tried a number of structural approaches in response to the challenges, initially creating a dedicated central advisory team. In 2006, recognising weaknesses, Oxfam decentralised the quality advisors, reintegrating quality into the management line in each location. New staffs' limited experience of cross cutting approaches also meant that their ability to integrate quality effectively could not happen overnight. With time and significant effort from the Aceh team, quality programming gained purchase, particularly from 2007 onwards. Oxfam's learning was that quality is a management responsibility and requires demand from management, prioritisation and integration; there is no quick fix.

***What management was "saying" was different to what staff were "hearing" – and acting on. Information flows were reactive, not strategic.***

It has been difficult to track the programme 'steers' from International Division senior managers through to action and choices on the ground. Awareness in the field of communications and strategy from the region and Oxford was low. Upwards communications from Aceh to the RC and Oxford were dominated by quantitative data, rather than management information. Many key decisions were never documented. Staff in Aceh felt bombarded with requests for numbers – of beneficiaries, litres of water supplied etc. Yet the provision of information that others defined as important came with a cost. The casualty was time for the programme's *own* information needs that could have helped staff redesign in the light of changing needs and relevance earlier.

***Efforts to develop a coherent vision for recovery and development were weakened by piecemeal strategies and diverted by earlier commitments***

For the first two months, Oxfam was on familiar territory: public health, livelihoods and then cash for work and basic shelter materials. A key turning point was the decision to follow the displaced

home, “ensuring options” for the newly returned communities. It was this strategy that, above all, drove the programme out of emergency and into recovery. At the same time, its good intentions led to a fragmentation of effort and a loss of direction. Several strategies were subsequently created but with the exception of the policy work, it seems that the strategies did not inform the project areas. Many projects were hidebound by the earlier promises of individuals, rather than strategic direction. From mid-2006 intensive team efforts and leadership refocused the programme. A complex recovery environment is just as unpredictable as an emergency and yet multiplies the number of stakeholders, increases the possible range of interventions and demands skilled interaction with communities and government. Sustained organisational support and agile planning supported by strong leadership and analysis are needed then, more than ever.

***Without periodic “Time-Out” for review it was difficult, if not impossible, for staff to refocus and redesign the programme.***

Transition requires staff to stand back, invest time in assessment and community engagement and translate their analysis into new programmes. It is not characterised by an output driven working culture. Ironically, it was the crisis of the fraud from March 2006, a critical evaluation and a painful process of budget consolidation that finally provided teams with the occasion to re-assess. It is psychologically difficult to change pace, recognise when current activities are redundant and take the time to stand back. Creating the opportunity for a rethink demands strong leadership. Oxfam’s experience in Aceh suggests that review periods are imperative; if they are not driven by managers they will be driven by crises. Time out to plan should be regular, backed by management follow-up and translated into programme and individual work plans.

***From the Bunker to the Green – internal recovery can happen***

Oxfam Aceh demonstrated that despite the challenges, it could and did shift the programme out of emergency and into recovery and early development. The right staff, a willingness to let go and create a forward-looking programme and sheer hard work led to the careful mapping and honouring of existing commitments, concerted action in response to the audits and OI Evaluation and the creation of a more cohesive team that shared learning. Change and consolidation was properly resourced and exit strategies carefully planned. Staff noted that risk taking was required by “taking off the white gloves and providing strong leadership”, introducing new structures that were not traditional to Oxfam (e.g. as an ‘enlightened contractor’) and re-igniting the support and organisational spotlight that had waned in Oxford.

**Conclusions**

Over time, the Aceh-Nias programme did transition, pulling out of its low point in early 2006 and getting back on track in 2007. Skills in contextual analysis and recovery, strong leadership to retain focus and ensure review and new approaches generated transition. Livelihoods transitioned from cash for work, to cash grants and to business development training. Shelter shifted from a community to a partnership approach with other NGOs, leading to quality housing. Public health regained lost ground on hygiene promotion and introduced new technology appropriate to a new environment. Teams engaged contractors, freeing staff to emphasise facilitation and quality. Partnerships became increasingly strategic, moving out of asset replacement into joint planning and impact. Staff continuity and experience grew with the programme and the 2006 low was used by new managers and staff to launch the programme into consolidation and a focus on quality.

Many of the transition achievements of the Oxfam team in Aceh were hard-won and took time. Making change happen also involves a profound change in mindset. Transition-drivers such as mainstreamed quality, re-assessment and re-design, staff capacity building and stability, HR systems and management information are all relatively slow processes, regardless of size and budget. A key lesson is that early mistakes linked to over-expansion take massive effort and time to repair. But Oxfam in Aceh has also demonstrated that it can be done. Although the Tsunami context was exceptional, there is rich learning for the organisation more broadly. This review’s transition focus excludes a broader description of programme achievements but they can be found in the forthcoming *Final Report* by the Aceh-Nias team. Some recommendations for the organisation based on Oxfam’s learning in Aceh are included in section 7 of the main report.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Methodology.....	1
3 Defining our Terms.....	2
4 Types of Intervention over Time.....	2
5 The Timeline.....	4
6 The Main Drivers and Inhibitors of Transition.....	5
6.1 Big Money.....	5
6.2 The External Environment.....	9
6.3 Staffing.....	11
6.4 Organisational Structure and Management Support.....	13
6.5 Programme Quality and Programme Advice.....	16
6.6 Communications and information management.....	18
6.7 Strategic Planning and Programme Vision.....	19
6.8 Time to Review.....	21
6.9 From the Bunker to the Green – internal recovery can happen.....	22
7 Learning from Aceh for the Future.....	23
7.1 Handling big money:.....	23
7.2 Managing a complex external environment.....	23
7.3 Learning about staffing for transition.....	24
7.4 Management Structures and Support.....	24
7.5 Learning from Programme Quality and Advisory Posts.....	25
7.6 Communications and Management Information:.....	25
7.7 Strategic Planning and Time to Review.....	26
8 Concluding Remarks.....	26

<b>Annexes:</b>	Annexe 1	Terms of Reference
	Annexe 2	Timeline
	Annexe 3	Interviewees & Workshop Participants
	Annexe 4	References

### **Acknowledgement:**

*This review came about because the Oxfam team recognised that the Aceh-Nias programme offered an invaluable opportunity for organisational learning. They have demonstrated that the incredible opportunities and challenges presented by the programme could be grasped and turned around through professionalism, leadership and sheer hard work. That commitment has continued into their vision of this review. We greatly appreciated the real engagement of participants in this process and the intensive support to the review team by many staff in Banda and beyond, in particular from Ian Small and Kerry Ross whose analysis has made a significant contribution to this report.*

## **Abbreviations used in the report**

BRR	Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (Gol Special Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction)
CFW	Cash for Work
CMT	Corporate Management Team
GAM	Free Aceh Movement
Gol	Government of Indonesia
HD	Humanitarian Department (of OGB)
HSP	Humanitarian Support Personnel (of OGB)
(I)HR	(International) Human Resources
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDTF	(World Bank) Multi Donor Trust Fund
OGB	Oxfam Great Britain
OI	Oxfam International
OITF	Oxfam International Trust Fund
PDU	Project Development Unit
PHE	Public Health Engineering
PHP	Public Health Promotion
PIP	Programme Implementation Plan
PM	Project Manager
PMO	Programme Manager Operations
PPT	Programme Policy Team
PQLU	Programme Quality and Learning Unit
PSLU	Partner Support Liaison Unit
PU	Public Works (Water Ministry Aceh)
RALAS	Reconstruction of Aceh Land Administration Systems
RC	Regional Centre
RD	Regional Director
RHC	Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
RPM	Regional Programme Manager
SMT	Senior Management Team
SPM	Senior Programme Manager

## Learning about Programming in Transition

### Drivers and Inhibitors of Organisational Transition from Emergency to Recovery and Development in Oxfam International's Aceh and Nias Programme

#### 1 Introduction

Oxfam International's £48 million Aceh-Nias Tsunami programme is entering its fourth and final year. In the last three years the programme has supported many thousands of individuals in Aceh through periods of terrible loss, displacement and on to return home and recovery. To date, 1400 permanent houses have been built, thousands of latrines, wells, cash grants and cash for work provided and millions of litres of water delivered. Long term changes to land rights have been achieved, partner organisations supported and training provided to health workers and small businesses. Despite considerable challenges, the programme has survived, revised and delivered.

One of the biggest challenges faced by such a massive programme was in relation to its efforts to shift out of emergency and into recovery and development programming. Transition, and particularly the middle ground of recovery work, is an enduring challenge for Oxfam<sup>1</sup> globally and indeed for the entire sector. For this reason, the Aceh-Nias team commissioned a learning review "to assist the wider organisation to learn from the process of transition programming in the Aceh and Nias programme." *The objective is "to explore and learn about what drives and what inhibits organisational transition down the continuum from emergency to recovery to long term development".*<sup>2</sup> The ToR is attached in [Annexe 1](#). All Annexes are in the attached folder [Aceh Transition Annexes](#) and hyperlinked in the text.

The focus of this review is therefore change: it is not a programme review or an evaluation. The findings are drawn from a comprehensive review of key documents, interviews and a series of workshops in Aceh. Programme achievements are being documented in the *Oxfam Aceh-Nias Final Report*, due to be completed in April 2008. Our focus in this review is on what led, or didn't lead, to Oxfam revising its programme approach according to the evolving needs of communities as they re-established their lives.

#### 2 Methodology

The review was carried out in two phases by three Oxfam staff (from Indonesia, the Regional Centre and Oxford) and two consultants. The first phase consisted of interviews with staff and one community focus group discussion. This was carried out by one review team member in January 2008 in order to meet with the many staff leaving the programme that month. In February, the remaining four members of the team carried out a documentary review in Aceh and facilitated three separate workshops for field staff, managers and external agencies. Interviews were also carried out in Oxford and by telephone with staff unable to attend the workshops. An important component of the workshops was the creation of timelines, documenting events and decisions that participants viewed as significant drivers and inhibitors of transition. An overall timeline in pdf format can be found in [Annexe 2](#). A total of 130 people participated; the list is attached in [Annexe 3](#); references are listed in [Annexe 4](#). Each workshop was written up; they are attached as [Annexe 5](#).

