

PREPAREDNESS: SAVES TIME, MONEY AND LIVES



IASC
Inter-Agency Standing Committee

SUB-WORKING GROUP ON PREPAREDNESS



PREPAREDNESS IS AN IMPORTANT INVESTMENT AGAINST NATURAL AND MAN-MADE DISASTERS. IT BUYS THE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY VALUABLE TIME TO RESPOND MORE EFFECTIVELY AND GIVES VULNERABLE PEOPLE A BUFFER AGAINST THE REPEATED CRISES WHICH STRIP AWAY THEIR RESILIENCE AND PUSH THEM DEEPER INTO POVERTY.

THE UN AGENCIES AND THEIR NGO AND GOVERNMENT PARTNERS CAN SAVE LIVES, CROPS, PROPERTY AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE BY USING PREPAREDNESS THINKING TO BE AWARE OF RISKS, TO REDUCE THEM AND TO PLAN AHEAD TO COMBAT THEM. IT MEANS WE CAN USE OUR LIMITED RESOURCES AS WISELY AND EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE TO STOP A BAD SITUATION BECOMING WORSE.

AS OUR CHANGING CLIMATE MEANS MORE FREQUENT EXTREME WEATHER, IT IS EVER MORE IMPORTANT THAT WE CAN BOTH RAISE A WARNING FLAG AND BE READY TO RESPOND TO IT. OTHERWISE, THE THREAT OF HUNGER, DISEASE, POVERTY AND CONFLICT IS MULTIPLIED.

WITH GOOD INFORMATION, STRATEGIC THINKING AND CAREFUL PLANNING WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO SAVE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS.

HAVING STOCKS IN THE REGION: BETTER READY TO RESPOND

The quickest way to get emergency relief to a disaster zone can be to have supplies in a region, accessible to all partners. It makes sense as the world faces more frequent extreme weather – 2010 was one of the worst years in decades for natural disasters. However prepared the humanitarian community is, it cannot have stocks everywhere, just in case.

In Panama City, supplies are held for UN agencies and some NGOs in the UN's Humanitarian Response Depot for Latin America and the Caribbean. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Spanish Co-operation also have a depot. It's an important strategic location, bringing the whole region within reach within hours.

When the earthquake struck Haiti on January 12th 2010, cargo was sent out from the Panama City depots every day for the first 11 days of the emergency. 850 cubic meters of consolidated relief supplies – food, medical help, infant formula - went out from WHO, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, the IFRC and NGOs. The depots put out daily bulletins on the state of logistics for the Dominican Republic and Haiti to help co-ordinate international efforts. The UNHRD in Panama organized 15 operations by air and sea on behalf of ten major humanitarian organizations.

Standing behind the Panama City infrastructure is one of the most effective regional humanitarian groupings – REDLAC or the Risk, Emergency and Disaster Task Force Inter-Agency Working Group for Latin America and the Caribbean. Inspired by the IASC, REDLAC was set up in 2004. REDLAC members met within 2 hours of the Haiti quake and they were the first personnel deployed to lead clusters, assessments and to deliver goods and services.

In 2009, the strength of Panama as a regional base for the UN and other agencies was proven when the regional Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was able to call on its rapid deployment roster and quickly send an experienced human rights officer to Honduras following the military coup there.

The 30 UN, Red Cross and NGO members of REDLAC sit down at the same table together with donors to swap information, best practice and plan their work together. A web platform – Redhum – has improved emergency co-ordination with alerts, tools and guidelines gathered together in one place. It is co-ordinated by OCHA on behalf of all members. In a project to take advantage of advances in technology, Redhum is now working with WFP's regional early warning system SATCA to pilot the delivery of early warnings via SMS phone messages.



LARGE AREA AND LITTLE PRESENCE: JOINING FORCES FOR THE MOST IMPACT

Small islands, big distances, a light humanitarian agency presence and a big risk of natural disaster. These are the challenges in the Pacific Islands, whose location in the Ring of Fire of seismic and volcanic activity makes investing in emergency preparedness of extra importance.

