

# Tsunami Emergency Lessons from Previous Natural Disasters

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The aim of this report is to assist agencies working in the tsunami crisis by highlighting seven generic lessons that have been learned from other natural disasters, specifically floods and earthquakes. The report distils main findings and lessons from evaluations and synthesis reports contained in the ALNAP Evaluative Reports Database (ERD), as well as other learning initiatives concerned with responses to natural disasters. Where possible it provides links to these documents as well as to additional relevant papers and web sites. These are listed in the footnotes and the references.

At this preliminary stage the report is generic. This is necessary given that the effects of this 'double disaster' are large and complex; that countries affected have considerably different social, economic and political systems; and that impact varies from large-scale countrywide devastation to more localised but no less catastrophic destruction. In due course, ALNAP intends to provide a more detailed and focused report containing contextualised lessons and good practice examples as they emerge from the field. If you would like to contribute to this process please send your comments to [alnap@odi.org.uk](mailto:alnap@odi.org.uk).

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Topics in this report reflect the key findings that arise from source material. By no means exhaustive, they have been chosen to enhance the latest thinking concerning the response to the disaster. The themes are inextricably linked and do not represent discrete categories. They are:

1. Integrating recovery and development
2. Needs assessment and targeting
3. Monitoring, evaluation and learning
4. Recovery and reconstruction assistance strategies
5. Shelter and housing
6. Coordination
7. Integrating disaster preparedness

It is important to note that **'the main response will come from governments and the people themselves'** (Clay, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Agencies should build on this substantial national capacity wherever possible. The greatest challenge will be in ensuring that the poor, especially those in fishing, on the margins of the tourist industry, and in the smaller, remoter economies, are helped to recover.

## **Lesson 1 Integrating Recovery and Development**

Many sources agree on two counts: first, that relief and recovery will initially need to proceed in parallel; second, that although sustainability is not a requirement for humanitarian assistance, **the sustainability of the recovery will depend on agencies' ability to integrate longer term development planning into recovery and reconstruction**. Moreover, sources recommend that recovery and reconstruction look beyond returning to the status quo and rather seek to address the root causes of vulnerability – aiming, for example, to improve infrastructure and livelihood opportunities.

Good recovery and reconstruction practice are generally found to reflect the principles of good development practice, albeit within a shorter timeframe and less stable conditions. **Existing local development plans should form the basis for recovery, and reconstruction activities will need to be revisited in the light of self-identified community needs**. Those agencies new to the region and / or that do not intend to stay beyond the initial relief phase should therefore focus on collaboration with both international and local partners at every level of their response.

**Good practice** examples include projects in Honduras post-Mitch to integrate housing reconstruction with, for example, access to recreation and employment opportunities (ProVention Consortium, 2004), as well as meaningful participation of communities in housing projects to take account of differentiated

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<sup>1</sup> [www.odi.org.uk/tsunami.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/tsunami.html)

need based on gender and ethnicity. Indeed, **community participation is viewed as key to ensuring the durability of all flood relief and subsequent reconstruction interventions**. Ordinarily, however, the short funding periods relating specifically to relief and some reconstruction operations are not conducive to this. Sida is noted as displaying **good donor practice** in this regard through its use of 'developmental humanitarian assistance' in response to Hurricane Mitch (Sida, 2001; also noted in ProVention Consortium 2003; forthcoming). This involved enormous in-house coordination such that reconstruction projects were led by the technical and geographical departments, to ensure that reconstruction aligned with developmental objectives 'to reduce social and ecological vulnerability within the affected countries'.

In order to facilitate recovery, agencies may want to consider the timelines within which they expect money to be spent. Moreover, public response to this disaster has been massive and agencies will need to resist the temptation to spend money quickly and 'get results' under the spotlight of intense media scrutiny. Given the vast influx of support, proper accountability mechanisms must be put in place, especially when working through partners on the ground.