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<sup>1</sup> "Oxfam Aceh" denotes Oxfam International in Aceh-Nias throughout the document

<sup>2</sup> Terms of Reference: OI Aceh and Nias: Tsunami/Earthquake Response Learning Review

### 3 Defining our Terms

It became evident that the terms emergency, recovery, rehabilitation, development and transition were understood by staff in different ways. Given the complex and often passionate debate about what each of these types of programming mean, or even if they can be described as separate phases, no attempt here is made to provide definitive descriptions. The so-called continuum itself is a contested notion. As Aceh demonstrates there is no uniform or linear progression from emergency to development. Cash for work can be 'classified' as both emergency and recovery. Development programming can (and did) occur right at the beginning. Recovery work coexisted with emergency work, reflecting the various locations and circumstances of affected individuals.

For the purpose of the workshops and this review in general, the terms were broadly understood to mean the following:

*Emergency* (or relief): Immediate life-saving responses, survival, life saving: often temporary (e.g. camps, water tankering, tents, temporary coordination mechanisms).

*Recovery* (or rehabilitation or reconstruction): Restore to 'normal', repair, replace. (e.g. cash for work and cash grants, transitional housing, repair of water systems and wells; enabling a return home)

*Development*: Long term, sustainable, community or government managed (often changes to beliefs, social and gender-related change, local and government policy changes such as to land rights, infrastructure, permanent housing, sustained changes to the economy, urban water supply)

*Transition*: The process of changing to different approaches and programming: responding to a changing context and changing needs. "finding a way to stay as relevant as possible in a changing environment" (Oxfam staff member)

*Underpinning the process of transition is an increasing level of engagement with local actors (from community to government). This engagement and the continuous process of reading the environment drive transition.*

### 4 Types of Intervention over Time

The focus of this review is what caused or constrained change. It is however useful to briefly describe the main types of intervention in each sector, characterising emergency, recovery and development approaches. The following summary is drawn from information provided by staff in Aceh and shows how the transition in the programme led to different approaches and activities over time.

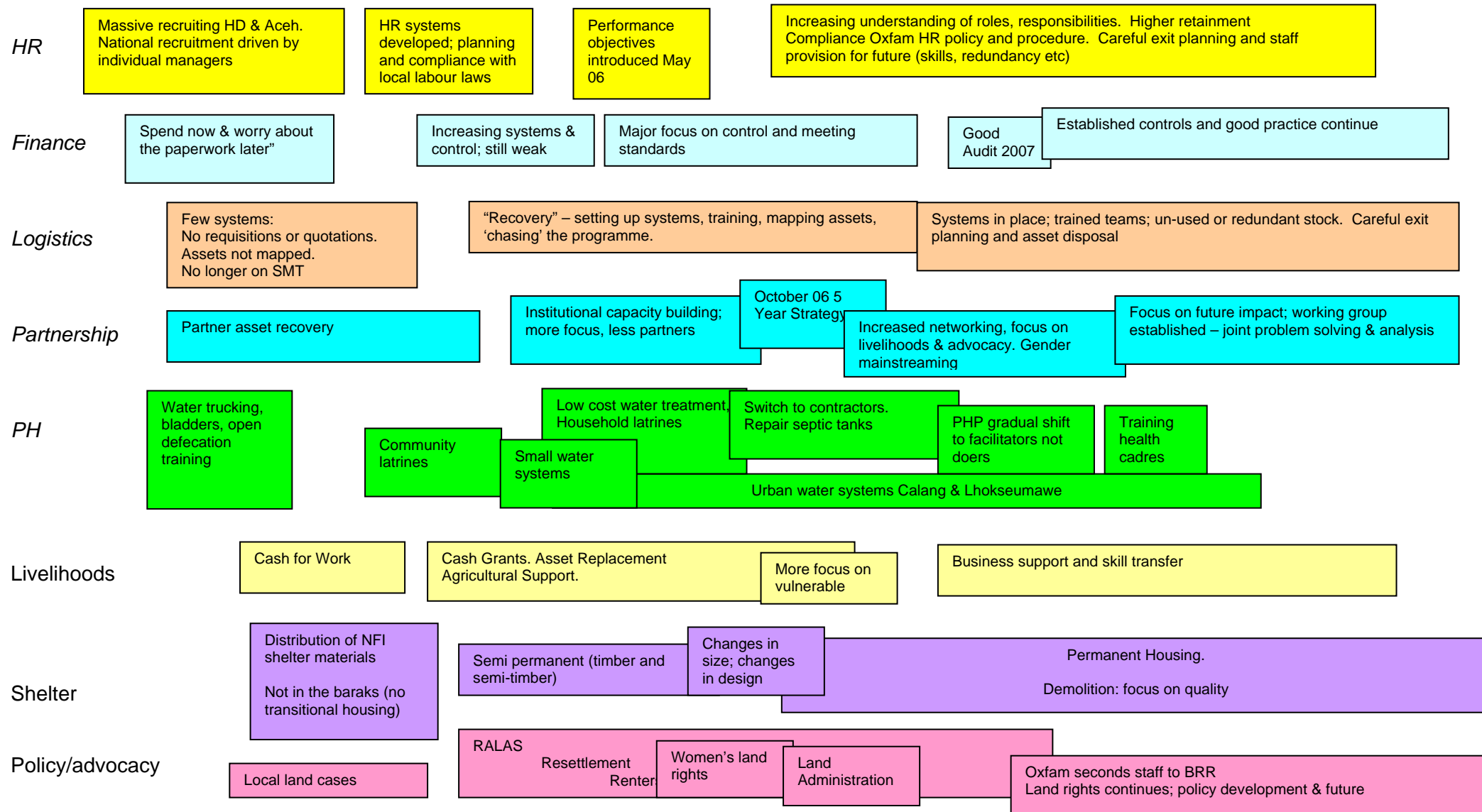


Early 2005

2006

2007

2008



## 5 The Timeline

A time line was constructed by participants in each of the three workshops who contributed key events and decisions that had had a significant impact on their experience of transition. Further events were inserted by the review team, drawing on earlier interviews and the documentary review. The full time line can be found in Annexe 2. The following is a brief summary of the events that were clearly of major, shared importance.

<b>2005</b>	<b>Summary of the Time Line</b>
Jan-March 05	Concern that government policy will restrict the presence of INGO international staff Characterised by high engagement (visits and operational staff) from HD; strong RC support; secondment of senior staff
February	PHP staff reduced
March	Departure of (seconded HD) SPM and POM (seconded RHC) and other experienced staff
28 <sup>th</sup> March 05	Nias earthquake: Oxfam mobilises & responds immediately
Late March/early April 05	Govt declares emergency phase over (i.e. agencies should start recovery work)
31-Mar	BRR established and launched Government of Indonesia's Master Plan for Rehabilitation & Reconstruction in Aceh & Nias
March-April	Start of the return home by IDPs. Oxfam responds, offers options on return home
April-August	Programme grows exponentially. High spend rates and multiple programme commitments
May	Govt declares return to civil order (agencies assured of their continued presence)
May	Visit and report by PHE and PHP Oxford Advisors - things not going so well
June	1st livelihoods team meeting between coordinators
July	BRR policy change to permanent housing: major implications, negotiation, rebuilds Main PIP for programme drafted (final version); 4 year plan
July	Departure of many senior managers (at critical period of programme-transition)
August	Peace MOU signed
August	Major IDP returns home, further response needed
September/October	OI reviews spend to date; requests reduced yearly spend
October-November	Logframe planning exercise aiming to create coherent & clear plans across sites
November	Budget revisions and consolidation: new plans revised downwards by up to 40% some locations. Some PMs reacted strongly; morale low
December	Anniversary of the Tsunami. Media pressure to show results on shelter
<b>2006</b>	
January	Review of integration with Indonesia programme: postponed to end 2007
February	Staff association in place
February	OI Evaluation: critical – shock to RC and Oxford
March	Fraud uncovered: crisis. Aceh Besar programme closed for 3 months. At same time, led to pause and reflection. Rekindled organisational attention to Aceh (not always constructively)
April	Ian Small arrives as SPM. This appointment and other new managers bring stability
May-June	Performance objectives introduced for first time
June onwards	Shifting from community to contractor implementation
June onwards	Office closures start based on written exit strategies
August	New Regional PM role for Tsunami: more regional perspective and plans for integration with the country programme
November	Rebuilding houses; focus on quality. Contractors.
November	PMT – significant meeting in Hermes Palace: team finally gels, planning together
December	Beginning of clarity about integration with Indonesia programme
December	BRR revises renters policy – major achievement by Policy & Advocacy for poor
<b>2007</b>	

January	Started assessment in 6 offices on septic tanks with PREP team – quality commitment, new approaches. Budget training for managers – significant impact on financial management
January	Regional HR Manager sets a tentative framework for integration. Not used or considered viable
May	Exit strategy completed
August	Annual planning begins
September <b>2008</b>	Decision for 08 to be continuation, not new programme. 08 seen as tsunami transition to closure
January	Integration with the Indonesia country programme

Events that were perceived as important change-factors varied of course depending on an individual's position and sector. Clearly government decisions were a major influence on Oxfam. Internally, although the total amount involved was relatively small<sup>3</sup>, it was the fraud and its repercussions that appeared to have had the biggest impact on transition.

## 6 The Main Drivers and Inhibitors of Transition

Drawing on a review of documentation and interviews with staff, the review team focused the information for the workshops by proposing a series of hypotheses or questions about what appeared to be the main drivers and inhibitors of transition. The selection of hypotheses was an iterative process, tested and discussed in all three workshops and further revised in the writing of the report. The eight hypotheses were found to encapsulate the range of transition factors found during the review and to provide a framework through which to communicate such multiple but highly inter-related issues. They were generally found to hold true for workshop participants. Participants in one workshop generated a further (the ninth) hypothesis. This and participants' feedback are reflected in the following analysis.

The main issues clustered into the following nine titles, developed into the hypotheses below:

1. *Big money – the size of the budget for a three year programme*
2. *Pressures and influences from the external environment*
3. *Staffing*
4. *Management structures and support*
5. *Programme quality and technical advice*
6. *Communications and information management*
7. *Strategic planning and programme vision*
8. *Time out to review – pausing for planning*
9. *From the Bunker to the Green*

Each hypothesis is described and discussed in turn below. Some factors are given more space than others, reflecting the reach of their impact. Nonetheless, each hypothesis shares common ground with the rest, albeit seen through a different lens.

