

# **UN FLASH APPEAL BANGLADESH FLOODS 2004**

## **INDEPENDENT REVIEW MISSION REPORT**

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**November 2004**

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**This review was financed by DFID, but undertaken by two independent humanitarian consultants; the views expressed in the report are those of the consultants only.**

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

1. The large-scale flooding in Bangladesh in mid-2004 resulted in the launch of a UN inter-agency flash appeal (FA) for US\$210 million to respond to the needs of those worst affected by the disaster. The Department for International Development's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (DFID-CHAD), in conjunction with the UN's Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) decided to commission an independent review of the FA process in Bangladesh. The DFID office in Bangladesh (DFID-B) supported the review financially and also facilitated meetings with key individuals in Dhaka.

2. A team of two consultants visited Bangladesh and Geneva between 25 October and 6 November, and were provided support by an OCHA staff member; the terms of reference and itinerary for the review mission are at annex 1 and 2 respectively<sup>1</sup>. The consultants gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance extended by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), the UN country team in Dhaka, OCHA Geneva and DFID-B, all of whom gave valuable insights and time during the course of the review.

3. The overall aim of the review is to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the FA process and to draw lessons so that subsequent humanitarian responses to natural disasters in Bangladesh and elsewhere can be improved. The review was not intended to assess the execution or impact of projects funded under the FA. The outputs of this review in Bangladesh will form part of a wider process of support to OCHA in order to contribute to the improvement of the Consolidated Appeal (CAP) and FA mechanisms. In June 2003 during the Stockholm International Meeting on Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD), participating donors endorsed the Principles of Good Practice. This included contributing responsibly and on the basis of burden-sharing, to UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals, requesting that implementing humanitarian organisations fully adhere to good practice and are committed to promoting accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in implementing humanitarian action.

## **CONTEXT OF UN FLASH APPEAL BANGLADESH**

### **The Flooding**

4. Bangladesh is well known as being a highly disaster prone country, with flooding being an annual event and severe flooding occurring every four to five years. Sporadic flooding began as early as May in the north east of the country this year. This was preceded by river flooding in late June and early July that followed the normal pattern of slowly rising water levels along the main river systems. However, this pattern quickly changed with a sudden increase in water levels in the second week of July, causing flash flooding and

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<sup>1</sup> Review team consisted of Harold Lockwood, team leader, and Jane Barham; support was provided by Claude Hilfiker of OCHA Geneva

rapid flows in major rivers. Floodwaters started to recede by the end of July and into early August, but torrential downpours during the second week in September again led to localised flooding. Standing water remained for up to three months in some areas, and there are still significant numbers of people affected by the impacts of the flooding.

5. In total it is estimated that 39 of the 64 districts of the country were affected, including Dhaka city and upwards of 30 million people suffered directly as a result of these cycles of flooding. The scale of these floods puts them on a par with the 1988 and 1998 floods that affected 45 million and 31 million people respectively. According to GoB figures the flooding this year destroyed or damaged over 4 million houses and led to the displacement of at least 4 million people. There were immediate needs for water, sanitation, food and health care in shelters established by the government and extensive requirements for medium term recovery and rehabilitation. It is significant to note that although this year's flooding affected a very large part of the country, only 231 people lost their lives to drowning (out of a total number of 747 deaths) and there was no major epidemic disease outbreaks<sup>2</sup>.

## **Response**

### **UN Agencies**

6. During the last two weeks of July, UN agencies with the ability to mobilise emergency surge capacity began responding. With the support of a regional emergency focal point, UNICEF prepared an alert that went to all UNICEF's donors including National Committees for USD13.4 million. UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Response (BCPR) sent two experts from Geneva to support the local Disaster Management and Crisis Prevention Team. The Emergency Humanitarian Assistance section of WHO in Geneva offered assistance to the WHO country team and WFP were already working on the production of an EMOP.

7. In parallel with the development of these individual agency initiatives, the FA was prepared with the launch in Dhaka taking place on 12 August in the presence of the Minister of Food and Disaster Management (MoFDM), the RC, senior staff of UN agencies, the UNDAC team leader and donor representatives. The financial target for the FA was based on a percentage of the damage assessment figure of \$7 billion, which itself was arrived at on the basis of a rapid assessment carried out in late July, when flood waters still covered significant areas of the country.

### **GoB response**

8. The position of the GoB was ambiguous with regard to the handling of the flood response, with a split between those in-favour of large-scale external support (i.e. MoFDM) and those against (the Minister of Finance). The position of central government was that they could cope with the initial relief

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<sup>2</sup> Figures provided by UNICEF office in Dhaka

needs of the crisis, but would require assistance for rehabilitation efforts for which they would seek donor contributions.