## **Lesson 2      Needs Assessments and Targeting**

### ***Needs assessments***

Sources are unanimous that **needs assessments must be ongoing**, and that effective flood relief interventions are dependent on robust assessment. Where ongoing assessment is missing, relief can continue for too long and, as a consequence, 'uneven and problematic transition between relief and recovery / rehabilitation' may occur (Report 458).

The most accurate and useful assessments are **dependent on a number of key factors**. These include timeliness; composition of assessment teams (multi-disciplinary); appropriateness of assessment methodologies and data collection techniques (disaggregated at least for age and gender); good relations with local institutions; prior knowledge of local communities; coverage; and beneficiary consultation.

One source notes: '**the assessment of needs is probably best seen in terms of risk analysis: who faces what risk and in what timeframe?**' (Darcy, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Flood disaster mapping is therefore important to identify where risk is greatest. Needs can then be seen as the measures required to remove or reduce risk for individuals, families and communities. **Current hurried relief responses** based on minimal information, legitimate in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, **must soon be checked against detailed needs and risks assessments** as response moves into recovery and reconstruction.

**Needs / risks assessments** not only define agencies' own programming but **can also be used to bring problems to the attention of the wider aid community** (Report 370). They are **essential if appropriate targeting is to take place** (see below) and are particularly pertinent to complex and large-scale emergencies – the key message being that **one size does not fit all**.

**Maximum use should be made of information that is already available from national structures**, both political and civil (Report 411) as well as established international agencies. If possible, **joint assessments** should be undertaken in order to mitigate people's feeling of being 'abused' by the process, and to assist with coordination (ibid). This will enable the application, for example, of consistent food baskets to beneficiaries in the same area. Agencies also need to **carry out assessments of their partners' capacity to implement relief and recovery programmes**, particularly in countries with less developed civil structures and in the potentially problematic contexts of civil strife in Aceh and Sri Lanka.

Guidelines to conduct post-tsunami field surveys and standards for observations have been established by the International Coordination Group for the Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific (ICG/ITSU). Farreras (2000) has also written a paper on post-tsunami field procedures.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/Tsunami.html>

## **Targeting**

Findings from the most recent ALNAP synthesis on Evaluating Humanitarian Action (EHA) suggest that, in terms of targeting, **'agency policy and practice is out of keeping with local culture and that communities are forced to redesign emergency programmes to fit with their culture of sharing'** (2004:94). In other words, when planning programmes, agencies often rely on external criteria (generally economic or scientific in nature) in order to differentiate between various functional groups within a community. Experience has shown that such criteria can be at odds with local customs and culture and, **if not contextualised properly, interventions based on such criteria can have a divisive affect**. Adjustments in programming thus have to be made later.

There are no easy answers. Sources do agree, however, that **target populations must be identified on the basis of actual need rather than expediency**, and that **meaningful beneficiary consultation / participation is essential if targeting is to take place**. In the case of this response, beneficiary selection must be closely linked with flood and earthquake effects, in addition to or instead of more generic vulnerability criteria such as size of land holding.

An alternative approach is noted in Report 370 which observes that some agencies used **'self-targeting mechanisms to ensure that only those most in need received assistance'** (p19). These included both cash for work and food for work projects. Cash for work in particular allows beneficiaries to target themselves and to identify their own priorities and needs.

Another clear message is that **gender is an important dimension within response to natural disasters** (ILO, 2000) and that **agencies must incorporate a gender analysis into their work** (Report 370). This is not because women constitute the majority of victims but because women in particular are made more vulnerable to disasters due to their socioeconomic status and their lack of access to resources. Furthermore, violence against women often increases post-emergency. In terms of agency operations, the ILO study found that **female survivors are more likely to discuss their needs with female relief workers**. This has implications for staffing policies.