### 6.1 Big Money

***“Did the sheer volume of Oxfam’s funding generate a commitment-driven, spend culture which inhibited Oxfam’s ability to re-assess, redesign and programme in line with Oxfam’s values and programming principles?”***

<sup>3</sup> According to Oxfam, only 0.05% of the funding, most of which was recovered

Oxfam took on £48 million - more money than it has ever received for a single emergency response. The budget was greater than that of most of Oxfam's regions. The (rare) certainty of massive funding beyond the initial emergency phase created enormous opportunities to meet recovery and development needs and leave a sustainable legacy for the future.

As described elsewhere, Oxfam has achieved a great deal in Aceh. Inevitably, staff nonetheless question whether the full opportunities offered by the budget were realised. Our focus, on transition, is to explore the extent to which the money enabled the programme to support recovery and provide a platform for development, and in what ways it acted as an inhibitor.

The money enabled staff to "think big". Helicopters hired during the emergency instantly increased coverage and speed. As communities expressed a wish to return home as early as March 2005, Oxfam was able to respond, offer a range of options, inject large amounts of cash into the economy through cash for work and take on the kind of infrastructural work that it would normally be unable to afford. As early as January 2005, Oxfam was signing MOUs with local authorities to build urban water supplies. The programme could afford to create its own advisory capacity. It had the money and vision to support local partners and replace their assets. Permanent housing, septic tanks, boats – Oxfam had the budget to do it. Several months in, Oxfam could still respond to new emergencies (Nias) and new areas (Calang). As a big player it was taken seriously by government and was able to significantly influence policy and land rights.

Unfettered by budget constraints, the ability to say yes led to over-expansion and a loss of focus and control. By 2006, the programme had inherited a backlog of commitments to communities and government that prevented it revising its approach in the light of longer term needs. Work continued in some areas with interventions of questionable relevance. In some sectors, particularly housing and sanitation, poor quality construction meant that resources for new work were diverted to repairing and rebuilding. Staff repeatedly talked of the "emergency mindset" that the money (unintentionally) created - meaning the drive to deliver outputs, compared to the need to let go of doing and handover to local actors.

Having the money also made Oxfam unusually vulnerable to demand. Communities and the government woke up to the possibilities suggested by the obvious largesse of the agencies and began to increase the pressure. It seems that staff, even at a senior level, could not say no. The usual oversight and accountability mechanisms demanded by donors were weaker in the DEC and Oxfam International (OI) and Oxfam's management and systems did not fill the gap.

From the perspective of Oxfam's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and International Director (ID), the drive was not to spend per se, but to respond to the needs without fear of budget limitations, fulfil commitments, ensure quality and good budgeting. This is not what staff heard. External and internal media pressure for figures and 'successes' further tipped the balance away from quality and into numbers. Saying yes was also rather enjoyable; "when communities asked for something, young managers could say "Yes, we've got the money". They loved it!"<sup>4</sup>

The rapid spend in 2005 (which, based on a forecast of sustained levels of spending, led to the prediction that the money would not last 5 years), was partly responsible for a reduction in the length of the programme from 5 to 3 years. However, the programme at any rate was constrained by DEC time limits – and as importantly, by OI donors. This had

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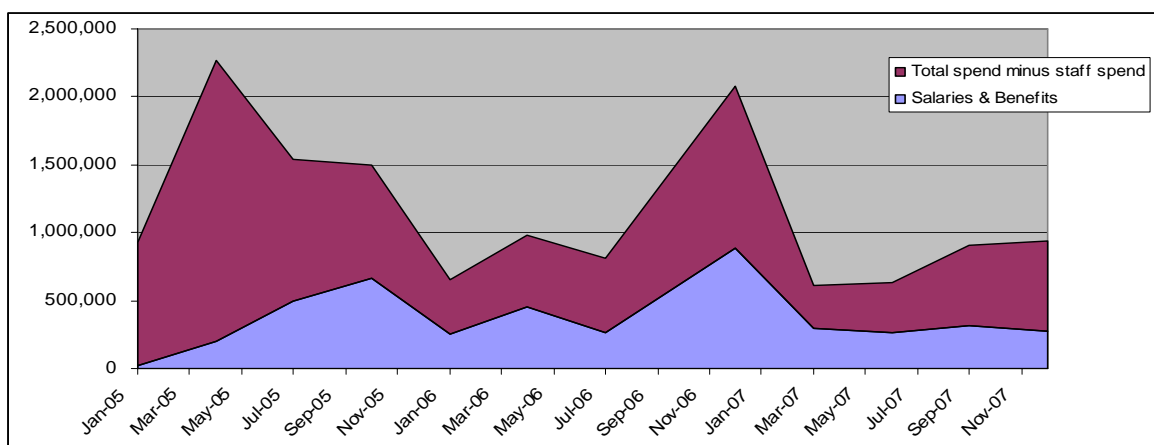
<sup>4</sup> Workshop participant

a profound impact on the programme's ability to envision developmental work. In retrospect, the use of OI funds for exactly the same period as DEC funding may have been a missed opportunity. Could Oxfam have used its private funding, and non-institutional components of OI funding more flexibly and strategically – allocated for example to the post-DEC period and for conflict-affected communities?

Additionally, because Oxfam's budget system monitors the budget against actual expenditure, questions are asked if there is a mismatch. This appears to have created the message that "under-spending was a terrible thing to do". Moreover, first time staff were faced with multi-million pound budgets and simply lacked the skills to re-budget and reschedule; when training was given in early 2007, the situation markedly improved. Workshop participants noted that they were required to defend their budgets for the first time in 2007: the experience forced managers to focus on quality and a clear programme rationale.

Despite several lone voices, at no point does there appear to have been a substantial challenge to whether Oxfam could effectively absorb £48 million and programme accountably. The perception appears to have been that the money had to be spent, and that the three year limit was non-negotiable. According to field staff, an organisational culture that did not encourage criticism, Indonesian culture that hesitates to criticise managers and the absence of formal mechanisms for upwards feedback constrained their ability to voice concerns about the spend culture. Oxfam's participation in an inter-agency initiative to address such cultural issues (called *Building Trust*) could provide useful learning for the future.

Certainly there was little evidence of a systematic risk analysis. Several key risks were identified early in the programme (for example regarding staffing, the ambitious shelter programme, the conditions necessary for urban water supplies), yet they do not appear to have been revisited or monitored. Oxfam was programming at the extreme end of its technical competencies, and often beyond them. Perhaps this in part explained the under-estimation of what, in particular, a large housing programme could entail. Similarly cost-effectiveness, including the monitoring of overheads, took second place to getting the job done – a reasonable approach during an emergency but counterproductive for the long-term.



With staff salaries and benefits averaging 32% of total spend over the life of the programme, several staff expressed deep misgivings about the continued emergency-style deployment of international and relocated staff, viewing the cost as diverting funds from longer term programming. It also took time and courage to later revise embedded expectations of emergency-linked benefits (such as Hard to Work allowances). The

feasibility of greater nationalisation of senior positions and an earlier rationalisation of posts is beyond the scope of this review. It does appear that a disproportionate amount of the budget was spent on staff and associated costs. Whether this diverted funds from longer term programmes is an academic question however, given that other limitations to longer-term planning were in place. The figures would also need careful analysis to avoid drawing the wrong conclusions – after all, participatory approaches are staff, rather than material-heavy and hence high staff numbers could indicate an emphasis on ‘software’ rather than a delivery-oriented programme. However, the ratio of staff to programme could perhaps serve as one indicator of the extent to which a programme is moving towards the reduced operationality and increased engagement with national actors that characterise development work.

That the budget exceeded Oxfam’s coping capacity seems generally accepted by the organisation now. But “think big”, although interpreted as an invitation to do more of Oxfam’s usual programming, was also intended to mean think outside the box of Oxfam’s typical programming. After all, “too much money for what?”<sup>5</sup> – and for whom? It was too much money for Oxfam to implement the programmes itself, and in a community-based way, but not too much money for the affected population of Aceh. The Lhokseumawe water system and the eventual use of contractors for housing, demonstrate that there were other successful ways of working. Similarly Oxfam quickly recognised the opportunity to create a partnership programme that emphasised partners’ own recovery and programmes, rather than a more traditional emergency partner approach in which partners are at risk of being co-opted into the ‘donor’s’ operational programmes.

Yet further alternative approaches failed to really gain traction and ran out of time or money (for example two other planned urban water supplies were not ultimately implemented by Oxfam). The idea of contributing substantial funds to the World Bank’s Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) was twice considered by OI, and dropped both times. Arguably, with this kind of money and such a short time, Oxfam could have used far more of its money, and earlier, by using private contractors. This raises all sorts of questions about NGO values, and would have meant almost entirely parallel programming and management – different staff and structures entirely, skilled in managing contractors and other businesses. However, the path that Oxfam eventually took was an uneasy and reluctant shift back and forth between the two worlds.

Oxfam’s Corporate Management Team (CMT) has absorbed the lessons from the post-emergency experience in Aceh noting that:

“We should only accept funding for phase 2/3 rehabilitation and recovery when it matches beneficiary needs and Oxfam’s ability to deliver through its own competencies. We think that the volume of funds available (unusually) in the Tsunami was at the level normally required by Governments for major infrastructure rehabilitation, but recognise that major infrastructure does not match well with Oxfam’s competencies. In future, especially now that we have defined our policy on shelter, it is unlikely that we would be able to spend funds at the Tsunami level matched with our core competencies. Our revised shelter policy is now clear that we should not engage in construction ourselves.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite the challenges, the programme did manage to regain its focus, rein in the emergency work and concentrate on quality and outcomes. From mid 2006, the Aceh-

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<sup>5</sup> Links between relief, rehabilitation and development in the tsunami response. A synthesis of initial findings. Ian Christophos. TEC July 2006

<sup>6</sup> Email from International Director 14/02/07

Nias team threw itself wholeheartedly into consolidation and quality. Livelihoods have focused on business development since the money ran out for cash grants – and some staff anticipate higher impact as a result of a more developmental approach. It is notable that the Policy and Advocacy Unit (PAU), which did not have its hands tied by operations, kept its focus on the long-term at the outset. The partnership programme was in danger of losing its own direction during the recovery/asset replacement period, but then regrouped and focused on developmental objectives as part of its new strategy. The budgets of both Policy and Partnerships were however very small in comparison and perhaps less vulnerable to output pressure.