9. No national appeal was launched and international assistance was only finally accepted publicly several weeks after the height of the flooding. The Minister for MoFDM attended the launch of the FA, but the following day the Minister for Finance announced to the media that no international assistance was required. These mixed messages emerging from GoB, combined with a lack of a national appeal, complicated the UN response and were a major impediment to the timeliness of the appeal as well as making it difficult for donors to react.

10. The UN relied on data from line ministries to arrive at the initial damage estimate of \$7 billion. Two damage assessments were released just following the FA launch, both contradicting the scale of damage cited in the FA; the Centre for Policy Dialogue issued the figure of \$2 billion and a joint ADB/World Bank assessment figure of \$2.2 billion. The final, revised damage assessment figure released by GoB in late October was for \$2.5 billion. It appears to be the discrepancies in damage assessments that provoked the greatest contention between the UN and the GoB regarding the appeal.

## **Donors**

11. Many donors in Bangladesh were able to provide small amounts of funding for immediate humanitarian response from local budgets and these were primarily channelled through their regular partners, such as INGOs and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and IFRC. Funding decisions regarding the response to the flooding were centrally managed at headquarters level for most donors, with the notable exception of DFID-B. The majority of donors interviewed by the review team stated that an FA is the essential mechanism for requesting funds from headquarters, but that the amount and allocation of those funds are generally decided at headquarters level.

12. For some donors, the level of detail in the FA was adequate for immediate response, whilst for others the FA acts as a 'menu' of options, which, once selected, requires more thorough project proposals. One or two donors expressed disappointment that the FA was not a more cohesive document, with a clearer list of priority actions but for the majority, the content of such a document was less relevant than the actual presence of an appeal.

13. The Bangladesh Flash Appeal remains generally under funded, currently standing at 23.3% which in monetary terms amounts to USD 48.9 million (see a summary of contributions in annex 3) although further funding is in the pipeline through a number of donors.

## **IFRC and NGOs**

14. The IFRC launched a small scale appeal on 25<sup>th</sup> July for USD 3.4 million to assist one million beneficiaries for six months. The emergency relief phase

covered food, family household kits, medical services and water purification tablets. The rehabilitation phase focused on agricultural inputs. As of the 8<sup>th</sup> September, the IFRC received 160% of their funding requirements, and as a result added a further 400,000 beneficiaries to their response.

15. Some of the larger INGOs received significant funding from various sources, both through private fundraising and bi-lateral donors for immediate response activities prior to the launch of the FA. Many INGOs have significant disaster management capacities, and work in regular partnership with donors, and were therefore in a position to respond quickly.

## **Disaster Preparedness**

16. In recent years significant progress has been made in Bangladesh towards improving preparedness and response capacities for major emergency events. The Disaster and Emergency Response (DER) sub-group of the Bangladesh Local Consultative Group (LCG) has been in existence since the floods in 2000 and played a significant role in the response to the flooding this year. WFP acts as the Secretariat for this group and remains as the focal point for emergency response in the UN system. The DER activated six sectoral working groups for the first time, which included NGOs, UN agencies, government and donor representatives, the international financing banks and IFRC/BDRCS. The DER facilitated and managed the first major rapid assessment of damage caused by the flooding in the last weeks of July.

17. The GoB already has an extensive network of disaster management personnel working under the MoFDM, reaching to district and sub-district levels. The Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) was launched at the start of 2004 after several years of planning; this is an initiative of the international community and GoB, facilitated by UNDP, to improve the national capacity to better prepare for and respond to disasters.

18. Whilst the government is in the process of changing policies and strategies from a response-orientated position, it is also important to recognise the work carried out by the NGO community in Bangladesh regarding preparedness over recent years. With funding support from a range of donors, both national and international NGOs have engaged in educational and awareness campaigns as well as in practical mitigation and preparedness measures.

## **FLASH APPEAL PROCESS**

### **In-country UN**

19. As of 12 July, the UN believed that this year's flood pattern was still within a normal range, but days after this it became clear that the situation was worsening. The UNDMT was activated by the RC a.i. on 18 July as a forum for UN agencies to come to an agreed position on the severity of the flood situation and determine their response. A further UNDMT meeting was held on 27 July, where it was decided to launch a flash appeal. The role of the RC was covered by four people during the initial three week period of the crisis,

and several heads of agencies and senior staff were out of the country during this period. The UNDMT was supported by UNDP's new Disaster Management and Crisis Prevention Team, created under the CDMP in January of this year. See annex 4 for a detailed chronology of key events and decisions regarding the flood response and FA process.

