

DEC 2009 Disasters Appeal for Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam

Validation Report



Local women take stock after the 2009 earthquake in western Sumatra.
(Courtesy Enny Nuraheni/Reuters-IFRC)

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Validation Report for UK Broadcasters

This is an independent validation report commissioned by the UK DEC Secretariat in response to a request from broadcasters. It draws on Member Agency submissions to the DEC, the agencies' own external evaluations, and a real-time evaluation also commissioned by the DEC. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author alone.

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1. Background and introduction

1.1 The disasters

In just five days in 2009 between Typhoon Ketsana making landfall in the Philippines on 26 September and the first of two major earthquakes that struck the Indonesian island of Sumatra, the Asia-Pacific region abundantly lived up to its reputation as one of the world's most testing crucibles of natural disaster.

As Ketsana, moving west, hit Vietnam, another undersea quake off the Samoan Islands triggered a tsunami that caused loss of life and damage there and in Tonga. Then shortly before the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal for Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam was launched, on Sunday 4 October, Typhoon Parma left a trail of destruction across the northern Philippines.

More than 1,100 people died in the Indonesian quake while Typhoon Ketsana left more than 460 dead in the Philippines alone.

It was an extraordinary sequence of events. The DEC's chief executive, Brendan Gormley, described the number of disasters to have hit the region as 'staggering'. Agency responses were underway but 'seriously underfunded', according to the DEC when it launched its appeal. 'The nature of these disasters vividly recalls the horrors of 2004 tsunami,' Gormley added. 'Millions have seen the world they know ripped apart around them.'

1.2 The DEC appeal and members' response

The DEC had taken the unprecedented step of issuing a single joint appeal – the 'IPV appeal'¹ – for several countries suffering the effects of separate climatic and seismic disasters that had, by chance, almost coincided. More than £1m was raised within 24 hours of the first broadcast appeal – a result helped by another unusual decision, to allow website and telephone donations which were promoted via the BBC News website and Twitter before the TV and radio spots went out. The DEC's Secretariat and Member Agencies together went on to raise £9.3m in total.

All 13 Member Agencies mounted a humanitarian response either to Ketsana (in the Philippines or Vietnam) or the Padang² earthquake; two of them, Age UK³ and Save the Children, worked in all three countries. Many already had long-term development programmes in the affected nations – a factor which greatly improved their ability to respond. All but two agencies transitioned to, in DEC terms, Phase 2 response.⁴

¹ Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, listed alphabetically.

² Padang is the capital and largest city of Indonesia's West Sumatra province, and the closest to the quake's offshore epicentre.

³ Help the Aged and Age Concern are referred to throughout as Age UK, the name of the new merged agency.

⁴ DEC-funded programming is now divided into two phases: the first six months and up to 18 months. Agencies must disburse at least 30 per cent of funds Phase 1; the balance can be carried over to Phase 2.

1.3 Validation report

This independent validation report was commissioned by the DEC Secretariat to review systems and performance against the objectives of the appeal, and in particular whether programmes were conducted in accordance with prevailing standards for the humanitarian sector. It is a desk review by an independent consulting company specializing in the humanitarian sector, drawing mainly on:

- A DEC 'monitoring mission'
- Member Agency periodic submissions to the DEC (Phases 1 and 2 progress reports)
- External evaluations (three on Ketsana, two on the Padang quake) conducted by Member Agencies
- A DEC lessons-learned summary covering all agencies.

The report comments on the major challenges faced by agencies and summarizes learning and action, and comments on the existing evaluations and the RTE.

2. The Philippines: Typhoon Ketsana, 26 September 2009

DEC agencies responding: Age UK, British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Merlin, Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision

Typhoon Ketsana, known as 'Ondoy' in the Philippines, was the most destructive of the 2009 Pacific season. After it dumped approximately a month's worth of rain on the Philippine capital in a single day, it was described by the country's President Gloria Arroyo as a 'once-in-a-lifetime emergency'. The downpours on Saturday 26 September broke a meteorological record set in 1967, and by the end of the day parts of Metro Manila resembled a canal city. Although storm disasters are not usually thought of as 'sudden-onset', Ketsana's impact on the Philippines fell into this category for all practical purposes.

Two things were quickly evident: firstly that it would be an overwhelmingly urban disaster, and secondly that the Philippine authorities – although well used to humanitarian emergencies of many kinds – would need international assistance.