Overall, it does seem that big money enabled Oxfam to massively increase its emergency response in the first phase and to fund innovative programme work. However, the volume of funds (squeezed into a three year programme) subsequently enabled a post-emergency expansion that burst the boundaries of Oxfam's usual ways of working, forcing Oxfam into unfamiliar territory. At times, the programme became a hostage to fortune, tied to the earlier expansion and spending drive, making it much harder to shift out of emergency and respond to new needs in a changing external environment.

## 6.2 The External Environment

***“Intense pressure from a complex external environment led to difficulties in maintaining programme direction and moving smoothly down the continuum from emergency to development.”***

### *Aceh's context*

Aceh is both a post natural disaster and conflict context. Three decades of conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia ended shortly after the Tsunami. A peace agreement between GAM and the Government of Indonesia (GoI) was signed in August 2005.

Understanding the fluid political and religious context of Aceh has taken time. Oxfam's knowledge of the communities in which they have been working was sometimes low, at least in operational teams. Inductions for staff tended to emphasise technical skills, rather than an understanding of the context. Aceh is a complex environment: people have been traumatised by conflict and the Tsunami, ex-GAM have joined new and old communities. GAM won the election in 2006 and a new Governor was inaugurated in 2007. The need to deliver on housing also became an election issue.

Loss of coastal land, raised groundwater levels and saline contamination had changed the environment and required different solutions. Infrastructure built on Tsunami funds has generated new commerce and had a profound effect on communities – for example in Calang where the building of a new road has opened up a trade boom and radically changed the population and economics of the town.

A key transition factor of increasing engagement with local actors was itself a challenge and often not considered a priority by some managers. New political structures were (and are) still being established. Engagement may not be possible with some actors on the scene who are outside the political process and based on the alternative economy of corruption and extortion. Unstable communities have not necessarily had an appetite for community collaboration and longer term goals. Given the huge physical destruction caused by the Tsunami and the population movements occurring after the peace agreement, communities themselves were often newly created and had evolving needs.

Development work would probably target entirely different, more vulnerable communities than those with whom Oxfam has been working to date.

Some Oxfam international staff had extensive experience of Aceh; most did not. This was compounded by the fact that many Indonesians were hired from outside Aceh and themselves had limited understanding of local communities and values.

The Partnership Support and Liaison Unit (PSLU), elevated to the Partnership Programme in May 2006 had, like PAU, teams which were led and populated by Indonesian speaking staff knowledgeable in Acehnese politics and culture. Full integration of PSLU partners with the operational projects was probably always going to be limited, since Acehnese civil society was orientated towards human rights and advocacy, not public health and livelihoods operations. Furthermore, the Senior Programme Manager (SPM) sought to protect Partnership and PAU from being diverted by the operational programmes – ensuring the space to develop their own strategy and maintain it, despite a reactive environment. However Partnerships and PAU could have been an excellent resource for enhanced understanding of the context, culture and politics of Aceh by operational teams. Some links were created, especially over time, but staff felt that opportunities were missed to benefit from the kind of community understanding enjoyed by non-operational teams that could have provided an engine for transition.

#### *Coordination, the BRR and the influence of other agencies*

On March 31<sup>st</sup> 2005, the Indonesian central government established a new agency dedicated to Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, the BRR (*Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi*). BRR's ability to coordinate nearly a thousand agencies was almost inevitably limited; the shelter group alone had some 400 actors in 2005 and "working groups were just a talk fest". Intense competition between agencies and the absence of donor-led directives also weakened coordination. The external agency workshop noted that opportunities for sharing and longer term planning were often missed until too late.

To bolster coordination, BRR created UNORC to coordinate the activities of UN agencies and NGOs, and extend field coordination. However, it failed to fully articulate the role of UNORC, legitimise it and ensure greater clarity. Against this backdrop, effective coordination among a huge number of actors was never achieved.

Although it took time to establish its authority, coverage and experience in Aceh, BRR was a powerful influence on Oxfam's and other agencies' programme decisions. With a big budget to hand, BRR published its Master Plan for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation. Whilst generally appreciated as a positive force, some agencies experienced intense pressure from BRR; MOUs were sometimes hastily established as the message was conveyed to engage in housing or leave; "housing became the iconic driver of rehabilitation work in Aceh". Although Oxfam had volunteered itself into housing, it was (and is) under pressure to keep to its original, albeit over-ambitious shelter commitment. Additionally, the goal posts changed repeatedly as BRR revised its standards on size and in late 2005, in response to community demand, insisted that agencies switch from semi-permanent to permanent housing. BRR's mandate excluded it from reintegration planning and support to conflict-affected communities; the Aceh Re-integration Agency did not have BRR's power, lacking funds and strategic direction to shape recovery and development.

Oxfam's ability to modify its programme and respond to the needs of non-Tsunami affected vulnerable communities was further constrained by DEC rules (and those of the Oxfam International Trust Fund OITF), confining interventions to Tsunami affected families. This lockdown was in sharp contrast to Sri Lanka, where Oxfam benefited from a



broader interpretation of 'affected districts', including all those living within them. By contrast, Oxfam Aceh made a formal request to OITF to use funds for conflict-affected communities in March 2005. The go-ahead was not received until October 2007.

In general, collaboration between the NGOs in recovery programming was limited; if anything their effect upon each other was counterproductive and marked by competitiveness rather than sharing. In some cases beneficiaries received multiple cash grants for the same business endeavour. Oxfam's efforts to increase community participation and responsibility were often undermined by the payments and practices of other NGOs.

During this review's workshop with external organisations, other agencies too asked "why didn't we say no?" All agencies question whether close coordination could have created a common advocacy platform through which they could have lobbied BRR and the DEC in favour of realistic housing policies, an extension of the three year DEC period and the inclusion of non-Tsunami communities. It is indicative of the power and divisiveness of intense pressure and competition that the NGOs did not recognise their own muscle in Aceh, becoming largely reactive and compliant to the demands of government, communities and media.

### *The Media*

Media interest was unusually high and led to intense pressure to be seen to be "doing a lot". This emphasised numbers and outputs, rather than longer term goals and processes. There was "media madness", too much focus on reconstruction and pressure to spend the money by 2007. Moreover, the fraud and negative reporting of Oxfam in the Indonesian press increased the pressure on Oxfam and diverted attention from programme development to damage control. Nevertheless, Oxfam managed the media successfully, hired more media officers and adopted an increasingly proactive approach to local media, providing training and hosting field visits; this learning was quickly absorbed by the rest of the Indonesia programme.

A complex external environment was certainly a significant challenge to transition. Recovery and development programming depend on an analysis of the context and population and on close engagement with local actors. The difficulties of planning in post-conflict and post-destruction flux were intensified by the phenomenal impact of the media, actual or perceived expectations of the donor public and the very real expectations of government and communities. With hindsight, the impact of Aceh's hothouse atmosphere on management decisions was under-estimated and bound to lead to output-orientated programmes. Aceh has offered lessons about media management and protecting staff from such pressures. Not for the first time, it also demonstrates the unrealised potential and power of strategic coordination and collective advocacy at both headquarters and field level.

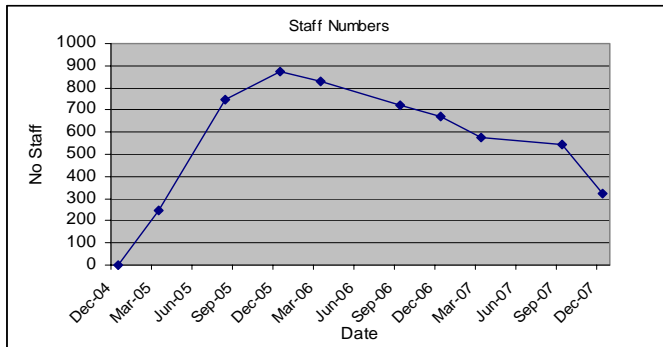
## **6.3 Staffing**

***"Given the size and rapid expansion of the programme, was it really possible to match staff capacity to programme demand in the desired timeframe?"***

To what extent did the staffing of the Aceh response impact upon the programme's ability to manage the different types of emergency, recovery and development programming? Oxfam in Aceh grew from zero staff, peaking at 873 staff by the end of 2005. In terms of international staff, Aceh was hard to recruit for and Oxfam was recruiting in a competitive

external market. Candidates often chose Sri Lanka rather than Aceh. Oxfam was also competing for staff internally with other emergencies such as Darfur and Chad and later, Pakistan. Within Aceh, experienced local NGO staff were in high demand. Further, because of the political context prior to the peace agreement, Acehnese with operational experience in NGO approaches to public health and livelihoods were thin on the ground.

Nonetheless, in the first few weeks of the emergency, there was an unprecedented willingness by the whole organisation to resource Aceh with many of its most experienced staff. The main difficulties were encountered between March and August 2005 when support from the wider organisation dropped off but the number of staff in Aceh increased by a further 200%.



At this time, the programme was still implementing emergency programmes, but was also starting recovery projects and articulating a developmental vision for the programme. However, the profile of newly recruited international staff continued to be dominated by emergency backgrounds. Many of the more junior field staff had development backgrounds, as did

the SPMs in charge during the crucial few months of recovery planning. It was difficult to find staff that could bridge the emergency-development design gap and identify recovery interventions that met immediate needs (such as asset replacement) and yet provided a platform for development. The limited availability of staff with experience of the different approaches and types of programming in emergency and development is sector-wide and not specific to Oxfam.

Bold statements were made on staff development and the nationalising of senior posts, but this remained largely an intention; the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Programme Management Team (PMT) are still populated entirely by international staff. Opportunities may have been lost to develop a new cadre of programme and management staff. Opportunities were also limited by the absence of a decision about the longer term in Aceh, further discussed below.