20. The DER met regularly from early July, and provided a forum for information sharing. The DER established an operations room in the WFP offices on 22 July and agreed to conduct a quick assessment process to determine need. The Secretariat designed and implemented a process to consolidate the many assessments already conducted and reports produced largely by district level government, as well as NGOs and UN field staff. These surveys were carried out between 20 and 27 July and resulted in the completion of a series of rapid emergency needs assessments, which were presented to the Government on 28 July 2004. This provided the basis for the UN Flash Appeal. A further and more thorough assessment carried out in September corroborated these findings, although admitted that it was hard to distinguish between acute flood needs and the chronic 'normal' situation.

21. On 16 July, the RC a.i. agreed with UNOCHA Geneva to receive two OCHA staff members to reinforce the UN flood response capability. Their ToR included assisting in sector coordination for response activities through the UNDMT and DER, and advising OCHA Geneva on the need to activate other OCHA response tools.

### **OCHA Geneva**

22. OCHA Geneva has undertaken significant work on guidance and support to country teams on the CAP process. The CAP Section had plans to develop a similar process for the FA, but other priorities resulted in delays. Currently there is a general agreement in OCHA that rather than being a simplified version of the CAP, a new format will need to be considered for the FA.

23. OCHA Geneva provided generic guidelines for the development of the FA in Bangladesh, and supported this by sending a two-person team who arrived in country on 19 July. Their function was to support the RC in the coordination of the response to the crisis. The two OCHA staff were highly appreciated by the UN country team and contributed to the overall response effort; between them they stayed in country for almost one month.

24. On 29 July, OCHA Geneva received permission to send an UNDAC team to Bangladesh, with initial approval granted through the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh in Geneva. The UN country team felt they were not adequately consulted about this decision, nor about the requirement or suitability of an UNDAC team deployment, which in fact they viewed as not being appropriate at the time. OCHA Geneva were influenced in the decision to send a team by the apparent indecisiveness in regard to the UN response in country.

25. When the RC a.i. became aware of the decision to deploy an UNDAC team, the UNDMT drew up ToR that would match the gaps in country. These

TORs were discussed in Geneva with the UNDAC team leader, who while recognizing that they fell outside the normal functions performed by UNDAC, agreed to assist the country team in whatever capacity they required. The UNDAC team arrived in Bangladesh on the 31 July 2004 and left shortly after the launch of the appeal. The team included six persons, none of whom had significant prior experience with writing FA or CAPs.

### **Development of Appeal**

26. The data sources for the Flash Appeal were based on information and analysis from the DER working groups, largely drawn from the DER assessment presented on 28 July. The DER sectoral working groups, each headed by a UN agency then prepared sector specific details and UN agencies submitted outline project proposals. The OCHA staff in Dhaka prepared a first draft, and the UNDAC team leader was then largely responsible for finalising the document and pulling together the overall appeal, using other of the UNDAC team members to support some of the sectoral working groups.

27. The date for the launch was decided collectively in country as being the earliest possible date for compiling all necessary elements for the appeal. The scope and amount of the appeal was subject to much debate both within the UNDMT and the DER, and between the UNDAC team and OCHA Geneva, with OCHA Geneva advising a ceiling of \$50 million. In country it was felt that the flood was commensurate to that which occurred in 1998, and therefore merited a similar scale of response in financial terms.

### **FLASH APPEAL DOCUMENT**

28. The document consists of an introduction and background to the flooding, a synopsis of the response to date and nine thematic components, largely based on the original DER assessment sector working groups, but in addition including a component for coordination and support services.

### **Coherence and Consistency**

29. There is a lack of consistency between and within various sectoral components of the FA covering aspects such as working modalities and costings. For example in determining the costs per beneficiary for family shelter, two widely differing figures are provided side by side for projects to be implemented by different UN agencies. The IOM projection for shelter provision is \$7 per family, whereas the figure for UNDP is more than double this at \$160 per family<sup>3</sup>. These discrepancies illustrate wider inconsistencies, and apparent lack of consultation between UN agencies in the preparation of the FA.

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<sup>3</sup> The intended figure from IOM for their housing proposal was \$140, 000 for 2,000 families, but a mistake was made with this figure in the FA and it was printed as \$14,000; despite repeated attempts by IOM to have this error rectified it was presented as this figure in the final hard copy of the FA.

30. In total nine UN agencies were represented in the FA; see annex 5 for a breakdown of agencies and sectors. In some of the sectors more than one UN agency is involved in response interventions. The FA indicates that UNDP, ILO and IOM will all work in the area of economic recovery and infrastructure, and that in addition all three agencies will work with the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) as one of their main counterparts. Equally, three UN agencies (UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA) all intend to work in the area of emergency health in conjunction with various departments of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

31. The FA document does not make clear how these various inter-related activities involving more than one UN agency will be coordinated and managed, both in order to avoid duplication, as well as to maximise cost-effectiveness. For example, water purification tablets were procured in bulk by three separate UN agencies (UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO) for the same GoB ministry during the same phase of the emergency, with each one carrying out independent procurement procedures.