Report 224 provides a case study on assistance to widows and orphans post-Orissa cyclone in India. In general, sustainability in benefits to women will only accrue over the longer term. **Good practice** is noted in response to the Mozambique flood when agencies took a long-term approach to recovery that included joint titling of land, joint housing registration in a couple's name or the woman's name in female headed households, and women's obligatory participation in construction committees (ProVention Consortium 2003:86; forthcoming). Report 49 **recommends** the following in terms of targeting women:

- As relief items are distributed mainly to women, distribution centres should be as close as possible to the homes of those women so that women's daily activities are not overburdened.
- Where pregnant and lactating women, and old and disabled women and men, cannot come to distribution centres, arrangements should be made, in consultation with the concerned women, to hand over distribution cards to male or female relatives or neighbours who would collect relief on their behalf.
- It is important to ensure that distributions begin on time so that women need not stand in a long queue with their children and their household chores are not hampered.
- A small amount of money should be provided to women to buy essential items or to pay the transportation cost to carry relief to their homes.
- Cooking stoves, pots and fuel should be included in the distribution list, depending on the situation.
- Sanitation facilities should be provided to ensure women's safety and privacy.
- Consideration should be given to developing measures to ensure the safety of adolescent and young girls, especially at night.
- Supplementary packages should be provided to male heads of households that have no adult female members, as single vulnerable men can often be excluded.

## **Lesson 3      Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**

### **Monitoring & evaluation (M & E)**

Sources note the need for, and often the absence of, **the development of a detailed monitoring and evaluation plan during project design**. Many sources mention the importance of logframes, though it

is recognised that agencies also use other planning tools. (If using logframes, it is necessary to distinguish between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact.) The point is that projects need to **define clear aims and objectives from the start, against which they can measure progress – not just in terms of outputs but also outcomes**. An emphasis on outcomes is central to agency understanding of what works in specific circumstances, and why, and what doesn't, and why. This increases the ability of agencies to respond effectively. Studies note that evaluations in particular suffer from a lack of focus on outcomes, which impedes learning and accountability.

**Measurable and relevant indicators linked to each objective also need to be developed.** This is best done in consultation with field level staff *and* beneficiaries. Each indicator should have a clear means of verification – i.e., should appear somewhere in the agency's data collection tools, for example, as a question in a survey or checklist. All too often, potentially useful indicators are neglected. Report 362 found that **coping mechanisms are some of the best indicators for asset protection-type programmes post-natural disasters**. Careful study of coping mechanisms used by households may therefore be important.

**Ongoing monitoring should be focused on both programme progress and situational context**, the latter being important if projects are to respond holistically to a country's needs and remain responsive to local contexts. Situation monitoring also offers an excellent opportunity for joint activity and information sharing – the lack of which severely constrains humanitarian action.

**Ongoing evaluation will involve activities such as strategic review, real-time evaluation (RTE) and after action review (AAR).** RTE in particular could play a central role in agency response. Participatory, rapid and interactive, RTE fosters *in situ* learning and is used to gauge the effectiveness of agency programming early on, thus ensuring timely information on programme impact to both field and senior managers. RTE is normally run by staff from the agency's evaluation unit and / or by consultants who are already familiar with agency operations.

**Sources recommend** M & E training for project designers; also that M & E activities are properly budgeted for and carried out, and that job descriptions detail specific M & E responsibilities. Report 362, for example, also recommends that M & E planning should include schedules for preparing and disseminating reports and strategies for decision-making based on findings and learning from M & E exercises.

### **Learning**

The **ongoing learning of field level workers** is essential if humanitarian action is to improve, and is **closely linked to effective monitoring and evaluation**, as noted above. In recognition of this, ALNAP's *Review of Humanitarian Action in 2003* focused on field level learning. It provides a number of practical suggestions as to how this can be encouraged before, during and after an operation, such as through effective briefing, induction and handover strategies; mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, networking and RTE; and end-of-project reporting and AAR. This information can be accessed at <http://www.alnap.org/publications/rha.htm>. The **key role of managers** in organising and leading such events and in creating and supporting learning more generally needs to be recognised by agencies. An **organisational learning self-audit** is usefully included in this chapter on p76.

