

Statement from DEC Trustees

DEC Board Review of the Sudan Appeal – 18th July 2006

The DEC Trustees at their meeting on the 14th June welcomed the independent Report to the Board on the DEC Sudan Emergency Appeal, carried out between 23rd January 2006 and 31st March 2006 by Channel Research as part of the Board's regular review of each Appeal's income and expenditure. The Trustees have reviewed substantially the way the DEC manages its accountability, learning and risk management processes in the last year with support from the National Audit office and the Member Agencies.

The DEC Sudan Emergency Appeal was launched in July 2004 in response to what the UN described at that time as the "the world's worst humanitarian crisis". Following decades of civil war in South Sudan, Darfur, an area the size of France, erupted into violence. By mid 2004 more than two million people were affected, leaving 1.1 million people internally displaced within the region and a further 200,000 living as refugees in camps along Chad's eastern border.

The Appeal, launched on 20th July, raised £10 million in its first 10 days, and went onto raise a total of £35 million. It enabled DEC Members to quickly provide emergency aid to tens of thousands of men, women and children forced to flee their homes. The funds were fully allocated to 11 DEC Member agencies for a 9 month relief programme until April 2005 and then a second phase lasting to 31st January 2006.

The generosity of the UK public meant that the response of the DEC Members was substantial and effective across the full range of emergency responses. However, the DEC members are only a small part of the international community's humanitarian relief effort encompassing the whole of the UN system and the governments and voluntary agencies of many countries. DEC Member Agencies do not have the mandate or resources to resolve the underlying problems of the conflict nor easy access to many of those in need, but have continued, often against overwhelming odds, to bring relief to the survivors.

The DEC Trustees welcome the overall conclusion of the independent report to the Board that:

“DEC funds presented the members with timely and flexible resources with which to mobilise a very significant response to the crisis in Darfur. For those already in theatre, the funds facilitated the necessary changes for a rapid adjustment from development to emergency relief. For those Members without a presence in the country, the funds eased the very difficult process of their establishment in Darfur.”
(Conclusion 11.1)

The Board accepts the criticism aimed at the international community that the response in the beginning of the crisis in 2003/4 was not at a scale commensurate with needs. A major factor was the way the international community and media were kept away from the worst effected areas of Darfur. The Board welcomes the improvements noted in the report in 2005, itself a huge achievement given the context and commends the DEC Members role in this:

“DEC Members established a coherent humanitarian response and brought the condition of the victims to a degree of stability and to a tolerable living environment.

Some of the key factors in turning the situation around were:

- i) the leadership of some of the stronger Members;
- ii) the willingness of specialist Members to help out more 'generalist' ones;
- iii) the unprecedented cooperation, collaboration and coordination amongst all agencies.” (Conclusion 11.4)

The Board finds that the complex political and security implications, such as the barriers placed on NGO mobilisation and access are underestimated in the Report. The Board agrees that “difficulties of working in Darfur and the frustrations placed in the path of agencies... explain much of the slowness in the achievement of results.” (Conclusion 11.2). DEC members and the UN system were and continue to be hindered by restrictions on access and have to exercise caution in their public policy positions because of risks to the security of their staff, (sadly DEC Members have had staff killed or imprisoned).

The challenge of real protection for the survivors remains the critical issue in Darfur and Eastern Chad and the ongoing abuses and violence. The Board feels that the report focus on the DEC agencies underplays the lack of international leadership and effective political action, which has left most relief agencies including DEC members to struggle with issues that they have not been mandated to address.

The Board shares the evaluators concern about human resources in relation to Darfur, such as difficulty in attracting (or keeping) international aid workers, limited experience of staff, and staff moving on to well-resourced humanitarian response such as the tsunami (Conclusion 11.5). The DEC Members have encouraged inter agency discussion to try to enlarge the pool of skilled personnel.

The Board notes the importance of both actual and perceived impartiality in humanitarian assistance in pursuing peace and reconciliation (page 11), and encourages those Members still operating in Sudan to ensure that assistance is offered to both Arab and non-Arab populations. A requirement to demonstrate how emergency responses are conflict sensitive in practice has now been built into DEC reporting requirements.

Finally, the Board agrees that the success of the humanitarian response in combating malnutrition and disease and improving health services should not be interpreted as a call to scale down relief operations while “no durable solution to the conflict is forthcoming and the Darfur population remains seriously food insecure” (page 10). DEC member agencies remain committed to despite the fact that all the DEC appeal money has now be allocated.

Lesson learning and improvements to ways of working are central to DEC membership and the Board welcomes evidence that co ordination in Darfur was exemplary as this is an issue raised in previous reports.

The Board accepts most of the formal recommendations set out in the consultant’s report, and in particular is addressing issues of emergency preparedness, the challenges around human resources, and improved financial accountability with the appointment of a DEC internal auditor.