Working together on an Inter-Agency basis as the Pacific Humanitarian Team has been the answer. Under the guidance of the UN's two Resident Coordinators in the Pacific, six response clusters have been set up, covering 14 Pacific island countries. As preparedness work had been happening on an ad hoc basis, OCHA has organized local Inter-Agency Contingency Planning exercises – so far for the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands and Tonga.

In Samoa the exercise – in April 2009 - was especially timely. Samoa already had a small but good National Disaster Management Office and functional early warning systems, but the government had not yet reached out to international humanitarian agencies. When it asked for a planning exercise to respond to an earthquake and tsunami, its thinking could not have been better. Six months after the exercise, almost exactly the same scenario happened, affecting the

same coastline and causing the same number of casualties as the rehearsal had simulated. Thanks to the preparedness investment, up to date maps and baseline data were immediately at hand ready for the arrival of humanitarian workers in Samoa the next day.

Regional clusters were activated formally for the first time with global and regional cluster coordinators. Because they had been agreed beforehand, cluster collaboration between agencies and government ministries was rapidly established. Relief supplies came in quickly by ship and their delivery was streamlined due to the quick arrival of WFP and DHL logisticians. A four-member United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team arrived in Samoa to support the UN Country Team and government systems in coordinating their response. A regional inter-agency protection roster was also tested for the first time in response to the natural disaster – two staff from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights were deployed to Samoa to lead a team from UNICEF, Save the Children and others.



MULTIPLE OUTCOMES: LISTENING TO THE WARNINGS AND PLANNING FOR ALL EVENTUALITIES

Sometimes the threat of a serious emergency can be seen coming well in advance because our preparedness is deeply rooted in good early warning systems - which we listen to and act upon. UN agencies and their partners can then plan for the worst case scenario. If, happily, the best case scenario results instead, pre-positioned emergency humanitarian supplies can still be used and not wasted.

South Sudan's vote on independence in January 2011 brought together so many diverse issues and potential outcomes set against a background of decades of civil war, local conflicts and difficult terrain that strong planning for anything between a return to war to a peaceful transition had to be considered. Planners had to think beyond the borders too - Sudan is Africa's largest country with 9 neighbours which could receive some of the 1.7 million people it was estimated could be displaced from their homes.

Over 20 UN agencies, funds and programmes worked together on a comprehensive preparedness plan to run from December 2010 until the end of 2011. Action was taken across Sudan's borders to have logistical plans in place for any influx of people and supplies were pre-positioned in anticipated hot-spots in case conflict cut supply lines. UNICEF put stocks in place for both its own operations and for the emergency response clusters it is responsible for - water, sanitation and education. It took on the job of fund raising on behalf of other agencies for some joint operations. Like UNICEF, WFP has since used part of its stockpiles to help the greater than expected number of Sudanese who moved from the north to the south in the run up to the voting. Just in case, other supplies were kept in place for independence day itself.

The thinking ahead has had to go even further than usual in the case of South Sudan. Humanitarian agencies worked on the basis that they could - overnight - have a new country to work with. This scenario was built into the preparedness planning from the start. Structures were designed for easy upgrading into country-level offices with minimal disruption and waste of resources. Common services were brought to all agencies by UNDP under the management of OCHA. All through the preparedness process there was also consultation with the other UN missions in Sudan who work alongside its humanitarian agencies - the peacekeepers in the south and in Darfur. Looking at the whole picture is a key necessity when planning for a historical event which could provoke a major emergency.



GETTING AGREEMENTS IN PLACE: STANDBY PARTNERS

Bhutan is a tiny landlocked nation of 700,000 people surrounded by 2,000 glacier lakes. It is mountainous, remote and in an area of strong seismic activity. How would humanitarian supplies get in if the worst was to happen?

This was one of the questions the Government of Bhutan wanted to know the answer to when it asked for a UN Disaster Assessment Mission to help it with preparedness plans. OCHA was the inter-agency coordinator.