Additional helpful information on learning can be found on the BOND website at <http://www.bond.org.uk/lte/index.htm>.

## **Lesson 4 Recovery and Reconstruction Assistance Strategies**

The tsunami has deprived over a million people living in coastal areas not only of sources of income but also of household and productive assets. Sources note **complementarity between action to restore people's productive capacity and action to revive market demand for their output and labour** (Roberts, 2005; forthcoming). This briefing considers four key assistance strategies crucial to sustainable recovery:

- a) Buying locally ;
- b) Providing 'cash and vouchers' in conjunction with/instead of direct hand outs;
- c) Livelihood support, including land titling and insurance;
- d) Community participation.

**a) *Buying locally***

Although the negative impact of floods and earthquakes is varied, in general agriculture has been much less affected than fishing and tourism. **Agencies must buy locally**, and avoid sending food by air and / or ship, clogging ports already overstretched with other relief supplies, as well as avoiding inappropriate food parcels.

Report 334 notes that **buying locally is beneficial for three key reasons**: acquiring supplies locally / regionally means assistance can be delivered more quickly; purchasing from local markets supports their recovery; and purchasing locally / regionally minimizes the risk of lowering local prices of similar goods. While centralised distribution systems will suit some situations, other sources note that agencies may find it more cost-effective to by-pass these and instead provide funding: **'When it is in proper hands on the ground, money is the best way of helping disaster victims'** (334:21). This links to:

**b) *Providing 'cash and vouchers' rather than direct handouts***

As far as possible **people should be helped to recover through their own endeavours**. In many situations it may be preferable for them to receive public financial assistance rather than in kind assistance, especially once the immediate emergency relief phase is over. There is mounting evidence that **it is possible to target and distribute cash safely and that people overwhelmingly spend money on basic essentials**. This stimulates local economies and gets local markets working again. Moreover, beneficiaries know best their own priorities and often (but not always) report a preference for cash rather than in kind assistance. Evidence also suggests that **cash can complement commodity-based distributions and should therefore not be seen as a replacement** for other forms of aid, but rather as an additional instrument. For more information see Harvey (2005)<sup>3</sup> as well as his forthcoming paper on the subject, to be published by the end of February.

Depending on the local context, agencies are likely to engage in food for work and / or cash for work schemes. In situations where there is surplus labour, food for work might be appropriate. However, if food is available in local markets at reasonable prices cash for work might be more suitable (Report 362). In fact, cash for work schemes are becoming increasingly common, for many of the reasons listed above. A **case study** on the use of cash for work in a flood rehabilitation programme in Bangladesh in 2001 can be found in Khogali (2002) and is available on the ALNAP website at [www.alnap.org/pdfs/TLL\\_OxfamCase.pdf](http://www.alnap.org/pdfs/TLL_OxfamCase.pdf).

Many agencies focus on women when running cash for work schemes. If this is the case they could usefully consider the following (Report 49):

- Pregnant women selected for Cash for Work should not be encouraged to take part in heavy work.
- Depending on context, both relief and Cash for Work programmes should consider adopting a household approach, so that men or adult children can replace women who are unable to participate.
- Crèche facility and toilet should be provided for all Cash for Work projects.

Additionally, **good practice** in capital replacement was identified in Chokwe, Mozambique, where the NGO World Relief Fund gave cash grants to clients after the floods to re-stock their businesses and repay loans. This microfinance scheme was highly successful: businesses were kick-started and debtors did not default on their loans (ProVention Consortium 2003; forthcoming). **Key to the successful provision of microcredit to millions of poor people is the insurance of loans as well as funding and guarantees to withstand the effects of disasters** such as this. 2005 is the International Year for micro credit. For more information visit [www.yearofmicrocredit.org](http://www.yearofmicrocredit.org); also [www.postconflictmicrofinance.org](http://www.postconflictmicrofinance.org).