Staff plans were either not made or not followed and the Darfur lesson of planned over-resourcing did not bear fruit in Aceh. Even when offered, some incumbents refused additional staff, apparently for fear of leaving someone under-employed. The unaccompanied status and shared housing for international and relocated staff made longer contracts less attractive. Reportedly, the ‘mindset’ of new staff continued to be emergency orientated, emphasising action, rather than facilitation and capacity building. This was perhaps hardly surprising, as the Humanitarian Department (HD) in Oxford continued to recruit most of the staff or to field its Humanitarian Support Personnel (HSPs).

During the workshops, several staff noted that the challenge was “not impossible but extremely difficult”. Many of the early difficulties described (such as lack of induction, low awareness of Oxfam policies and approach) are in large part the inevitable result of the sheer volume and speed of recruitment. Systems and stability take time to establish and some staff thought that opportunities to import systems from the country programme were missed. Conversely, the SPM points out that over time Aceh had developed quality systems that the country team could have benefited from.

The inadvertent creation of three layers of staff (national, relocated and international) led to division and a sense of inequality. During the review, some national staff spoke of feeling increasingly part of Oxfam. Are there ways of removing the barriers created by different benefits earlier or is it a hazard of emergency programmes dominated by non-local staff? Over time however, human resource systems caught up with the programme. The staff benefit review in 2007 and subsequent implementation of medical cover for national staff and their dependents increased staff retention.

Some improvements could have been made earlier, particularly related to better clarity on recruitment responsibilities between HD and the Regional Centre (RC) and more investment in recruitment resources in both locations. Neither HD nor the RC significantly increased their staff capacity to support the Tsunami programmes. Oxford's Programme Policy Team (PPT) added a dedicated advisor for livelihoods. Following a disagreement with Aceh's management over the first field trip report, this additional support from PPT was itself curtailed and the post holder has not visited the programme since September 2006. Other options considered, but not implemented, included the creation of a dedicated recruitment coordinator (disagreements over the need and location in either HD or the RC stalled the initiative). A long term vision from the country programme and far greater involvement of programme staff outside HD in recruitment was also needed, in particular a shift in responsibility for recruitment of recovery and development staff to PPT.

Oxfam did match staff capacity to programme demand in the first emergency phase of the programme. It could not keep up with a rapidly expanding programme that required new and complex staff profiles for transition and recovery programming. Later in the programme, HR responded to the new challenge of planned integration with Indonesia as well as exit with well thought out transition plans.

Transition programming needs staff with the outlook and skills to adapt to the changing context and drive the programme down the continuum. In addition to allowing more time for staff to keep in tandem with demand, Oxfam needed to greatly increase its recruitment, HR personnel, training and coaching capacity to fill the gap internally and within the sector.

#### **6.4 Organisational Structure and Management Support**

***“Are Oxfam GB's organisational structure and management support mechanisms conducive to supporting and guiding transition?”***

*Organisational Structure:*

The Aceh programme's interventions in emergency, policy and advocacy, recovery, partnership, media and communications and development programming spanned the entire organisation and burst the seams of the individual remits of particular departments and locations. More than ever before, the response involved almost the entire organisation.

Early in 2005, the Aceh programme received intensive support from the Indonesian country programme and the RC through direct line management by the Regional Director (RD) and through the secondment of staff. From the outset Aceh, although a province of Indonesia, was not managed by the Indonesia country programme. In January 2005, the Indonesia Country Programme Manager (CPM) was asked to step aside and Aceh's SPM was thereon line managed by the RD. Although plans were made to integrate Aceh into the Indonesia programme by May 2006 and again in 2007, the decisions were reviewed and postponed. Aceh continued to be line managed by the region until January 2008.

The 'special case' of Aceh was created in recognition of the size of the programme. The Indonesia country programme's capacity to absorb a programme bigger than the region was made even less likely due to its own rapid expansion; it had successfully increased its restricted funds substantially (from around £300,000 in 2003 to more than £7 million in 2006). There was a clear risk that integration with the country programme would dilute the support Aceh needed or divert capacity from the country programme. The necessary high level representation of Aceh to the organisation as a whole was also facilitated by the direct involvement of the RD.

Further structural changes marked out Aceh as a stand-alone programme – neither the East Asia Regional Programme Manager (RPM) nor the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) were involved in Aceh's management and support. A new support role to the RD (a Regional Humanitarian Advisor) was created for the first year of the Tsunami and the RHC was directed to focus on other countries in the region. The result was that whilst Aceh received unusually high levels of RD engagement, particularly during 2005, it was isolated from sustained or programme-level support from the RPM or RHC that could have supported transition.

Furthermore, whilst leadership was clearly held in the RC, supporting functions such as recruitment, logistics and technical expertise remained largely in HD (still the primary recruitment locus for technical staff for Aceh). Within Oxford, responsibilities for strategy and recruitment post-emergency were unclear between HD and PPT – there was no clear handover in many areas, or necessarily the capacity to hand over to. Although the continued advisory support from HD was clearly appreciated and regarded as significant to the programme's ability to transition, it was inevitably intermittent.

At the crucial time, when the programme was expanding in the recovery phase, the 'organisational spotlight' moved on to other emergencies and demands. The stand-alone status of the Aceh programme inadvertently increased the grey area between the 'boxes' of emergency and development, sometimes falling between the HD, PPT and the RC. It left something of a vacuum, experienced by the Aceh programme at times as near abandonment.

The projects that appear to have transcended Oxfam's structural backdrop in many ways prove the rule: the work done by partnership and policy was mainly led from within Aceh. Although policy and advocacy linked to established expertise such as Oxfam's global land rights work, it was the leadership of the unit in Banda that quickly identified Oxfam's potential role in land rights. "Oxfam's advocacy work in Aceh has been characterised by a very strong culture of *engagement with authorities, with other agencies and with communities*"<sup>7</sup>. The entire approach was therefore linked to transition and, like the partnership unit, created its own niche unrelated to Oxfam's internal structures.

The creation of an additional RPM post from June 2006 until March 2008 covering Indonesia, including Aceh, has helped to bridge the Aceh-Indonesia gap and lay the foundations for integration. Nonetheless, the earlier impact on transition is still being felt in Aceh. It has remained unclear what kind of programme Jakarta expected to inherit, or could manage. This has undermined Aceh's ability to plan longer term programmes. Even now, plans to find funding for conflict-affected communities and other long term work are on hold, pending the finalisation of the Regional and then Indonesia Country Strategies in mid-2008. This is compounded by the flux of new appointments and job shifts in Jakarta and the region. The uncertainty has led, for example, to advertising key posts such as the

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<sup>7</sup> Executive Summary: A History and Celebration of Oxfam's Land Rights Advocacy Work in Post-Tsunami Aceh, Indonesia, 2005-7

new head of PAU for only an 8 month contract; this may be one of the reasons for the current recruitment difficulties. The overall risk is that the momentum in the programme for transition reduces and the opportunities for development work get lost in the cracks.

### *The Critical Issue of Leadership*

Time and again, individuals spoke of the impact of an individual SPM's capacity and leadership in Aceh, for good or ill. Oxfam fully recognised the critical function of the SPM and accordingly drafted in high level (RD and CPM) post holders when recruitment failed. Despite such efforts it proved difficult to identify individuals with a profile that suited the complex environment of Aceh and the coexistence of emergency, recovery and development programmes. Furthermore, turnover was a problem: during a critical transition period in 2005 four successive SPMs took the helm. Gaps and sickness also led to the overstretched Programme Manager of Operations (PMO) providing interim cover. The turbulence was mirrored in other key positions; for example during the critical transition period from March to August 2005, the leadership of HR, Finance and Programme Management of Operations changed; the turnover of Programme Managers (PMs) was also extremely high. At the same time, regional and HD support was declining. It was not until the arrival of the current SPM on a two year contract in April 2006 that the leadership of the programme finally stabilised.

But what is the lesson here? Failed recruitments happen and planning must account for it, finding other means to ensure the appropriate skills are in place. Oxfam's current strategy to invest in the humanitarian management and leadership skills of the CPMs, RPMs and RDs is laudable and could significantly enhance in-country and mobile capacity. Nonetheless, for exceptional programmes, particularly those which are out of a country programme's operating area, there will still be a need to find new managers, rather than divert or borrow existing ones. Oxfam is not like the military, it cannot unilaterally relocate senior managers for long periods.

Overall, Oxfam's structure reinforces the grey areas of responsibility or capacity for post-emergency programming common to humanitarian agencies and donors. Although the needs of Aceh were exceptional, the structural challenges of supporting recovery programmes are not. Aceh's isolation from the usual country-regional relationships deepened the uncertainty about the future of the programme, despite the assurance of multi-year funding.

*The effectiveness of Aceh Tsunami programme senior management to lead transition was dependent on individuals' skills and/or relationships rather than institutional support. With the benefit of hindsight, reliance on the talent and availability of a single post holder is a high risk strategy. Are there other models based on an acceptance that the perfect individual cannot be parachuted in? On-the-job coaching and mentoring are now part of Oxfam's management lexicon. Perhaps more exploration is needed of flexible management support mechanisms that transcend traditional line management. For example the formal availability of a steering group of high level multidisciplinary advisors or managers, led by a very senior manager, and an emphasis on what one workshop participant referred to as an *emergent leadership model*.*

A steering group is acknowledged to be risk-laden. The risk would be that the group does not contain the required mix of experienced, balanced, strategic thinkers – staff with good interpersonal skills who are able to advise and support without undermining or diluting the decision-making capacity of the SPM, able to adapt their own experience to the given context of the programme, yet able to challenge decisions in the light of institutional learning, offer evidence to counter opinion and stand back from the in-field hothouse in a constructive manner. They also need to be willing to be on call to support with practical

help in their field and be genuinely available – time would have to be formally allocated to the task; otherwise the support would be patchy and unsustainable.