2.1 Programme achievements

Six of the seven DEC Member Agencies which launched disaster-response operations were already active in the country (Merlin was the exception). The agencies were quickly able to change gear from development work to humanitarian response, taking advantage both of the experience of local staff and their networks of national partners. This also later had the effect of reinforcing their operations' longer-term developmental legacy. Christian Aid's evaluation of its response to Ketsana in the Philippines, for example, says the involvement of 'development partners with close linkages to communities' led to outcomes that served to 'build community resilience', in addition to meeting relief objectives.⁵

This validation report reinforces the conclusion reached by the DEC's RTE that the response in the Philippines and Indonesia was 'generally very positive'.⁶ In terms of the timeliness of the response, the RTE noted that agencies were able to get their relief

⁵ J. Levers and S. Pacaigue, *Evaluation of Christian Aid's Response to Typhoon Ketsana*, 2010.

⁶ A. Davies, S. Dien, and R. Lachica, *Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam Crisis Appeal Monitoring Mission, Projects funded by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), Synthesis report: Indonesia and Philippines*, Channel Research, 2010.

operations up and running within a week, especially food, water and ‘non-food items’ (NFI) like kitchen and hygiene sets. Most agencies were able to report meeting their relief targets across a wide variety of interventions including, in the Philippines, food and potable water, hygiene and kitchen sets, medical assistance and training, emergency shelter, cleaning kits, cash, child-friendly spaces and school supplies, and more.

Merlin, which arrived in late November 2010 and had to set up anew in the country, ‘was able to find unmet needs in supporting reproductive health services three months after the disaster in a hard-to-access area [Talim Island across the Laguna de Bay from Manila] where no other assistance was provided’ – something that was retrospectively seen as an advantage since the first wave of humanitarian response had prioritized more accessible areas.⁷

As the Ketsana disaster was largely urban in the Philippines, much of the relief effort focused on the emergency evacuation centres, often churches and schools, that quickly became overcrowded and where conditions were marginal at best.⁸ However, it was noted that DEC agencies’ provision of latrines, water and waste management improved the situation in many centres. Beneficiaries also attested to the agencies providing moral support to families and assisting their general recovery.⁹

No hard data was available from the Philippine authorities, but beneficiaries in the evacuation centres spoke of generally improved health because of the work of DEC agencies like Save the Children and Oxfam in providing mobile medical services and hygiene kits. This ‘undoubtedly did much to detect, prevent and contain disease outbreaks,’ according to the

The DEC agencies were quickly able to change gear from development work to humanitarian response

RTE. Agencies like Save the Children and World Vision continued afterwards to help clean and re-supply schools that had been used as evacuation centres, and Philippine officials reported that this helped speed the resumption of teaching.

The DEC agencies’ humanitarian assistance was also judged to have been appropriate in that beneficiaries made use of what they were given; there was very little, if any, ‘leakage’ (when humanitarian aid ends up being sold in street markets), though families may have traded individual items among themselves.

At the three-month point, according to the DEC’s annual report for 2010, just under 27,000 families had been helped by DEC agencies; 7,000 cash grants had been made to households to help them buy essential items; nearly 2,500 people had been given packs of essential family medicines.¹⁰

In Phase 2, agencies’ priorities shifted toward the provision of shelter, either transitional (‘T-shelter’) or permanent (‘P-shelter’).

⁷ Merlin, DEC Phase 2 report.

⁸ As of 30 January 2010, nearly 25,000 people were still being hosted in 54 evacuation centres, according to the International Organization for Migration, but the true number was thought to be higher if those staying with relatives were included.

⁹ A. Davies, S. Dien, and R. Lachica, op. cit.

¹⁰ In standard reporting practice, to avoid double-counting the largest single total for any one relief item – often NFI – is taken as a global total for the number of people reached by an entire operation.

2.2 International standards

DEC agencies are required to demonstrate their commitment to honouring the 'Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response', commonly referred to as the Sphere Handbook, which is being relaunched this year. They are also required to adhere to the 'Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief'.¹¹

The level of awareness both of Sphere and the Red Cross Red Crescent code, as well as other current humanitarian benchmarks like People in Aid (1995) and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) (2007) standard, is high – in national headquarters and country offices alike. (World Vision, for example, specified that its relief packs in the Philippines were made up according to Sphere standards.)