Assessing the feasibility of cash should not be seen as an additional or separate exercise, but as integral to agency assessments. As this activity is less well-developed, however, this may mean adding some questions to current assessment checklists. The following is suggested as a basic checklist. It is very much an initial suggestion and needs to be further developed and refined based on developing experience.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.odi.org.uk/hpg/Tsunami\\_cash.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/Tsunami_cash.html)



Issue	Key Questions	Methods
Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are people likely to spend cash on?</li> <li>Do emergency-affected populations have a preference for cash or in kind approaches?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participatory approaches</li> <li>Interviews, surveys</li> </ul>
Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How well and competitively are markets functioning?</li> <li>For the key basic items that people need, are they available in sufficient quantities and at reasonable prices?</li> <li>How quickly will local traders be able to respond to additional demand?</li> <li>What are the risks that cash will cause inflation for key products?</li> <li>How do debt and credit markets function and what is the likely impact of a cash injection?</li> <li>What are the wider effects of a cash project likely to be on the local economy, compared to in kind alternatives?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews and focus group discussions with traders.</li> <li>Price monitoring in key markets</li> <li>Interviews and focus group discussions with money lenders, debtors and creditors.</li> <li>Assess the volume of cash being provided by the project compared to other inflows such as from remittances.</li> <li>Ensure that remote areas are covered in analysing how markets work.</li> </ul>
Security and delivery mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the options for delivering cash to people?</li> <li>Are banking systems, or informal financial transfer mechanisms functioning?</li> <li>What are the risks of cash benefits being taxed or seized by elites or warring parties?</li> <li>How do these compare to the risks of in kind alternatives to cash?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mapping of financial transfer mechanisms.</li> <li>Interviews with banks, post offices, remittance companies.</li> <li>Interviews with potential beneficiaries about local perceptions of security and ways of transporting, storing and spending money safely.</li> <li>Analysis of security analysts about risks of moving or distributing cash.</li> <li>Political economy analysis of war economies.</li> </ul>
Gender issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will cash be used within the household (do men and women have different priorities)?</li> <li>Should cash be distributed specifically to women?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Separate interviews with men and women.</li> </ul>
Cost effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the likely costs of a cash or voucher programme and how do these compare to in kind alternatives?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs of purchase, transport and storage of in kind items compared with costs of cash projects.</li> </ul>
Corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the risks of diversion of cash by local elites and project staff?</li> <li>How do these compare to in kind approaches?</li> <li>What accountability safeguards are available to minimise these risks?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment of existing levels of corruption and diversion.</li> </ul>

Source: Harvey, P (2005; forthcoming) *Cash and Vouchers in Emergencies: A Discussion Paper* (London: ODI).

### c) **Livelihood support**

All too often, agencies focus on physical reconstruction post-emergency rather than on rebuilding livelihoods. Report 411 notes that inadequate livelihood recovery was the reason beneficiaries felt unable to drive their self-recovery in other areas such as water, food, education and shelter after the 1999 cyclones in India. This reinforces the importance of at least a **‘second’ needs assessment at the beginning of the recovery phase** to prioritise communities and individuals in need, and to better understand local livelihood strategies. In general, **livelihood recovery activities work best when they are timely, demand-driven and individualised. Again, one size does not fit all.**

There are scant good practice examples in sources. Evaluations note that this is mostly due to inadequate and / or non-existent needs / risks assessments. Where good practice examples exist, this is mostly in relation to housing reconstruction when reconstruction takes a community development approach.

Of significance to the current response, **some good practice** was found in response to the Orissa cyclones of 1999 with regard to the **rehabilitation of fishing communities** (Report 224). **Key lessons** that emerge from this example include: allowing beneficiaries to choose the type and quality of their boats and the nets they use; engaging local craftspeople in boat construction; the need to register and insure boats as soon as possible; clearing of debris from the water to avoid destruction of boats and nets; financial assistance during the 'lean season' in order to avoid indebtedness to local moneylenders. Catastrophe insurance is one of the most effective ways of enabling poor people to recover. Agencies found that **advocacy was needed** to convince insurance companies as well as the state government to reduce premiums. In addition, **market linkages** need to be considered.