## 6.5 Programme Quality and Programme Advice

***“Oxfam made a strong commitment to programme quality and technical advisory support right at the start. Yet a centralised quality team and the outputs driven nature of the operational programme sidelined and challenged quality for a long time, inhibiting its ability to adapt and change.”***

Programme ‘quality’ in Aceh covers all cross cutting programme approaches such as gender, accountability (e.g. Sphere and HAP), advocacy, monitoring and evaluation. Quality also relates to good practice (in partners, public health, livelihoods, shelter) and to the standard of Oxfam’s construction and material input. Oxfam quickly recognised the opportunity created by substantial and flexible funding and recruited advisors for both technical and cross cutting sectors at the outset, providing in-house leadership in each of the cross cutting sectors as well as Public Health Promotion (PHP), Public Health Engineering (PHE), shelter, livelihoods, media and policy. Quality is a significant driver of transition, underpinning the programme’s ability to engage with local actors, design in accordance with evolving needs and support sustainable recovery and development.

Technical and cross cutting advisors have been either separately managed (e.g. in January 2005) or housed together in one unit (e.g. the Programme Development Unit (PDU), created in February 2005). In August 2005, the technical advisors were once again back in the operational line, reporting directly to the Programme Manager of Operations (PMO). The cross cutting advisors remained as a separate unit (Programme Quality and Learning Unit, PQLU) outside the programme line. Policy and Advocacy was established as a separate unit.

Despite some notable successes, the impact of PQLU and the technical advisors was never fully felt in the field<sup>8</sup>. Changes began from late 2005, but the turnaround still took most of 2006/7. By contrast, the Policy programme maintained a strong quality focus throughout its work. Partnership work faced early challenges regarding quality, but was increasingly able to focus on quality and measure impact as the programme evolved. In recognition that a centralised unit had inadvertently weakened the field’s sense of responsibility for quality, PQLU was disbanded in June 2006 and cross cutting advice was decentralised to each field site and reintegrated into the management line.

Despite Aceh’s good intentions and investment, including the creation of information officers and M&E specialists, the establishment of a systematic monitoring system of both quantitative and qualitative data has largely eluded the programme. Most sectors lacked a solid baseline which made it difficult for staff to measure impact. Crucially this and weak monitoring throughout the life of the programme made it difficult to re-assess and transition the programme and on occasion led to poor quality control and sub-standard construction work by contractors.

For the first year or more, monitoring seemed to be driven by the need for figures. There appeared to be strong pressure and high expectations (partly from the media and partly through internal OI reporting) to show what had been achieved in terms of numbers (number of wells cleaned, latrines built, houses built, grants distributed etc). The need to supply numbers drove programming and monitoring. Emergency style programming sometimes continued long after it was needed: as one staff member observed, “people were installing TV antennas when we were building them toilets”.

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<sup>8</sup> See the OI Evaluation 2006 for discussion on the reasons for limited impact

The issue of effective, centrally-based quality advice is a major challenge for the organisation as a whole, including HD and regional advisors. Aceh experienced the familiar difficulties of dotted line management and resistance to advice from 'outsiders' by some Programme Managers. The team's technical advisory posts also had to manage the inevitable dilution of their impact in a multi-site programme, high turnover and sometimes limited previous experience of Oxfam. Some succeeded and influenced quality and strategy; others struggled to find a foothold. The ability to establish good relationships with managers and teams was critical. Gaps that could have been filled by regional advisors (livelihoods and RHC in particular) suffered from Aceh's 'special case' of separation from the regional and country structures.

Oxfam's experience of embedding cross cutting quality approaches into a large programme demonstrates that time, rather than money, is the primary investment. Limited initial experience of accountability and gender meant that staffs' understanding and ability to integrate quality effectively could not happen overnight. Although staff showed a clear commitment to participation early on, it was often interpreted as simply doing what the communities or government asked, without the counterweight of technical feasibility or Oxfam's organisational boundaries of competence and strategic direction. As one participant observed, "our values got us into trouble!" Houses were built on inappropriate sites because that is where the communities wanted them. Traditional sanitation models preferred by communities were constructed, but some settlements were now more densely populated and in areas which had higher groundwater levels – traditional approaches were no longer appropriate. Participatory planning ultimately demanded a delicate balance of community-informed design along with technical analysis in the light of a changing social and environmental context.

Over time, quality programming gained purchase, particularly from 2007 on. Various earlier initiatives had started to improve the programme's monitoring and learning. By mid 2006 more participatory programme cycle management was being introduced into the programme. New project areas carried out assessments and planning and introduced monitoring systems, though ad hoc. An extensive situation analysis was carried out in early 2007.

PHP also adapted over time. The middle-income demographic of urban Aceh had led the programme to reduce its PHPs during 2005. By early 2006 PH engineers were calling for PHP, realising the need. PHP approaches began to adapt to the needs of both educated and rural populations and in early 2006 increased its needs-based PH and risk analysis to inform programming.

The discovery of fraud from March 2006 and the OI evaluation published the same month also led to a major focus on quality and demonstrated the programme's commitment to improving accountability. The new SPM and the Deputy PMO committed to resolving the problems and from April 2006, quality became a major management focus. Workshop participants observed that they began to spend far more time listening to the beneficiaries. A major rebuilding of houses was started and poor quality septic tanks repaired. It took another year for systems (finance, logistics, and human resources) to revoke the legacy of sub-standard audits and the fraud, but this was achieved by 2007 and a positive audit.

The reasons for the relatively limited impact of quality advisory input are amply described in Oxfam Aceh's forthcoming *Final Report*. With respect to transition, quality has been both a driver (periodically during 2005 and more concretely from mid 2006 onwards) and a constraint. Embedding quality into a programme is clearly a challenge. Given the efforts made by the Aceh programme to establish monitoring systems and provide information, there is little value in suggesting the establishment of sound M&E systems: everyone

knew that was important. The struggle to obtain management buy-in to monitoring was recognised in Aceh and the challenge of designing simple, do-able systems is a common feature of most programmes.

Aceh's experience demonstrates that the luxury of in-country advisory capacity does not solve the problem alone – quality is a management responsibility and works through management support and integration. Without the constant feedback loop of participatory approaches, gender analysis, monitoring and quality oversight, a programme's efforts to reinvent itself and shift down the continuum will be severely hampered. This implies that management demand for quality in-country, from the regions and Oxford needs to massively increase and become a primary focus of transition management.

## 6.6 Communications and information management

***“Particularly at key moments, what management was “saying” was different to what staff were “hearing” – and acting on. This lack of through-the-ranks clarity had a significant impact on the programme’s ability to develop, communicate and act upon a collective strategy down the continuum from emergency to development.”***

It has been difficult to track the programme ‘steers’ from senior managers (i.e. at International Division Senior Management Team level) through to action and choices on the ground. Key communications and policy often did not link tangibly to implementation in the field. Awareness in the field of such higher level communications and strategy was low. Meanwhile significant decisions were being made in each programme site which were not documented; accountability for those decisions remains unclear.

Some managers were committed to keeping their teams informed and generally communications within each site was less of a problem than between the field and Banda. Junior staff referred to “Chinese whispers” and “verbal policy”. Language was an issue – the use of ‘foreign’ programme concepts and NGO terminology, the mix of English, Bahasa Indonesian and Acehnese, meant that understanding was often distorted.

Sharing across and between teams had also been patchy but improved; when it worked, the exchange of learning had a real impact. A key turning point was in September 2006 at the 3<sup>rd</sup> shelter coordinators meeting in Lhokseumawe when staff realised that they had the same problems in all sites. This meeting brought it together and enhanced learning. Similarly from April 2006, the PMT began regular bi-monthly meetings to create cohesion amongst project sites; according to workshop participants it was in November 2006 that the PMT finally gelled as a constructive forum for sharing and planning.

Upwards communications from Aceh to the RC and Oxford were dominated by quantitative data, rather than management information. The findings of the OI Evaluation were no surprise to the field, but came as a shock to the RC. The RD was in receipt of massed programme detail, but not of the type of strategic management information that permits the tracking of major trends, risks and bottom lines upon which programme success may rest.

That said, there is a supply and demand issue underpinning information flow. What kind of information was being requested of the Aceh teams? According to staff there, they felt bombarded with requests for numbers – of beneficiaries helped, of houses built, of litres of water supplied. Aceh did not write its own donor reports until July 2006. “Feeding the machine” took time; there was an opportunity cost from the provision of information that



others defined as important. The casualty was the programme's own information needs that could have helped staff redesign in the light of changing needs and relevance earlier.

The communication needs of such a large programme were bound to be difficult – striking a balance between overload and information vacuums. Writing reports that contain the right mix of detail and strategic information to suit different stakeholders, coordinating and chairing meetings, taking decisions about their frequency and participation – they are all skilled activities that may need additional guidance and training.

## 6.7 Strategic Planning and Programme Vision

***“Although some strategies were developed, they did not translate into programme plans and a coherent vision for the programme. Attempts to evolve the programme’s approach beyond emergency and recovery were weakened by piecemeal interventions and diverted by earlier promises and commitments”.***

For the first two months, Oxfam was on familiar territory: public health formed the traditional entry point; the programme planned to focus livelihoods on asset replacement and cash for work, shelter plans envisaged providing materials for temporary shelter. Plans were ambitious, but in line with Oxfam's established competencies.

A key turning point was the decision to follow the displaced home with an overall intention of “ensuring options” and accountability to the newly returned communities. In March 2005 it was recognised that “the consequence of this is a massive programme that is set to get bigger”.<sup>9</sup> Geographically and sectorally, ‘going home’ expanded the programme instantly. It was this strategy that above all else, drove the programme out of emergency and into recovery. At the same time, its good intentions led to a fragmentation of effort and a loss of direction beyond that of responding to requests; it ceased to be a strategy and was not replaced by a longer term focus.

The newly introduced OPAL and Oxfam's overarching strategy tool, the PIP, did not seem to act as the template for the programme. Any strategy would have had to have been easily and regularly revised in the light of changing conditions; the PIP appears to have become quickly redundant and largely ignored. Aceh presented a particular challenge because the needs were so different across the province: even now in 2008, Oxfam emergency water tankering to the baraks coexists with permanent housing, urban water supplies and developmental objectives regarding land rights, civil society and the market economy.

Several strategies were created (livelihoods, public health, gender), but with the exception of the policy work which was largely implemented from Banda, it seems that the strategies did not inform the project areas. Early recognition of the need for workforce planning, the fact that “the staff we have in place are unlikely to match the competencies needed for long term livelihoods programming<sup>10</sup>”, the wide ranging ambitions of the July 2005 PIP - these did not translate into practical action. Aceh was given special dispensation and delayed the introduction of performance management; it proved difficult to create a sense of an overall performance strategy, rather than a piecemeal approach for individuals. Many of the plans and risks identified during key OI strategy meetings were not owned by teams or revisited by management. Successive PMs and team leaders made their own plans.