Before Ketsana, Christian Aid in the Philippines reported that it had provided partner staff and community volunteers with 'basic orientation and training' in Sphere and HAP, covering assessment, coordination, security, procurement and distribution. As a result, in its own operations Christian Aid reported to the DEC that 'affected families were treated with care and their dignity upheld'.¹²

Oxfam reported that it hired new staff from locations outside operational areas for their experience of emergencies and held 'briefings and trainings' on humanitarian quality and accountability, especially Sphere.¹³

However, in the Philippines, conditions in the packed evacuation centres were sub-standard almost by definition. Said Oxfam in its DEC Phase 1 report: 'Sphere standards are not being met in all evacuation centres and temporary relocation sites due to overcrowding and issues of space. Oxfam is reducing public health risks by distributing hygiene kits and increasing knowledge of safe hygiene practices [and ensuring] local authorities and agencies are aware of Sphere standards.'

Away from the evacuation centres in more rural but still densely populated areas, the British Red Cross (BRC) reported to the DEC that because of lack of space, it had not been possible to fully comply with international standards for the location of septic tanks at a minimum of 30 metres from water sources. The BRC, working in partnership with the Philippine Red Cross (PRC)¹⁴ under coordination by the IFRC,¹⁵ set a lower project benchmark of 15 metres. In what was surely a victory for common sense, the Red Cross reported that the alternative was 'no latrine at all', although it hoped to be able to comply with the higher standard at sites identified for the shelter programme.

One area in which Member Agencies might have done better, the RTE found, was in accessing remote communities: 'Most agencies tended to direct programmes towards easily accessible beneficiaries to the detriment of those in more remote areas.' This 'coverage deficit' is itself a contravention of the Red Cross Red Crescent code, which stipulate that beneficiaries must be selected strictly according to need, not accessibility.

But the general point is worth emphasizing: in the Philippines – the 45th most densely populated country in the world on a list of 240, according to the UN – it was largely

¹¹ Can be seen in full at <www.sphereproject.org> and <www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>.

¹² Christian Aid, DEC Phase 1 report.

¹³ Oxfam, DEC Phase 1 report.

¹⁴ The PRC changed its name in 2009, dropping the word 'national' from its title.

¹⁵ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

environmental factors beyond agencies' control that caused them to depart from established international standards.

2.3 Challenges

It was also environmental factors that gave rise to the greatest challenges agencies faced in the Philippines, where they had to jump-start relief operations against a backdrop of continuing bad weather, inaccessibility, electricity shortages and damaged infrastructure.

In both the Philippines and Indonesia – and in another precursor of what would soon happen in Haiti – agencies' shelter strategies faced what the RTE called 'challenges with respect to...relocation and livelihoods.' In other words, some affected people would be willing to relocate if assured of being able to make living, like the Red Cross T-shelter beneficiaries in Laguna. Others would not, saying that 'what motivated them to leave their provinces and settle in the affected areas of Metro Manila in the first place was the prospect of improved income-generation.'

Christian Aid reported that its beneficiaries were members of urban poor communities whose pre-existing levels of poverty meant that they were less able to recover without external assistance. Its own external evaluation characterized the challenging backdrop of Metro Manila thus:

Metro Manila is one of the world's largest and most densely populated cities with almost 12 million people...[Its] vulnerability is increasing due to poor urban planning, corruption and more. Estimates of the number of informal settlers vary greatly but were conservatively estimated by the Manila Observatory at 4.7 million. The number of urban poor is even greater. Informal settlers come from diverse backgrounds but most migrated from rural Philippines to Metro Manila decades ago. Informal settlers squat illegally on private and government land in cluttered and dense conditions. Some families live in ten square-metre shacks made from donated banana crates which serve as small stores and homes with no utilities...¹⁶

In addition, in the Philippines there was the significant man-made factor of the elections held at all political levels (mayoral to presidential) in May 2010 for which campaigning was beginning as the relief operation got underway. There was some evidence of beneficiary lists, whose compilation is outside the direct control of agencies or their partners, being manipulated for political reasons. The politically dynamic atmosphere in the Philippines probably posed the greatest challenge to cash-based programming – 'cash for work' or livelihoods grants – such as those pursued by Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision.

2.4 Lessons

The 'lessons' section of the Christian Aid evaluation of Typhoon Ketsana – the only one to focus on the Philippines alone – advocates engaging more closely with local government and partners, and cash programmes in urban settings in preference to relief – a point also made by Oxfam, the BRC and others.