The **establishment of rural community banks** is an important initiative in livelihood risk mitigation. Post-Hurricane Mitch in Honduras, this initiative was seen to reduce risk related not only to fishing, but also in agriculture, livestock and crafts (ProVention Consortium, 2004).

Finally an important aspect of livelihood support in the context of SE Asia will involve work to build up coastal embankments.

#### **d) Community participation**

**If recovery is to be sustained, meaningful community consultation and participation is required.** This theme cuts across all others in this briefing. Participation is important not just in project design, but also in project implementation and maintenance. **Local and national coping strategies should be taken into account and built upon** rather than outside agencies deciding on project intervention.

**Good practice** examples are again scarce. Some examples, however, can be found in Report 411 by DEC agencies following the Orissa cyclones. For example, in distributing blankets, Concern asked women to form a committee, allowed them to identify the most needy and then distribute the blankets themselves. A weaving project started by ActionAid was applauded because weavers were able to intervene; they were subsequently taken to another area to select their own cotton and then given assistance with marketing. Another example comes from Honduras where beneficiaries constructed their own houses in the Waller Bordo community in Cortes (ProVention Consortium, 2004). This not only influenced the physical recovery of the community but also, through the provision of masonry training, endowed beneficiaries with new skills. In addition, based on payments for 60% of the cost of the materials over a 10-year term, the local bank will be able to generate capital that can be invested in future projects for the benefit of the community.

### **Lesson 5 Shelter and Housing**

Across the region, beneficiaries' most essential post-emergency need will constitute temporary shelter. Sources confirm that **good practice in shelter and housing (re)construction is closely linked to meaningful beneficiary consultation and participation, adequate assessment of need, and the pursuit of 'developmental relief'** – i.e. (re)construction in the context of community and / or longer term development planning. Sources more readily identify good practice in relation to temporary shelter; housing reconstruction is more problematic. The overriding emphasis is on **self-reconstruction** with the understanding that there are some vulnerable groups who may find this problematic. It will be important to look at any new national standards in housing construction, including in light of changing risk related to climate change.

**Good practice** is identified in Report 499 in relation to response to the earthquakes in 2001 in both El Salvador and Gujarat. For example, an 'excellent side effect' of temporary shelter provision was the dissemination of anti-seismic building skills to the skilled workers and to those in the communities who participated in the process. Also, the concept of 'progressive housing' was adopted whereby the skeleton of a house was built by aid agencies and later completed by beneficiaries as appropriate – though care needed to be taken that beneficiaries have the capacity to do this. **Other good practice examples** can be found in (ProVention Consortium 2004:26). As with that mentioned in Lesson 1, these are holistic and involve 'whole community development' approaches such as ensuring access roads, high quality services and recreational facilities. One community-led housing project contains a

park, playground, school, and dedicated bus routes. In its work the international agency GOAL was noted to have not only consulted with beneficiaries prior to and during project implementation, but it also conducted follow-up project reviews in order to make its projects more sustainable. Regrettably, this is not the rule in many donor and NGO housing programmes.

**Often the main constraint to shelter / housing (re)construction is lack of land title**, and a number of the sources suggest agencies advocate powerfully with donors and local / national government structures to deliver deeds quickly and free of charge. In one example a positive experience was to sign over land by community rather than individual family (ProVention Consortium 2004). Moreover, unless temporary settlements are holistic in terms of, for example, ensuring that income-generating opportunities are located close by, any new settlement is likely to remain a shantytown (ibid).

**Agency coordination is crucial to shelter and housing (re)construction**, especially with regard to common standards, transparent contracting and even urban planning. Another issue that sources raise is the need for **awareness of the concept of housing as both shelter and livelihood resource**: ‘... **housing schemes approach the issue as if people were industrial workers who go out to work and simply need a space to sleep and eat**’ (Report 411). Agencies must also take into consideration people’s right for compensation from government.

