PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS REVIEWS

'enhancing effectiveness through evidence-based learning'

Ethiopia Drought Response 2011/2012

The food security crisis that unfolded in the Horn of Africa in 2010 and peaked mid-2011, following two seasonal rain failures, affected 13 million people, 4.5 million of whom were in southern, eastern and northeastern Ethiopia. Severe water shortages increased the risk of water borne diseases, and moderate to severe malnutrition was widely reported in children and lactating mothers. Levels of livestock mortality were as high as 80%. The impacts of the drought were exacerbated by high local cereal prices, local conflicts and restricted humanitarian access in some areas. In addition, the drought and conflict in Somalia led to an influx of over 220,000 Somali refugees into Ethiopia. Significant scale-up of Oxfam GB's operational response began in July 2011, with the immediate aims of saving lives, minimising the negative impacts of the drought, and supporting Somali refugees in the refugee camps of Dolo Ado. The planned beneficiary target was 1.5 million. The response focused on water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), emergency food security and livelihoods (EFSL) and advocacy.

Evaluation method

The evaluation was carried out by an external evaluator that applied Oxfam's Humanitarian Indicator Tool (HIT). This tool is designed to help evaluators assess the degree to which a humanitarian response meets recognised quality standards. The HIT consists of 12 quality standards, each with defined benchmarks. In applying the tool, the evaluator reviews the available evidence and rates the extent each standard was 'met', 'partially met' or 'not met'. Scores are then assigned against each standard and a cumulative total calculated. Three standards – timeliness, coverage, and measuring technical adherence to Sphere and Oxfam quality standards – are given twice the weight of the others, given their greater importance.

Figure 1: Map of Ethiopia, credit Oxfam Ireland

Results

Overall, the Ethiopia 2011 drought response partially met seven of Oxfam's humanitarian response standards and did not meet four others at all. However, the detailed findings, assessed by project area, demonstrate variations in standards, with some benchmarks, such as timeliness and feedback/complaints mechanisms in place, being fully met by specific projects. Furthermore, considerable effort was invested to respond to needs and demonstrate accountability. All projects, however, struggled to articulate Oxfam's internal and external standards in the context of Ethiopia and to integrate practices that would benefit the affected communities beyond the immediate relief period. This is partly due to the particularly challenging nature of the Ethiopian context. Vast distances, unreliable beneficiary figures, slow procedures between NGOs and the Government of Ethiopia, dispersed pastoralist communities and hydrogeological constraints led to difficulties in achieving the timeliness, coverage and exit strategy benchmarks in particular. Other aspects, however, lie more within the control of the programme and include the need to pay greater attention to referencing and using technical standards throughout the programme cycle. Likewise, although advocacy activities were clearly part of the intended response, the limited influencing activities undertaken were not tied to an explicit strategy, and there is no record of their impact.

Standard	Level of achievement	Rating
1. Timeliness	Partially met	2/4
2. Coverage	Partially met	2/4
3. Technical aspects of programme measured against Sphere and Oxfam quality standards	Not met	0/4
4. Indicators (both process and impact) in place and being measured	Partially Met	1/2
5. Feedback/complaints system in place and functioning and documented evidence of consultation and participation	Partially met	1/2
6. Partners fully engaged in all aspects of the project cycle	Not applicable	-
7. Programme reflects measures to address dignity and protection issues	Partially met	1/2
8. Programme delivery addresses gender and specific needs of vulnerable groups	Partially met	1/2
9. Exit strategy/recovery plan in place	Not met	0/2
10. Evidenced utilisation of contingency plan in last humanitarian response	Not met	0/2
11. Programme addresses advocacy issues	Not met	0/2
12. Programme is linked to/will be linked to DRR interventions in area	Partially met	1/2
Final rating		**9/28**

Good practice & enablers

Timeliness was hampered by delays in securing official permission at various administrative levels. The speed of Oxfam's response in the Hiloweyn refugee camp is therefore notable, where, within a week, Oxfam GB had received permission to work in the camp, followed by WASH teams and equipment arriving and starting work one week later. Institution and active management of feedback mechanisms demonstrated effectiveness, eliciting changes in design and improving programme quality. A good example of this is in Borena, where the team, after having checked a variety of social and market parameters, switched to provision of cash transfers from food distributions in response to beneficiaries' stated preference for cash over grain.

Going forward

Much of the improvement plan centres on strengthening internal capacities, with actions already in place to strengthen technical (WASH and EFSL) and programme support functions, and mobility. This will be supplemented by developing an Emergency Response and Preparedness Team. Overall relevance and quality is to be improved by a) revising the contingency plan, b) strengthening technical aspects of the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, c) ensuring stronger links between response and advocacy, and d) developing a plan to bridge the gap between long term development and humanitarian response.

Photo credit: Tim Forster