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<sup>9</sup> Handover Notes, Ian Small March 28, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Jasmine Whitbread email 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005

External drivers such as government directives on housing meant that the shelter strategy morphed from an initial emergency shelter focus intended to provide a platform for policy work into semi-permanent and finally permanent housing. The logframe exercise in late 2005 seriously attempted to generate clear and shared plans. Buy-in was dealt a body blow by the budget revision and programme consolidation that followed and several managers did not accept or develop the proposed indicators. It was the start though, of concerted efforts to develop a cohesive plan across all sites.

Over time, and particularly since the arrival of the new SPM in April 2006, assessments were carried out and programmes revised. In October 2006 the SPM led the development of a common programme strategy and approach to the baraks; Oxfam influenced the BRR to prioritise the needs of the displaced.

By 2006, the latitude available for new types of programmes and development plans had greatly reduced owing to existing commitments. Careful and extensive exit strategies, rather than developmental strategies, dominated the planning. This has enabled a high degree of satisfaction and demonstrated accountability to the communities, but also tied the hands of the programme.

Most of the comments from staff related to strategy vacuums undermining transition, rather than strategy as a driver of change. Key inhibitors to strategy development were:

- Uncertainty and lack of integration with the country programme. Low engagement by the Indonesia country programme meant that there was no long term country vision: there was 'nothing to plan into'
- Staff turnover. "Short contracts produce short term thinking"
- Annual planning and budget cycles driven by DEC and OI time limits: "one year plans produce one year thinking". [In Sri Lanka, by contrast, Oxfam viewed DEC funds as a confirmed three year funding block and planned accordingly. This was in part because the OI affiliates in Sri Lanka accepted longer cycles. The OI affiliates in Aceh, like OGB, used annual cycles and thought in annual plans].
- Failure of sustained and strategic advisory support: one-off strategy development by visiting advisors or intermittent support
- Weak strategic planning capacity – i.e. that includes organisational assessment of capacity, SWOT etc
- Limited understanding of participation and limited assessment experience
- Confining the programme to the DEC time period (and not strategically exploring alternatives for the long term and conflict-affected communities)

In the last year or more, there has been a clear sense of direction. Better analysis, the gender review, new assessments, a new partnership strategy have all led to programme revision and greater relevance. Learning was shared between programme sites. Aceh developed new tools to guide the programme – and guide others; its experience of cash for work and cash grants has contributed directly to new guidelines and influenced other programmes.

Was there ever the possibility for Oxfam to hold onto a longer-term vision given the amount of money and the three year time limit? The July 2005 PIP, though viewed as aspirational rather than realistic, did articulate the beginnings of a long-term strategy. It could have been translated into a strategy that acted as a driver for change, but was not. By the time it was signed off, the PIP's vision was already lost in the helter-skelter of commitments and turbulent leadership of the critical mid 2005 period. The influence of OI affiliates, which could have supported long term strategic thinking, in many ways

exacerbated the problem. Like the DEC, OI was uncertain about post-conflict issues. Difficulties in the financial management of the OI collective funds meant that artificial pauses in programme planning were created whilst managers tried to determine how much money remained. Instead of a strategic influence, the OI impact was either insufficiently followed through or hardly felt at all, particularly from 2006 onwards.

The end of an emergency phase is possibly one of the most critical times for strategic planning. Although first phase emergencies are chaotic, Oxfam can fall back on vast experience, tried and tested approaches and equipment as well as experienced staff. A complex recovery environment is just as unpredictable and yet multiplies the number of stakeholders, increases the possible range of interventions and demands skilled interaction with communities and government. In Aceh, recovery also pushed Oxfam out of its competence zone and into new territory for which it, like other NGOs, was not equipped. In such a fluid and over-charged environment it would never have been possible to plan and forecast accurately; what was needed were agile planning tools that constantly drew new information from the environment and formats that could be readily revised. Ongoing review is needed to enable ongoing adaptation to need; this must necessarily be relatively light, such that the teams can continue their work and avoid crisis-based suspensions or the time-demands generated by evaluation.

## 6.8 Time to Review

***“Without periodic “Time-Out” for review it was difficult, if not impossible, for staff to refocus and redesign the programme, adapting to new recovery and longer term goals. “***

Change requires staff to stand back, review, invest time in assessment and community engagement and translate their analysis into new programmes. Development programming and strategic planning are not characterised by speed and an output driven working culture. The sheer momentum of a massive programme led to a default pattern of work overload and a fire-fighting culture. Ironically, it was the crisis of the fraud, budget revisions and the OI evaluation that finally provided teams with the time to re-evaluate and where possible, redesign. The fraud in fact was one of the most commonly identified transition drivers of the staff workshops and, despite its obvious negative impact, was also the cause of major reassessment, literal time out (especially for Aceh Besar which suspended operations for a few months) and shift in mindset. For senior management however, the fraud also threatened to derail the desired focus on the programme and quality – for the SPM, it was rather the OI evaluation that provided a central tool for review and moving the programme forwards. The exit strategies that were developed in 2006 were one of the products of a switch in focus from the present to the future. The care and planning that has characterised exit planning will itself provide tools and learning for all Oxfam programmes in the future.

Staff discussions during the workshops pointed to the need for structured mechanisms for reflection or time out. One of the participants at the external agency workshop noted that his agency had completed its emergency work and stopped activities before commencing with recovery and development work – this created an invaluable pause to plan and apparently helped the agency retain its post-emergency focus.

Some staff commented that at a sector level there were many examples of revision, with teams taking time out to develop new approaches. The difficulty was lack of buy-in from managers. Several efforts were made and transitions, such as a shift from cash grants to business support and market analysis, were achieved, particularly in 2007. Nias

refocused its livelihoods on two commodities and redesigned in the light of government policies. The partnership unit paused for thought and developed a new five year strategy, partly enabled by better staff continuity and greater freedom from operational commitments. Other sectors, particularly PHE, struggled to define a new direction and several programmes closed without ever having shifted out of emergency and recovery interventions. Elsewhere, the public health programme was able to refocus somewhat and link interventions more closely to policy and land rights.

Suggestions made by staff on how to provide structured mechanisms for transition included:

- Carry out a Real time Evaluation (RTE) six or eight weeks into the emergency composed of mixed teams from the region, Oxford and OI. In a programme of such scale, three months is likely to be a realistic goal
- Provide 360 degree feedback on the RTE (on both process and outcomes) and include national staff in a day of reflection
- A rolling review mechanism such as in-house 12 weekly reviews, linked to the RTE recommendations and advice from the steering group suggested above. Reviews should include context and risk analysis

Efforts were in fact made to review one month into the programme<sup>11</sup> and the OI evaluation carried out a year later was originally planned to take place much earlier at about six months into the programme. Major review exercises are demanding and time-intensive; they are rarely carried out at the intended time. An RTE, timed to coincide with major transition periods, would still be demanding, but nonetheless more feasible.

As well as the challenge of fulfilling existing commitments, it is psychologically difficult to change pace, recognise when current activities are redundant and take the time to stand back and reassess. Creating the opportunity for a rethink demands strong leadership: many staff would question the wisdom of taking time out to think in the midst of intense pressure to 'do' and deliver. No one would expect a programme to stop altogether (as happened in Aceh Besar as a result of the fraud). Time out to plan should be sufficient to enable genuine reassessment, but would only be useful if backed by management follow-up and translation into programme and individual workplans.

## **6.9 From the Bunker to the Green – internal recovery can happen**

The final hypothesis, generated by staff during a workshop, is in many ways a fitting summary of the transition successes won by dint of hard work and the team's commitment to delivering a programme that was in line with evolving needs.

With time, an increasingly stable team with post-emergency experience and a willingness to let go and create a forward-looking programme, Oxfam Aceh demonstrated that despite the challenges, it could and did shift the programme out of emergency and into recovery and early development. Existing commitments were carefully mapped and honoured, strategies and learning was shared between projects creating more cohesiveness and huge effort was invested to act upon the recommendations of the audits and the OI evaluation.

Change and consolidation was properly resourced and exit strategies carefully planned. Staff noted that risk taking was required "taking off the white gloves and providing strong

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<sup>11</sup> A *First Month Review* was carried out but did not appear to meet the need or, at any rate, be used

leadership”, introducing new structures that were not traditional to Oxfam (e.g. as an ‘enlightened contractor’) and re-igniting the support and organisational spotlight that had waned in Oxford. Oxfam staff and the ‘stop bitching’ message heard from Oxfam’s CEO in December 2006 helped the programme shift into a positive, shared and coherent team effort.

## **7 Learning from Aceh for the Future**

Workshop participants and the review team developed learning points and recommendations that can inform organisational learning for future emergencies – large and small. Some are particular to an exceptional, massive response. Several relate to most programmes developing from emergency interventions into recovery and development.

### **7.1 Handling big money:**

Within the limits agreed by CMT, Oxfam can and will accept significant funds in the future. Aceh’s experience suggests this would be greatly supported by:

- Leadership that quickly communicates the message that massive funding cannot and should not be absorbed in short term programmes and recognition of the opportunity offered for long term planning and vision
- Undertaking far more robust and assertive lobbying - in coordination with other agencies - to ensure that time periods set by the DEC are consistent with accountable and effective programming
- Investment in budgeting and planning skills for all managers and team leaders as a preparedness measure and at the beginning of all major emergencies
- An acceptable cap (such as 20 – 30% maximum) on the ratio between expenditure on programme support and direct action on poverty) in emergencies
- The development of macro management indicators to monitor organisational capacity to deliver quality and ability to resource a programme (e.g. ratio of spend per beneficiary vs spend on Oxfam, % staff posts filled, % international posts, progress against workplans, number of reporting lines to management or number of layers of management from RD to PM)
- Oxfam recognised the value of holding early strategic planning meetings. The plans did not necessarily link to actual practice nor were their implications fully analysed. Such meetings should always include a rigorous analysis of the costs, resource implications and clarity on roles and responsibilities demanded by the plans for the duration of the programme and beyond, linked to specific accountabilities for delivery, monitoring and review

### **7.2 Managing a complex external environment:**

- Invest heavily in analytical capacity that feeds directly into operational programming. Integrate the analysis of local actors using partnerships and advocacy staff as a platform for a better understanding of contextual conflict related, cultural and social issues
- Monitor the existence of and capacity of coordination mechanisms. Weak coordination should immediately trigger a reaction in Oxford and the region, leading to lobbying for the establishment of, at the very least, close DEC coordination and collaboration.