## **Lesson 6      Coordination**

Coordination is often a scarce resource in disasters yet remains the **key operational principle for effective response**. It is important in order to avoid duplication of effort so that resources are directed to those most severely affected by the disaster. **Good coordination can also facilitate lesson learning** (see ALNAP *Review of Humanitarian Action in 2003*, Chapter 2).<sup>4</sup>

A number of sources note that **coordination is often easier to accomplish and therefore more effective at local rather than national level**. **For example**, a learning review of the Red Cross response to the Mozambique floods highlights good field level inter-agency coordination (IFRC, 2001), while the evaluation of DfID’s response to the 2000 Bangladesh floods found that all relief agencies, including NGOs, and UN and the BDRCS, ‘**respected the authority of the DCs [District Commissioners] and the UNOs [Upazilla Nirbahi Officers] and were willing to be coordinated**’. In this example, local level coordination constituted local disaster management committees comprising administration, elected officials, NGOs, local elites, volunteers and community representatives. Sources note that often the **best local level coordination takes place in the context of appropriate disaster preparedness mechanisms pre-emergency**.

Relatively little effort and funding is needed to ensure good coordination and its associated benefits, such as that provided by the umbrella NGO Abhiyan in India. Probably one of the **best-known examples**, Abhiyan, a network of NGOs, engaged as a collective in coordinating planning, advocacy and capacity building activities in a range of development and recovery actions after the Gujarat earthquake in 2002. ‘**Abhiyan’s work to develop setus (information nodes) enabled communication flows between the affected population, project implementers and policy makers in the wake of the disaster. These have developed to play a key role in bridging communication gaps – especially concerning housing packages and entitlements – between beneficiaries and lower level government employees, and in strengthening information and data exchange between the government and its partners**’ (ProVention Consortium 2003:72; unpublished).

The work of Abhiyan points to another lesson: that **often network and membership based organisations that work through decentralised structures are very effective in terms of coordinating community response and participation post-emergency**. In this respect some sources note the reluctance of international agencies to be coordinated by local NGOs; others than international NGOs do not share information with local and national disaster management authorities.

**Opportunities for coordinated advocacy** are also an important issue. For example, in Orissa, DEC agencies combined to influence the state government to review disaster response mechanisms (Report 458).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.alnap.org/publications/rha.htm>



In terms of **donor coordination**, the ProVention Report (2004:29-30) makes some very useful **recommendations** with regard to donor coordination. Of note is that, overall, international actors 'should formally recognise, in policy ... and in practice, the right and responsibility of the affected state to manage and coordinate the recovery phase', and that, where donor inputs are substantial and where state structures have been affected, a '**strong donor coordination mechanism is an essential component of a national-led recovery coordination system**' that should 'aim to support national leadership and efforts' (p29). In addition, a joint donor-government central monitoring unit should be considered. Any such coordination mechanisms must have the capacity to be inclusive of civil society as well as to be replicated at regional and municipal levels.

One of the **few instances of good donor coordination** that sources highlight involves the 'Consultative Group for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America' set up post-Mitch. In addition, effective coordination between national government and international agencies after the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh resulted in the creation of a national Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) and the work of UNDP and UNICEF with the DMB to produce the Disaster Management Act as well as a Training and Public Awareness Plan. Nevertheless, line ministries were found to be the main actors in the recovery process, some of which drew up sector wide recovery plans (ProVention Consortium 2003:58; forthcoming).

Finally, **building preparedness capacity best supports coordination during the emergency response** (see below).