Christian Aid, in its Phase 1 report, emphasized that for true quality-control, assessment has to be ongoing, citing the example of its Philippine partner COPE, which decided to exclude instant noodles in relief packages after consultations with beneficiaries, and included vitamin supplements instead.

¹⁶ J. Levers and S. Pacaigue, op. cit.

World Vision said one lesson they had learned was the need for an off-the-shelf briefing document on the DEC itself to support field offices in implementing DEC funded programmes.

For offices that may be more used to long-term development work than humanitarian emergencies, in which every hour counts, Oxfam also wanted to see a 'to go' briefing on the basic principles of relief distributions: 'transparency, accountability, beneficiary participation, and so on.'

At the Phase 2 stage, a lesson for Age UK was 'the benefit of empowering older people in the establishment of [Older People's Organizations] OPOs...a successful method of selecting beneficiaries, managing funds and ensuring sustainability.'

One lesson offered in Save the Children's full-scale evaluation of its response in the Philippines was that programme workers had erred slightly on the side of being 'too local' – they had not consulted sufficiently with the authorities on a provincial or municipal level. But this was not much more than a quibble about an operation that, the evaluation found, had been 'extremely professional' and 'timely'.

Merlin did not offer any specific lessons from its Phase 1 experience in the Philippines, but it was clear that it believed the business of setting up in a new country was not to be underestimated: 'Merlin needs to consider realistically and strategically all restraints and/or opportunities when deciding on an intervention in countries where the organisation is not [already] operational.'¹⁷

3. Vietnam: Typhoon Ketsana, 29 September 2009

DEC agencies responding: ActionAid, Age UK, CARE, Save the Children

It took Typhoon Ketsana three days to cross the South China Sea, heading almost exactly due west toward the Vietnamese city of Da Nang. Heavy winds and strong rain along a 400-kilometre stretch of coastline caused huge flood surges in three provinces and forced several rivers up toward levels not seen since 1964. At least 40 people were reported to have died in the first two days.

3.1 Programme achievements

ActionAid's beneficiaries were mostly poor farmers and fishing families and ethnic minority groups who lived in highly inaccessible areas. More than 5,600 households (2,152 more than planned), received support from the programme – seeds, health care, blankets and mosquito nets, school materials. ActionAid reported to the DEC that it was 'able to achieve more with less money because [its] partners (Project Management Units or People's Committees) were able to bring down the cost of materials.'¹⁸

The agency continued in Phase 2 with programmes centred on livestock, seeds, and repairs to water supply and irrigation systems.

Rapid assessments in the days following Typhoon Ketsana indicated to CARE, which has a presence in Vietnam going back to 1945, that access to clean water would be a critical need. But complex customs procedures in Vietnam that held up the importation of material and equipment were among factors leading to the livelihoods component becoming a much stronger focus for DEC-funded activity by CARE than initially planned.

¹⁷ Merlin, DEC Phase 1 report.

¹⁸ ActionAid, DEC Phase 1 report.

DEC funding allowed CARE to provide livelihoods support in the form of rice seed, fertiliser and cash-for-work to nearly 2,500 households in the severely affected Quang Nam province. It also supported CARE livelihoods activities in Binh Dinh province after Typhoon Mirinae made landfall in Vietnam on 2 November, causing disruption and more severe flooding in seven provinces.

CARE's Phase 2 achievements in Vietnam later included:

- Repairs to a bridge in Que Xuan 1 commune
- First aid training courses in five communes for 150 people
- Agreement on the design of two safe houses in two communes.

Save the Children's DEC-funded emergency response focused on food insecurity for the most vulnerable people, especially infants and pregnant or lactating mothers, through micronutrients and an EBF¹⁹ programme, and later seeds and fertilizer. Save the Children's own evaluation, although not convinced of the value of EBF as part of emergency response, said this addressed an important issue: child malnutrition in remote, poor, and often ethnic-minority highland areas.²⁰

3.2 International standards

Save the Children technical teams in Vietnam followed Sphere standards, especially in food aid, 'WASH'²¹ and health-care activities. An accountability officer was on-hand for the whole response to ensure that adequate monitoring systems were in place and to act as a focal point for complaints – of which there were a few (16), about beneficiary selection or quality of relief items, but they were mostly 'trivial' and resolved satisfactorily.