The 2008 mission found some serious gaps in planning which had to be plugged. The emergency services were weak and there were very limited stockpiles of relief supplies. It would prove very difficult to bring more in as the national carrier – Druk Air – had monopoly flying rights. The one international airport at Paro, 65 kilometers from the capital, Thimpu, cannot take flights at night on its single runway.

OCHA took immediate action to bridge the fault line by helping the government negotiate a standby agreement with the Government of India to use its military airports within 20 to 30 minutes flying time.

Then OCHA's regional office for Asia followed up with an earthquake simulation exercise in which senior members of the Bhutanese government took part. UNICEF has run training sessions and awareness campaigns in schools about what to do if an earthquake strikes and has pre-positioned family kits and 21 schools-in-a-box (one for each district) around the country. UNICEF is currently working with UNDP on a "Safe School Package" to address both structural and non-structural issues of preparedness as well as school safety drills for earthquakes.

The UN agencies in Bhutan now work in clusters under the One UN framework and talk and plan together. As the UN Country Team, they responded with rice from WFP and blankets, tents and family kits from UNICEF when a smaller earthquake did hit in 2009. WHO is supporting the Ministry of Health's initiative to strengthen national and local capacities to manage health emergencies, such as mass casualties. The 2009 earthquake brought the agencies closer together. It wasn't severe enough for the standby agreement with India to be activated, but at least that plan is now in place should an earthquake cause a serious emergency.



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT: THE IMPORTANCE OF SIMULATION EXERCISES

Most life-saving professionals like doctors, fire-fighters and airline pilots don't just trust in their experience. They drill and rehearse frequently, to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. And so do humanitarian agencies. Realistic real-time simulations of responding to a sudden-onset emergency have become important tools for the UN agencies and their partners in NGOs and national governments.

New developments in technology are now making simulations even more challenging and fruitful. One web-based simulation called DeMist has been developed by WFP's Asia Regional Bureau – and in October 2010 was tested by more than 100 humanitarian staff from over 25 UN agencies and NGOs at a practiced response to one of the natural disasters which all too frequently strike the Philippines.

The computer-driven simulation first fires off email alerts that disaster has struck. Information then feeds out rapidly to participants – some of it is incorrect so as to make the exercise as realistic as possible. The innovative portal allows the situation report to be both in real time and to be updated by several people at once – when a major enemy in an emergency is a ticking clock, sharing information at once is essential. As local coordinating agency, OCHA is able to send updates via SMS to key staff.

Within days of the Manila simulation, the strongest typhoon for four years – known locally as Juan – hit the Philippines. The logistics and food clusters roles had been strengthened and Inter-Agency cooperation benefitted. Emergency contact lists, response plans and funding requests were ready to go. Minds were also focused towards other threats – such as earthquakes – and not only the more frequent typhoons.

Officers from the Philippines government also took part in the DeMist simulation, in recognition of national disaster agencies who are often the first line responders. Simulations are proven as a good way of bringing governments into the preparedness process.

An inter-agency simulation in Tanzania in 2009 was one of the first to focus on engaging national authorities directly in the joint-decision making and strategic planning of a simulated emergency. The Disaster Management Department of the Prime Minister's office took an active role in managing a "flood crisis". This is now an increasingly important trend – working with and strengthening national capacity through joint simulations. UNICEF has also seen that after taking part in a simulation, governments become more

interested in carrying out their own rehearsals. In Colombia in 2009, the Bogota municipal authorities followed up their participation in an earthquake-readiness simulation led by UNICEF, OCHA and UNDSS by organizing a very hands-on exercise of their own, including mass casualty drills, search and rescue exercises and the mobilization of city services.

The message that when we train together, the better we know how to work together, the better prepared we are, is being heard worldwide.



EARLY WARNING: USING TECHNOLOGY TO KEEP ON TOP OF THE INFORMATION

Forecasting that a slow-onset emergency is on its way and being prepared to respond to sudden disasters are both essential. As forewarned is forearmed, UN agencies have invested together in early warning systems to give them the information they need, delivered in the best possible way, given the developments in technology.