### **Lesson 7 Integrating Disaster Preparedness (DP)**

The importance of disaster preparedness (DP) is **the most often cited and single most important issue** to emerge from recent evaluations. The World Bank estimates that every dollar spent on risk reduction saves \$7 in relief and repairs. More than ever, preparedness and prevention need emphasis. Mitchell (1999) has written an excellent synthesis on learning on DP from past evaluations and reviews of DP programmes where he found that '**a major theme in evaluations was the difficulty of implementing a coherent regional strategy across a range of many different countries**' (ibid:1). This will be a pertinent consideration for agencies responding to the current disaster.

Many commentators stress the need for disaster management to move from reactive to proactive through the development of a culture of prevention. They note that the **key to effective disaster response lies in disaster preparedness**, and that this should be **integrated in development programmes**. Moreover, that there needs to be a **close relationship between institutional development and DP**. If governments and agencies don't invest in these areas, work towards the Millennium Development Goals will be compromised. The current **UN Kobe Conference** on reducing the impact of natural disasters will enable the humanitarian and development communities to look more closely at this issue.<sup>5</sup> For more information go to: <<http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr>>

In spite of this wide agreement, very little has been achieved; reports are more ready with recommendations than good practice examples. This is possibly because '**at the heart of the overall problem of inadequate DP is the lack of commitment of governments, bilateral or multilateral donors to invest in DP**' (Report 458).

One of the **few successes of DP relates to agencies' ability to inform local publics about the importance of DP, and their running public awareness campaigns** on simple matters such as house drainage. For example, post-Mitch a new NGO coordination body, INTERFEROS, was created to play both an advocacy and coordination role and to highlight the linkages between disaster and development. This is in line with Report 411's findings that, overall, affected populations are most effective in terms of reducing their future vulnerability, and along rather different lines from the aid agencies. For example, the right kind of leadership was identified by communities as the most important capacity.

Sources note that **beneficiaries highlight the importance of savings and insurance schemes as well as community-led reconstruction and development interventions**. Agencies might therefore find that information on relevant contacts, housing designs and government rehabilitation packages are

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<sup>5</sup> This conference held a special thematic session on Promotion of Tsunami Disaster Mitigation in the Indian Ocean.

most useful to affected populations. This doesn't preclude agencies from building seismic-safe houses, for example, and / or focusing on replacing productive assets in order to support livelihood recovery. In fact agencies can do a lot in physical terms, including investing in **flood early warning systems**. But the key message is that **communities must be helped to help themselves, and emphasis should be placed on building on their own coping and survival mechanisms**.

Often agencies have DP policies in place. The challenge is to operationalise them. A well-prepared agency in DP might:

- have articulated a clear role for itself in DP and disaster response in government legislation, including inclusion in a national disaster plan;
- be represented in national and local co-ordinating bodies for disasters;
- have a DP officer or staff responsible for DP at national level;
- ensure it has a DP disaster contingency plan that describes roles, responsibilities and procedures for staff at national and local level;
- have an emergency fund and fundraising capacity before and during disasters;
- develop a capacity to respond to seasonal disasters;
- incorporate a gender analysis into DP plans and programmes;
- have focused programmes tailor made for the needs of vulnerable populations for when disaster occurs;
- cooperate and coordinate with other bodies involved in DP and utilise their expertise; and
- have adequate hardware and stockpile resources that are sustainable, and a plan for rapid procurement during disasters.

*Adapted from the DP Self Assessment Process, IFRC, 2002.*

Certainly one of the most important ways donors and international agencies should support DP in the current crisis is to assist regional governments to develop and invest in an **early warning system, including for tsunamis**, akin to the one that exists for tremors as they occur under the Pacific Ocean.

**In summary**, this report highlights seven generic lessons that will have some applicability for agencies working in the tsunami crisis. ALNAP clearly acknowledges the considerable diversity that exists on the ground and it is not the aim of this report to be too prescriptive. There is no real substitute for sensible thinking and action. However, experience has shown that generic lessons can be relevant when applied to specific circumstances and, as a result, intelligent contextualised actions can have a positive outcome. It is the aim of this report to encourage agencies to consider these lessons and factor in the relevant components when planning and thinking through their plans and strategies.

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