One of the main conclusions of ActionAid's external evaluation was that the agency's work had 'satisfied all the requirements of the Code of Standards [sic]. The project attempted to build local capacity by cooperation with local authorities in management, mobilization of local staff, procurement of goods and services from local suppliers. Beneficiaries fully participated in all stages of the project circle.'²²

CARE told the DEC it had put a complaints mechanism in place and published beneficiary lists well in advance, to guard against aid being misallocated or used for local village-level political ends – common dangers in emergency relief operations.²³

3.3 Challenges

The chief challenge faced by agencies working on Ketsana response in central Vietnam was the local language barrier.

Both Save the Children and ActionAid reported to the DEC that most people belonging to ethnic minorities groups in affected districts of Quang Tri and Phu Yen provinces could

¹⁹ Exclusive Breastfeeding.

²⁰ Ngo Cong Chinh and Richard Rastall, *EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT, Post-Typhoon Ketsana Response and Recovery Interventions funded by the Disaster Emergency Committee in Vietnam and the Philippines*. Save the Children, December 2010.

²¹ Water, sanitation and hygiene.

²² Pham Nguyen Thanh, *Mid-Term Evaluation Report, Emergency Response Support to people affected by Typhoon Ketsana in Vietnam*, October 2010, ActionAid Vietnam.

²³ CARE, DEC Phase 1 report.

neither read nor speak Vietnamese, making interaction with communities and selection of beneficiaries difficult. Save the Children added, however, that commune and village leaders usually did speak Vietnamese, as did most of their local partners, so working through them the agency was able to overcome this challenge.

CARE also described as a 'key challenge' the overall low level of funding available to the response in Vietnam, but added that 'the flexibility of DEC funding proved very beneficial, in terms of adapting to and meeting needs in Vietnam.'

The mountainous terrain in highland areas also presented challenges for agencies. But in Phase 2 ActionAid was nevertheless able to report that it had managed to reach out to some of the most vulnerable households in remote areas – including women from ethnic-minority groups, female-headed families and disabled people – with livelihoods, shelter, water and capacity-building support.²⁴

3.4 Lessons

CARE's experience in the Ketsana response demonstrated the importance of a 'non-linear approach' to emergency response – i.e. the need to undertake both relief and recovery activities simultaneously, instead of taking a conventional view that one follows the other. Some of the agency's institutional donors only supported 'immediate relief activities', but DEC funding allowed flexibility, said CARE.

As a result of lessons learned in Vietnam after Ketsana and in Indonesia after the Padang quake, CARE hoped to improve the level of knowledge of donor procedures in both country offices.

ActionAid found a need to strengthen its monitoring and communications with partners after gaps attributed partly to the lack of a telephone signal in project areas and a general lack of accessibility. During Phase 2 monitoring was stepped up. When a small epidemic broke out among sows in a remote area which was not reported by villagers, it was picked up on a regular monitoring visit by facilitators and urgent veterinary action nipped it in the bud – only 22 animals (less than 10 per cent of the project total) were lost.

Save the Children's review of its cash programme suggested that clear criteria for household selection were important and a workshop had been critical in achieving this. Beneficiary feedback mechanisms like telephone hotlines had worked well despite the communications problems.

Existing 'system-based approaches' in EBF had also proved effective; local knowledge and human resources were utilized to fullest extent.

4. Western Sumatra, Indonesia: Earthquake, 30 September 2009

DEC agencies responding: Age UK, British Red Cross, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Concern, Islamic Relief, Oxfam, Save the Children, Tearfund, World Vision

The Indonesian island of Sumatra sits alongside one of the most seismogenic locations on Earth.²⁵ There had been several quakes in or off Sumatra since 2000, including the 2007 disaster, and there were three in 2010 above 7.0 magnitude – including the October quake that killed hundreds of people on the smaller Mentawai islands.

²⁴ ActionAid, DEC Phase 2 report.

²⁵ The 'Sunda megathrust', where the Eurasian and Indo-Australian tectonic plates converge.

The RTE team reported that many of the people they encountered, including those in higher income brackets, were 'highly distressed at the prospect of a continuing cycle of destruction and impoverishment'.

It is also important to emphasize the extraordinary clustering of Asian disasters in 2009: this first major earthquake on Sumatra struck the day after the Samoan quake and tsunami and Typhoon Ketsana's landfall in Vietnam; and four days after Ketsana's arrival in the Philippines.