In March 2010, the Humanitarian Early Warning Service (HEWSweb) was relaunched after months of major overhaul work carried out by WFP on behalf of all the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Sub-Working Group on Preparedness. The group had established the website back in 2004 but with the growth of the Internet there are now many more information sources available with faster updates. The new HEWSweb is an up-to-the-minute one-stop-shop for hundreds of expert and authoritative sources on all kinds of natural hazards, such as seismic data from the US Geological Survey and rainfall and flooding information from NASA and the world-renowned Dartmouth Flood Observatory.

The new HEWSweb went live just as Japan was being stricken by its devastating earthquake and tsunami. Thousands of users downloaded the latest maps, checked quake reports and clicked links to breaking news reports. More than 260 websites linked the platform to their own sites, including the UN agencies and major media organisations such as The Washington Post, CBS News and The Guardian. In a strong effort to share early warning information and spread a preparedness thinking culture, the IASC site has always been open to everyone.

A special tsunami service is currently under development in conjunction with the European Union's Joint Research Centre and it is hoped further additions can be made to environmental threats and pests in addition to the Food and Agriculture Organization's locust monitoring, which is already running on the site. HEWSweb users will also be able to overlay several hazards onto a single homepage to create their own scenario and preparedness plans.

<http://hewsweb.org>

twitter.com/hewsweb

HEWS HUMANITARIAN EARLY WARNING SERVICE
 A service of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Sub-Working Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning

INTERACTIVE MAPS
 There is a map for each hazard, and one central map that aggregates the data for all hazards.

DATA INTEGRATION AND ANALYSIS
 Integrating sources for each hazard and conducting basic data analysis e.g. population and infrastructure affected, statistics.

ALL INFORMATION GEO-TAGGED
 Export geo-tagged data for further analysis and integration with other systems.

AUTOMATED PROCESS
 Collection, display and analysis are completely automated creating efficiency and ensuring sustainability.



WORKING TOGETHER ON THE GROUND: EMERGENCY TASK FORCE FOR CENTRAL ASIA

As a complex region of interlocking countries facing multiple risks, Central Asia has benefitted from strong emergency preparedness work between the UN agencies. Back in 2005, the regional desks of UNICEF, OCHA, WHO and UNDP set up an emergency task force – they were later joined by WFP and UNHCR to provide a co-ordinated approach to planning for crises and responding to them.

Task force members tested preparedness levels through inter-agency simulation exercises in Turkmenistan in 2008 and Uzbekistan in 2009. The training paid off in June 2010 when ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan caused 400,000 thousand people to flee their homes, 75,000 over the border into Uzbekistan. The agencies found that they could co-ordinate much more efficiently and avoid overlaps and duplication.

The conflict killed 450 people, destroyed more than 3,000 homes and caused severe disruption to the agricultural cycle in a country where 27% of the population was already chronically food insecure. So, the UN agencies – working with around 30 international and local NGOs – have now carried out an extremely comprehensive contingency planning process in case there is another outbreak of conflict. Local and regional procurement chains and stocks of emergency supplies were identified, border access investigated and

weaknesses in healthcare identified. WHO mobilized funds from the Russian Federation to help the emergency health sector recover. It had been found there were few ambulances with almost no equipment in Kyrgyzstan. A strong emphasis was placed by OHCHR on putting mechanisms in place to protect human rights given the nature of the conflict. Much of the preparedness planning was based on a thorough Lessons Learned exercise performed on both sides of the border in the summer of 2010.

Across the Central Asian region, other emergencies caused by regular floods and mudslides, drought and extreme winter temperatures have had more rapid and targeted responses by agencies who know each other better and work in unison.

Early warning has played a strong role in Tajikistan, where a specially-developed inter-agency and government system raises the red flag so that everyone can plan together to respond to an impending crisis. Partners are sharing information ; WFP has integrated UNICEF's expertise on nutrition and school drop out into its food sentinel sites. In Central Asia's largest country, Kazakhstan, an inter-agency information management portal has been set up by the OCHA regional office to organise responses and build partnerships on the ground.