- Build on the initiatives of Aceh and Jakarta to train and sensitise the media in the complexities of recovery and development and realistic time frames
- Enhance analysis of the potential impact of narrow beneficiary selection on conflict-affected populations and use it to lobby for greater equity and peace building

### 7.3 Learning about staffing for transition

- Identify appropriate personnel with OGB experience who would be willing to deploy for *long* periods and provide stable coverage and continuity
- At the outset, carry out an objective review of the functions that will be necessary to support the programme *throughout its life*. The nature of recruitments and skills sets should be guided by this analysis
- Continue to invest in building humanitarian leadership and management skills amongst staff in the RCs and country programmes
- Develop a workforce plan for national and international staff that analyses and forecasts the skill sets required for all stages of a programme. Create an associated realistic timeframe in which to build skills and experience. Recruit additional capacity-building staff earlier in the programme with a ToR to develop and train, rather than implement

### 7.4 Management Structures and Support

In programmes of exceptional scale and complexity it is likely that candidates of appropriate experience and background will not be found. Hence exceptional management structures are needed to support the Senior Programme Manager. This should extend beyond the support of their direct line manager and would be likely to be needed for a much longer period than may be immediately apparent. The establishment of a support/advisory/steering group would have to be consciously assessed on a case by case basis and monitored for effectiveness: if the right participation and structure cannot be found, then the mechanism should not be created as it could otherwise burden or weaken the manager's capacity rather than strengthen it. However, if conditions can be met it would enable gaps in a particular manager's experience to be filled and capacity built, providing a cross-sectoral strategic reservoir of experience. Members should typically be very senior staff from the region and headquarters. Such personnel would normally not therefore be available for field deployments of any length; a 'home-based' provision of support would nonetheless make their expertise sustained and readily available. The recommendations are therefore:

1. A small high level multidisciplinary steering group with a ToR aimed at the provision of advice (e.g. in strategic financial management, HR, emergency/recovery/development programming, risk management etc). It should be led by a senior manager such as the Deputy International Director or Regional Director. Monitor the effectiveness of the group by levels of participation, evidence of take-up and discussion in CMT
2. A senior "champion" role, based in headquarters. The Deputy Humanitarian Director in Oxford now has a focal point role; this could have been effective much earlier in the response. Post-emergency would demand a new cross-departmental focal point in Oxford with a strong, clearly defined link to the RC line manager.

Aceh's experience of isolation from established structures suggests that for successful transition, integration with the country programme should have been initiated earlier (as

originally planned) or more strategic opportunities taken for sharing, if not integration. In addition, far greater resourcing of the RC and PPT is required to enable a progressive reduction in the role of the HD:

- High level regional management support (dedicated RPM) should be put in place as early as possible (with first 3 months).
- The RHC should always have a substantial involvement in a major emergency in their region, albeit carefully protecting the post's region-wide commitments
- Increase the resourcing and engagement of PPT in complex programmes and clarify its role in recruitment

## **7.5 Learning from Programme Quality and Advisory Posts**

- In-country advisory and quality support should spend a minimum of 50% of their working days in the field, or be based in each location, coordinated by a single post holder in the main office. The integration of advisory support into the programme should be part of a PM's ToR
- Systems and mechanisms to support quality are the responsibility of managers. They must hold advisors and teams accountable for effective monitoring and be themselves accountable for using the advice and providing meaningful management information. Management demand for quality up the line should be systematic and significant, providing leadership and support to the message that quality is a priority
- Advisory visits from the region and Oxford should focus on building advisory and support functions based in the programme and designed around the stated needs of field managers
- Accountability to beneficiaries and effective monitoring are often complex and new to staff. If staff are expected to implement approaches and systems related to quality, far more time and investment in on-the-job training is required
- Case studies of Oxfam programmes that have succeeded in establishing useful and simple monitoring systems at different stages of a response should be identified and shared across the organisation. There needs to be a stronger institutional drive to create skills and capacity for rapid assessments and regular follow-up secondary assessments throughout the programmes.
- The forthcoming global assessment framework should be rolled-out to enable inter/intra regional application and consistency. This should be spearheaded by RHCs/RPMs and senior humanitarian staff in countries and regions with CPM buy-in

## **7.6 Communications and Management Information:**

Aceh's experience provides learning about the diverting impact of a significant demand for certain types of information.

- Demand for detailed quantitative information suitable for headquarters consumption should be minimised, with requests coordinated, and the rationale for these needs clearly communicated with guidance on how to fulfil them.
- The demand for outcome-type of information should be increased and a clear information strategy developed by managers, defining the types of macro or strategic information required to monitor and manage the programme.
- Diversify methods of formal and informal communication to disseminate clear information more widely throughout the programme and organization
- Use this review to disseminate learning about transition through creative and interactive tools (such as narrated powerpoints, discussion topics etc) and the creation of different dissemination versions appropriate to a range of users (e.g. key messages for senior managers, visuals for new staff etc)

## 7.7 Strategic Planning and Time to Review

Strategic planning needs more prioritisation and support from RCs and Oxford. Ongoing planning mechanisms for review and analysis need formalising at an institutional level to avoid programmes being driven by individual predilection. Strategy development in the recovery phase should be characterised by:

- The inclusion of an organisational assessment of capacity, SWOT analysis, clear evidence of coordinated planning with other agencies and government, quality assessments and rolling analysis of the political, cultural and economic environment
- Ensuring that strategic planning exercises include partners or partners' input to ensure that political, cultural and economic understanding feed into transition planning
- Enable easier and quicker updating or revision for PIP and OPAL through rapid communication of funding allocations (the lack of which from Oxford delayed authorisation for unacceptable periods). If this is not possible, develop interim or alternative tools that will permit appropriate and timely rolling revision
- Integrate the process of strategic planning with the development of project plans and individual workplans. Use SMT and PMT fora to monitor, support and follow up on overall and individual sector strategies
- Formalise an institutional expectation for review: i.e. that some form of review or RTE will take place at an appropriate juncture early in the programme (i.e. following the first phase emergency) and another @6 months later. This implies an agreement on dates and preliminary arrangements for review teams at the start of an emergency
- Recognise that transition to recovery and development takes time: plan for an extended overlap of different kinds of programming; develop programme milestones that reflect reassessment and redesign and support and monitor their progress

## 8 Concluding Remarks

Over time and accompanied by strong and stable leadership, the Aceh-Nias programme did transition and redesign its approach. Livelihoods transitioned from cash for work, to cash grants to business development training. Shelter shifted from a community to a partnership approach, leading to quality housing. Public health regained lost ground on hygiene promotion and introduced new technology appropriate to a new environment and engaged contractors, freeing staff to emphasise facilitation and quality control. Partnerships became increasingly strategic, moving out of asset replacement into joint planning and future impact. Staff continuity and experience grew with the programme and the 2006 all-time low was used by new managers and staff to launch the programme into consolidation and a focus on quality.

The learning absorbed and acted upon by the Aceh-Nias programme is that transition requires the right staff with flexible skills and an ability to read the environment, adapt approaches and respond to new needs. It is not driven by money, but rather can be diverted by it. Transition demands sustained organisational support and leadership that emphasises quality and appropriateness rather than quantity. Shifting programmes out of emergency and further on in the continuum requires time, review and careful but flexible strategic planning. Transition is difficult to achieve in isolation from wider organisational structures and calls upon Oxfam to transcend its organisational silos and work collectively.



Alternative approaches by Oxfam in Aceh were taken that made constructive use of the unusual resources and bore fruit in partnerships and policy and subsequently in the 'enlightened contractor' model and the creation of new partnerships in shelter. Urban water supplies, with the right conditions and staff, were successful. In other contexts, they exceeded or clashed with Oxfam's culture and technical experience. Middle income countries and government-like amounts of money require different approaches, including the skills to manage more like a business (managing contractors assertively, using the private sector). Future choices about massive funding will no doubt be influenced by a greater awareness of the implications for Oxfam's values and type of staff.

Most of all, transition takes time. An intention to shift the type of programming will take far longer than anticipated; the backlog of intense operational work continues to send waves, tsunami-like, into the programme for a long time to come. Many of the transition achievements of the Oxfam team in Aceh were hard-won through intensive effort. Transition-drivers such as mainstreamed quality, re-assessment and re-design, staff capacity building and stability, HR systems and management information are all time-intensive, relatively slow processes.

Change is also a matter of mindset, predating the decisions and systems that evolve as a result. In many ways the transition experience of Aceh is typical of the challenges of change management. Oxfam staff tend to think of change management as code for downsizing. Yet, it relates to any process of change. A change management example of typical overlapping phases of change is:

<i>Awareness</i>	of why the change is needed (e.g. assessment, contextual analysis)
<i>Motivation</i>	to support the change (e.g. staff willingness, recognition of the need, management steer)
<i>Knowledge</i>	of how to change (knowing what will be involved, processes to use)
<i>Ability</i>	the skills, competencies, behaviours of the new phase
<i>Reinforcement</i>	to sustain the change (management follow-through, monitoring, project plans, staff performance objectives)

Closer consideration of the implications of change early on in a programme may help managers better anticipate the needs and support that transition will require.

The Aceh programme is seeking to move further down the continuum, building on early development programming and addressing the distortion in the economy from the exclusion of non-tsunami affected populations. At present there is a risk that the continuity assured through Aceh's integration with the Indonesian country programme is accidentally ruptured whilst the Regional and then Indonesia Country Strategy is finalised and funding proposals are on hold pending new management. At the same time, this review itself has generated stronger links with existing regional and country personnel who themselves can champion Aceh's integration and help optimise the learning. The Aceh story has more than a final chapter to come.