4.1 Programme achievements

The DEC's RTE highlighted:

- Concern/ACTED's project to restore the productivity of land for rice planting by repairing irrigation canals damaged by landslides; its cash-for-work activity, which had restored some liquidity in affected communities.
- Oxfam's 'community grant' which benefited everyone in the community and was also popular; also its livelihoods programme in Indonesia, which had a positive impact on women, helping them buy new materials to restart cottage industries.
- The impact of agency T-shelter programmes, which left 'children, their parents and the elderly [clearly] better off than they were in tents.'

By late November, Age UK had distributed emergency cash grants of the equivalent of £25 to 1,000 elderly people (aged 70 or above) in five villages affected by the earthquake.²⁶

The BRC, which assisted with the running of the shelter cluster in Padang, told the DEC that 91 per cent of respondents found its shelter-relief materials useful, and even before the end of Phase 1 it was able to report nearly 300 families had completed T-shelters using grants issued 'through PMI structures'.²⁷ Phase 2 saw 1,700 T-shelters completed as part of the DEC-funded programming.

CAFOD, which completed its emergency-shelter distributions in November, found that it was able to assist more than twice the planned number of households – 2,272 instead of 1,000 – because support costs were lower than planned and assessments found that many families did not require the full package of support (shelter kit, toolkit and hygiene kit).

With DEC funds, CARE provided household items, including sarongs, blankets, kitchen sets, mosquito nets, jerry cans and plastic sheeting, to 1,000 targeted households, as well as 50 household shelter kits and (one for every five households) 200 communal kits. DEC-funded distributions reached approximately 1,000 households or 10 per cent of the agency's total response.

Christian Aid reached more than 6,500 households with food and NFI, and worked in health and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

²⁶ In this section agencies' programmes are treated alphabetically. The source is their own submissions to the DEC.

²⁷ Palang Merah Indonesia, the Indonesian Red Cross, usually referred to by its local acronym. The PMI were the main implementing partners for the international Red Cross Red Crescent and some other NGOs.

Islamic Relief reported that its T-shelter programme (a planned 356 units) was nearly 70 per cent complete at the end of January 2010. By the time of the Phase 2 report, the agency said its WASH and T-shelter components were complete, with only DRR ongoing.

With pre-positioned stocks ready to be shipped to Western Sumatra, Save the Children was able to respond quickly to humanitarian needs after the quake, and in Phase 1 it assisted nearly 30,000 families with emergency shelter, nearly 34,000 families with shelter toolkits, and nearly 30,000 with basic household items and hygiene kits.

Tearfund, which was having problems with a traditional neighbourhood self-help scheme and earthquake-proof design, reported that it was 50 per cent completed on a project comprising nearly 350 T-shelters.

Finally World Vision reported that it had used DEC funding toward the construction of 13 temporary classrooms in five schools badly affected by the earthquake. The schools were provided with furniture and teaching materials. Training for children and teachers in DRR was also conducted.

At the three-month point, according to the DEC's annual report for 2009–10, more than 4,700 households had received shelter kits, including tarpaulins, blankets and mats; nearly 10,500 hygiene kits had been distributed; and thousands had also received tools, household items, emergency cash and health checks for mothers and children.

4.2 International standards

Tearfund's external evaluation focused on two T-shelter projects funded with DEC money and found that the design process had followed the Sphere standards, maximizing local materials and livelihood opportunities.²⁸ (Tearfund, in Phase 2, also reported that 'all partners' were aware of and sticking to recognized international standards.)

The BRC reported that the bamboo T-shelter approach was not feasible as bamboo was neither widely available nor culturally acceptable in West Sumatra. Alternative prototype

Most agencies reported no issues with their ability to observe standards

shelters were developed using a combination of bamboo, coconut wood, salvaged debris, with an expected lifespan of up to two years. The Red Cross programme went on to furnish 1,700 families with T-shelters.

Islamic Relief also explicitly reported adhering to Sphere T-shelter standards on living space and the use of local resources.

CARE reported that it had complaints mechanisms in place to guard against aid 'leaking' onto the market or being otherwise misused.

Most other agencies reported no issues with their ability to observe standards.

4.3 Challenges

²⁸ Hugh Goyder, *Tearfund UK & Tear NL: Evaluation of DEC-funded Shelter Projects following the 2009 Indonesian Earthquake*, August 2010.