PUTTING SUPPLIES IN PLACE: PREPAREDNESS FOR REPEATED NATURAL DISASTERS

When a hazard hits time and time again, it strips away people's resilience and sends them deeper into poverty. So, humanitarian agencies have to prepare for repeated natural disasters to ensure their help is as effective as possible. As the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is prone to floods the UN's Inter-Agency Contingency Plan is especially focused on emergency preparedness and response to extreme weather. Stocks are pre-positioned and communication channels are in place to work with the

government's National Coordination Committee and other partners.

In August 2010, the Amrok and Yalu rivers overflowed in North Phyongan province after weeks of torrential rain locally and in neighbouring north eastern China. 24,000 people were displaced from their homes – more than 7,000 of which were destroyed – in the areas around Sinuiju City and in Uiju County. The national government asked the UN agencies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to release emergency stocks which had been pre-positioned as a precaution. Based on its contingency plan, a UN assessment team was quickly mobilized and sent to the area, where it found people drinking highly suspect water as the supply system to 360,000 people had been put out of action. UNICEF distributed 220,000 water purifying tablets, rehydration salts and almost 3,000 kits of soap, jerry cans and buckets. WFP added to this with an immediate 60 metric tonne high-energy biscuit distribution to tide people over for the first ten days because food stores and harvests were submerged. The IFRC provided 5,000 family and hygiene kits and UNFPA a special reproductive health unit. As all health facilities were damaged and nine hospitals were completely destroyed, WHO provided essential equipment, sent emergency health kits for 20,000 people and equipped 45 household doctors with new bags of supplies to meet the immediate health needs of almost 60, 000 people.

It was a fast and effective immediate response, based on solid groundwork. The humanitarian teams also took away with them some lessons learned to incorporate into their regularly-updated preparedness plans. Trains provided more efficient transport than roads in this emergency because specific bridges and roads had been swept away. Despite the difficulties of obtaining reliable information, transport will be considered more fully in the future.



BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS: WORKING WITH REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

As preparedness thinking and actions are becoming more institutionalised in UN agencies and their partners – including national governments – attention has turned to the relationships which can be created with regional cooperation bodies. Working with groupings such as ASEAN in Asia, IGAD in East Africa and the Horn and ECOWAS in West Africa allows the UN to collaborate with partners who already know each other and to work across a range of hazards and capacity levels in one go.

More intense rain, falling in more variable patterns, is becoming an increasing threat in Southern Africa. So the UN agencies – co-ordinated by the OCHA Regional Office for Southern and Eastern Africa – has been focusing closely on preparedness. In Mozambique and Namibia there are now significant floods every year. In 2009, flooding destroyed the livelihoods of at least 350,000 people in Namibia – out of a population of just 2.2 million. Category 4 and 5 cyclones in the Indian Ocean are also over 50% more frequent than they were 30 years ago. In already-poor Lesotho, heavy rains between December 2010 and January 2011 destroyed nearly 700 houses and led to the loss of nearly 5,000 head of livestock.

With trans-border risk reduction activity regarded as weak and the need recognised for multi-year action plans to be developed, OCHA looked to SADC – the Southern African Development Community – as a partner. Inter-agency coordination also needed to be improved. In December 2007, government disaster managers were brought together with UN agencies such as UNICEF and WFP, donors, academics and regional NGOs to look ahead to the coming flood and cyclone season. Countries took stock of their preparedness levels and learnt strategies from one another. Some governments, including South Africa and Madagascar, developed agreements for logistics and air support in case they were needed in severe flooding.

This was followed up by regional inter-agency response planning when SADC members Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia were hit hard with floods in 2008, and in 2009 by emergency preparedness training for the upcoming flood season. A SADC clearing house system has been set up for all early warning information on emergency response. Contingency plans have been thoroughly revised, with the result that in 2010 all SADC members had up to date multi-agency plans in place.

