

security, public health, infrastructure,² security, and gender, as specified in the terms of reference.

Two research assistants (one in Geneva, focusing on health and the non-food sectors, and the other in Rome, addressing food and livelihoods) assisted the team in desktop studies. Their task was to inventory, describe and analyse the quality of available published assessment reports through review of existing databases³ and systematic contacts with agencies.

In Indonesia, the disaster preparedness department of the Province of Jakarta⁴ arranged for the loan of four national consultants who volunteered to research the assessment data generated by the national authorities in Indonesia. Brief curricula vitae of the main evaluators and contributors comprise Annex 2.

1.2.4 Methodology

- *Inventory of the most important needs assessments*

Systematic research was undertaken by the two research assistants, the national consultants in Indonesia, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and FAO evaluators in Sri Lanka (who pro-actively requested all agencies to share their assessments) as well as by the evaluators.

- *Desktop review of assessments in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives*

Beyond the methodology and timeliness of assessment, the desktop reviews lacked sufficient perspective to judge the effectiveness of needs assessments in guiding decision making. Securing unpublished documents as well as matching desk review of documents to field realities turned out to be a greater challenge than anticipated.

- *Visits to sites in three countries*

Evaluation visits were made to three sites in Indonesia (Banda Aceh, Calang and Meulaboh), two sites in Sri Lanka (Galle and Trincomalee) and also in Bangkok, Thailand. Calang and Meulaboh were chosen because they experienced delays in being reached by international assistance, despite being hard-hit areas. Three international experts visited Indonesia while only the team leader completed the field visit in Sri Lanka and carried out additional interviews in Bangkok.

- *Interviews with professionals*

Discussions were held with over 300 key stakeholders and decision makers, representing over 50 different agencies at field and regional level, as well as in international headquarters. The team combined a snowball approach (one initial contact leading to others with more institutional memory or relevance) with saturation coverage (as many pertinent contacts at all levels as possible).

2 Experience in damaged infrastructure was limited to health installations.

3 Sources included a database of 8,000 documents compiled by the TEC core team, ReliefWeb and the website of the Tsunami Humanitarian Information Centres (HIC).

4 The Province of Jakarta had no direct involvement in assessing need and therefore this involvement presents no conflict of interest in the evaluation of the performance of the international community. Three of the five consultants are civil servants of the Province, one a university staff member and one an independent consultant in Aceh.

Table 1.1 Distribution of interviews with humanitarian actors

	Indonesia	Sri Lanka	Thailand	Europe & North America	TOTAL
UN agencies	56	26	10	33	125 (41%)
Donors	20	9	1	24	54 (18%)
NGO	30	11	0	3	44 (14%)
Local government	29	14	0	0	43 (14%)
Other	30	8	2	2	42 (14%)
TOTAL	165	68	13	62	308

The team conducted semi-structured interviews with UN agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), national governments, and others such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other research institutions, both in the affected countries and at agency headquarters.⁵ Lists of interviewees are given in Annex 3. Table 1.1 shows the distribution of persons interviewed.

Initial drafts of interview reports were disseminated to over 250 interviewees for validity checking and feedback. Dozens of agents responded with clarifications and additions. In addition, interviews and all other evaluation methods were constantly triangulated, combining qualitative analysis and discussion with other TEC teams.

• *Interviews with affected individuals*

A total of 135 persons affected by the tsunami were also interviewed in a climate of widespread fatigue, being subject to many assessments not resulting in the direct improvement of their condition. The team made a systematic effort to include less accessible locations and to achieve a balance in terms of gender. A total of 135 affected individuals or families were interviewed, 49 in Indonesia and 86 in Sri Lanka.

The results of the qualitative interviews do not merely provide anecdotal information but also convincing evidence to confirm a conclusion drawn by many of the agencies interviewed. The use of stratified opinion sampling for the focus group discussions with affected individuals or families was not possible due to the lack of time for planning and recruitment of qualified local personnel. Questions concerning the adequacy of the needs assessment, however, were included in the random quantitative beneficiary survey carried out by the TEC team evaluating the impact on local and national capacities (see TEC Capacities Report, 2006).

1.2.5 Limitations and constraints

Contrary to anticipated constraints, assessment/evaluation fatigue of the population or of humanitarian workers had absolutely no influence on the findings of the

⁵ Interview format was guided by the interviewee's level of responsibilities, discipline, knowledge and presence or absence in the first three months after the onset, as well as the need to triangulate information received in prior interviews. Consequently, no quantified tally of the replies or opinions was possible. This approach permitted benefit from the analysis of the situation by the interlocutors, seeking their views on possible solutions (potential recommendations) and alleviating their reluctance to complete one-way questionnaires.