CAFOD reported that its umbrella organization Caritas had difficulty working within the local cultural context and, perhaps most seriously, felt obliged to be 'more explicit' about its Catholic background as a result of accusations of evangelism levelled at an (unnamed) US Christian NGO. The population of Sumatra is nearly 90 per cent Muslim.

Christian Aid reported that an 'interfaith meeting' was held in December to address the issue of alleged 'proselytizing' by faith-based agencies (not DEC members). No serious ramifications for the quake relief operation were reported by DEC Member Agencies.

These potentially difficult issues appear to have been successfully addressed and the agencies' work was not impeded.

The BRC reported local inflationary pressure and some difficulty in managing large numbers of volunteers.

Age UK, which worked through a local partner new to emergency response, said it faced problems getting good baseline data from OPOs and working out who most needed assistance.

Oxfam reported to the DEC (which was funding 14 per cent of its overall response in Western Sumatra) that it had 'remained flexible and adapted to challenges by conducting ongoing needs assessments and programme review activities.'

The BRC, as well, talked less about specific problems than their success in overcoming the ones that did exist: 'While operational challenges did exist early on, coordination and supportive relations between partner [Red Cross Red Crescent] National Societies active on the ground and IFRC remained strong...'

4.4 Lessons

Among the most comprehensive lessons learned from Indonesia were those detailed by Oxfam, some of which would be desirable everywhere (like earthquake-resistant construction and better feedback at community level), but less obviously Oxfam also mentioned the need for better

- capacity building on gender in disaster
- integration of cash-transfer programmes with other sectors
- targeting of beneficiaries
- mentoring for local staff to enable them to lead future recovery programmes
- advocacy for cash-transfer programmes as support for livelihoods initiatives
- engagement with government throughout the project cycle.²⁹

Possibly the newest lesson highlighted by the BRC – apart from things like the importance of communications, air bridges (when all else fails), and, in the Red Cross Red Crescent, motivated volunteers – was that T-shelter as a concept is still often difficult to sell to beneficiaries and local authorities in many recovery scenarios.

CAFOD reported that it tried to incorporate the findings of the DEC's own real-time evaluation, reviewing its partner's beneficiary criteria, for example, to emphasize households headed by women or children.

²⁹ Oxfam, DEC Phase 1 report.

An interesting lesson recorded by Save the Children was that Western Sumatran communities have 'strong values regarding child-care systems', which explained why the number of children placed in institutions did not increase significantly after the earthquake.

As in the Philippines, World Vision would value an off-the-shelf briefing document on the DEC itself to support its field offices in implementing DEC-funded programmes. Tearfund also wanted to 'ensure clarity of back-donor requirements' and has prepared a user-friendly introduction to the DEC after a project review.

5. The agency evaluations

ActionAid, Christian Aid, Concern, Save the Children, Tearfund

This validation report has taken account of the DEC's own real-time evaluation and the five external evaluations that exist – all but one of which, Concern's on the Indonesian earthquake,³⁰ have already been cited. Their conclusions about the overall purposive outcome of the DEC appeal and the disbursement of the funding it generated were unanimously positive:

...both [shelter] projects represent an extremely appropriate use of DEC Appeal funds. (Tearfund/Indonesia)

...an efficient and effective operation. (Concern/Indonesia)

The programme was in line with its appeal and largely met its output-orientated objectives. (Christian Aid/Philippines)

...the activities selected for the DEC project were the most appropriate selection to be achieved with limited resources. (ActionAid/Vietnam)

...the DEC-funded components of the programmes have been efficiently and professionally managed to maximise impact... (Save the Children/Philippines, Vietnam)

The above conclusions appear accurate in the purely quantitative sense that the projects involved all met their stated objectives. The major qualitative factors at issue are whether the original interventions were appropriate, whether planned budgets turned out to be accurate, whether agencies achieved results expeditiously, and – in doing so – whether they generally observed international humanitarian standards.

Broadly speaking, as this validation exercise will hopefully have helped to illustrate, these evaluations agree that the DEC agencies scored highly on qualitative issues too.

In full-scale field evaluations, as opposed to desk reviews, testimony from beneficiary communities should generate the most compelling evidence of all. (The separate issue of local involvement in actual project work relates more to humanitarian standards than the credibility of evaluations.) Did these external evaluations, therefore, present evidence from beneficiaries themselves for the claims made? To a significant extent, yes.