Simulation training has also been held in particularly at risk countries – such as Namibia, which is now second in the list of countries most affected by natural disasters. In October 2010, OCHA, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO

and WFP facilitated an emergency simulation in the north of the country with the Namibian Red Cross and regional and national government officials. The exercise, based on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's own emergency simulation, highlighted problem areas but also that early warning weather information was being used well.

In the Caprivi Strip in March 2011, when rains came heavier and earlier than usual, displacing 60,000 people, memories of the simulation were still fresh. The Namibian authorities were able to respond much faster, evacuating communities earlier and the Namibian Red Cross pre-positioned food and non-food items. When a state of emergency was declared, a rapid assessment team from the government, the Namibian Red Cross and UN agencies went to the worst hit regions including the badly-hit Oshana area. The team was presented with clear, detailed and up to date information gathered by a local official who had learned emergency best practices during the simulation training.



DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS: WORKING AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

The United Nations agencies are not alone in their increased focus on being better prepared for disasters so as to reduce the impact they have on affected communities.

Six international non-governmental organisations have been working in this area since 2004, coming together as the Emergency Capacity Building Project, to work with national governments and academic and UN stakeholders. The organisations - CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision - are focused on developing national staff capacity skills, global collaboration and practical tools and approaches for risk reduction programming.

This partnership is being pioneered by inter-agency consortia in 4 countries - Bangladesh, Bolivia, Indonesia and Niger - and in one regional consortium in the Horn

of Africa. Each inter-agency consortium implements a number of joint activities focussed on accountability to beneficiaries, national staff training and disaster risk reduction.

In April 2011 the Indonesian consortium signed the first set of protocol agreements on how agencies will collaborate in the event of a future emergency, so laying a solid preparedness programme in place for a more coordinated response. Four consortia are learning from new leadership, management and core skills training programmes, managed in partnership with the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies. Staff from multiple agencies, UN and government institutions train and carry out simulation exercises together, so getting to know their different priorities, strategies and ways of working. The Bolivia consortium is developing a Disaster Risk Reduction policy framework based on shared approaches. In Bangladesh, a disaster training mapping exercise has been carried out. This highlighted overlaps between agencies in preparedness programmes and training. These overlaps are now being streamlined in partnership with the government, showing how working at the national level can avoid duplication, save money and increase opportunities for collaboration during future emergencies.

www.ecbproject.org



LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FOR PREPAREDNESS

Preparedness means having patience and investing over the longer-term. It means engaging for a significant period of time so as to help governments assume leadership and develop their own capacity. Preparedness should be a sustained activity and not a one-off affair lacking meaningful follow-up or commitment.

That's the thinking for the future. In October 2010 a new project called the Strategic Partnership for Preparedness sent its first assessment mission into the field in the pilot country of Ghana to review the effectiveness of the emergency response capacity there. This included the national government, the National Disaster Management Agency, the UN agencies and partner institutions.

The Strategic Partnership for Preparedness mission found that Ghana had an excellent understanding of disaster management and considerably good preparedness and response capacity. But, the mission also noted several important gaps and weaknesses and these were incorporated into a plan for 2011 by a special working group chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator. The group is supporting the government's action plan together with global and regional partners. Follow-up activities include joint simulation exercises, capacity development workshops and other efforts aimed at strengthening institutional and operational capacities.

The Strategic Partnership for Preparedness is just that – a working partnership. It is highly participatory and as it is set to run over the next 3 to 5 years, it is a solid long-term investment, with all sides working together to the same plan.







THE NEXT STEPS FORWARD FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Establish a better coordinated and common approach between all IASC organisations which builds on existing initiatives

Work with national and local partners to develop emergency preparedness and response capacities which they coordinate from the centre

Support communities and local organizations as the frontline responders and their national counterparts as the guardians of emergency response capacity for the future

Support governments to develop long term strategies and multi-year operational plans for preparedness

Embed preparedness development within a broader strategy for more robust disaster risk reduction

Promote collaboration between humanitarian and development partners to strengthen the response capacity of national and local organisations

Actively monitor and measure the results of efforts to promote emergency preparedness

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