Concern's evaluation on Indonesia recalls that much of the project work consisted of rehabilitating irrigation channels damaged in the landslides that the quake triggered. It makes

³⁰ Martin Fisher, *Evaluation of the Agency's Contribution to the Padang Earthquake Response, Western Sumatra, Indonesia*, Concern Worldwide, Geneva, February 2009.

the key point that it was villagers themselves who prioritized the work to reopen the irrigation canals, seeing the longer-term benefits of food production as an output. However, this is not directly evidenced in any of the case studies, which relate only to beneficiary selection.

‘The beneficiaries’ views of both [shelter] projects were found to be strongly positive,’ said the Tearfund evaluation, ‘though both [local partner] agencies faced considerable initial difficulties and had to overcome scepticism about whether they would deliver what they promised.’ (They did.) The evaluators said their field visits confirmed the projects had unlocked ‘considerable local energies and expertise in relation to house reconstruction’ when measured by the time, effort, and value of materials which local people have contributed toward reconstruction.

Save the Children combined evaluations of its multi-sector response in Vietnam and the Philippines in one document; it has not presented an evaluation of its work in Western Sumatra, although it was one of only two agencies to undertake DEC-funded work in all three IPV-appeal countries simultaneously.

DEC funds in the Philippines supported the repair of schools used as evacuation centres and the provision of other educational resources. The evaluators found the education components overall to be ‘appropriate, coherent and well connected to other donor funding, adding that it was ‘particularly evident from interviews and discussions with school principals, parents, teachers and children [that they] were extremely grateful to SC for their invaluable support and assistance...’

In Vietnam, a more rural disaster, the same evaluation found that Save the Children’s provision of seeds and fertilizers was ‘extremely timely’, ‘unanimously appreciated by local farmers and led to a bumper crop, facilitating the early recovery of typhoon-affected households.’

Christian Aid’s evaluation on the Philippines tries harder than the others to use local testimony and case studies. One of its key findings seems to have been that Christian Aid was right to provide a standard and fairly comprehensive relief package to beneficiaries, whose views it had first sought. On the negative side, this evaluation is much less succinct than the others and it is not immediately obvious how some of the conclusions and recommendations arise from the experience of the operation in question. It would also have benefited from being edited before publication.

ActionAid’s evaluation (by a local consultant) is the least critical of the five: ‘Support received from the project is greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries. There are no significant complaints from the relevant parties. Overall, all the activities achieved their goals.’ But this evaluation includes nine useful case studies clearly illustrating the impact of the agency’s work in Vietnam on the lives of beneficiaries – some embedded in the narrative, some appended.

The best overview of the entire DEC response, however, is arguably to be found in its own real-time evaluation, for which the field work in Indonesia and the Philippines was carried out late in Phase 1. Its key conclusion was that ‘DEC assistance has largely met its objectives in a timely manner.’

Its most serious criticism may be the one discussed briefly above in the context of the Philippines, that ‘agencies tended to direct programmes towards easily accessible beneficiaries to the detriment of those in more remote areas.’ Other criticisms are familiar from many earlier disasters: assessment could be better; inter-agency coordination could be better; communications could be better; DRR could be better.

The RTE also made the key point that the DEC itself appears to be somewhat ahead of the game in allowing agencies' more flexibility in the disbursement of funds than they ask for, although this is relatively new.

The RTE also, very encouragingly, spoke of a 'concerted effort' to observe humanitarian standards and principles.

6. Conclusions of the validation report

- The chain of disasters in the Asia-Pacific region in 2009 was an exceptional sequence of events, but one that UK DEC agencies were relatively well placed to respond to because of the long-standing programmes almost all of them already had in the affected countries.
- The objectives of the DEC appeal were largely met.
- The operations DEC agencies launched were not only a success quantitatively, but they also saw significant progress in key qualitative areas like accountability to beneficiaries.
- The degree of flexibility new DEC procedures allows agencies was greatly appreciated.
- In the humanitarian world, accessing beneficiaries in very remote locations remains a problem.
- Transitional shelter remains quite difficult to sell as a concept unless local people are fully on-board with all aspects of the design process and the positioning of the shelters. (A lesson that was emphasized in Haiti.)
- The DEC could do more to educate Member Agencies on its own procedures and requirements – or to be precise, issue user-friendly guidelines that agencies might be able to pass on to country offices and local partners.

[ends]