32. Equally, the issue of overall coordination of FA activities is not clearly spelt out in the document. Although the appeal includes funding proposals for an OCHA staff member, there is ambiguity about the respective responsibilities of the RC, OCHA and the DER with regard to management of the FA process and monitoring of progress.

### **Scope and relevance**

33. The FA document contains a wide range of interventions including immediate humanitarian needs, as well as activities that are of medium to longer-term nature, such as studies into flood resistant housing design. A brief analysis of the eight operational sector components reveals that about half of intended activities are longer-term in nature, about a third could be considered as viable within a six-month period and only approximately 20% of activities focus on urgent life-saving needs in the immediate sense. Therefore, on balance the scope of the FA is very broad and goes beyond immediate, or even post-flood emergency needs.

34. The distribution of interventions in monetary terms equates to approximately \$47 million for truly emergency response, about \$60 million for the short-term and \$113 million for longer-term recovery programmes. However, the limitations of the flash appeal structure and the delays in disbursement of funds means that after almost three months into the six month implementation period, very little of the committed money has been received by implementing partners and therefore spent on the ground.

35. Although the range of humanitarian interventions identified in the FA were appropriate to the needs of the flood affected population at the time of its launch, the emergency situation has changed considerably. With the added delays of disbursement of funds, many of the immediate needs originally identified in FA are no longer relevant. The FA does not present any system to account for changing needs and priorities over time.

## **Objectives, Indicators and Standards**

36. There are clear instructions in the OCHA guidelines to define objectives that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound). The Bangladesh FA includes objectives that range from the very vague (e.g.: *“help provide safe drinking water for up to 30 million people during the flood”*), to objectives that are slightly better defined (i.e. *“provide all children between 24 – 59 months with anthelmintic treatment once in six months”*). However, none of the objectives described in the FA fully meet the criteria as defined under the SMART approach.

37. The FA guidelines also call for the description of indicators in the response plans, but none are included in the Bangladesh appeal. In addition, there is no common monitoring system described in the FA, rather each component comments on the issue of monitoring with varying levels of detail. There is no mention of the possibility of combining monitoring in areas where more than one UN agency is active, thereby increasing efficiencies and reducing costs.

38. The FA does not include the use of humanitarian standards in relation to the provision of emergency relief. Despite the brief nature of the document it is notable that this issue is not even raised in general terms in the introductory sections of the appeal.

## **Funding disbursement and prioritisation**

39. The FA document makes only passing reference to mechanisms for disbursement of funding given by donors on the basis of the appeal. It explains that OCHA could provide a channel for un-earmarked funding, but does not clarify if this would incur any additional overhead charges. The FA does not describe any other potential modalities for the management of funds, nor how funding will be prioritised, either by sector or by agency, in case that the appeal is under-funded (i.e. criteria to be applied for decision-making and management models, such as the establishment of an FA management committee).

40. In this response UNDP activated the UN “through-funding” mechanism that allows for funds to be channelled through one UN agency and passed on to another, as a means of receiving funding for joint programming from a single donor. This is a very new UN system-wide mechanism and was therefore applied for the first time in Bangladesh.

## **Absorption Capacity**

41. The FA target is for a significant sum of money and whilst the UN agencies are not direct implementers, they are responsible to ensure that funds can be passed on to implementing partners in a timely and transparent manner and that projects are properly monitored and reported on. A summary of financial information, comparing appeal targets with the average annual budgets of the UN agencies in country is given at annex 6. These figures illustrate that a

number of agencies put in bids to the FA that were many times their normal operating budgets. For example, ILO appealed for \$11.5 million, representing 330% of their \$3.5 million annual budget; likewise UNDP requested \$64 million, equal to 256% of their annual budget.

42. Only two of the sector components in the FA mention the issue of absorption capacity, and in neither case see this as a possible constraining factor. However, even the larger UN agencies such as UNDP and UNICEF, commented that they would find it very difficult to programme funds on this scale if the appeal were to be well funded. The issue of capacity to manage and monitor funding of this magnitude is critical in terms of accountability, especially given that in many cases the UN implementing partners are GoB line ministries. With very large sums of money involved there is the real risk of swamping partners, even well regulated NGOs, and creating the conditions for the misappropriation of funds<sup>4</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

43. On the basis of the review of documentation and interviews carried out, both in Dhaka and in Geneva, the review team has reached the following main conclusions with regard to the Bangladesh FA:

- i. The limited number of UN agencies that were able to respond to the flooding on the basis of individual appeals did so in a timely and effective manner before the FA was launched. The DER performed well and represents a significant improvement in information management and coordination from the 2000 floods.
- ii. The Bangladesh FA does not describe a truly cohesive and integrated response on the part of the UN, rather it is a collection of distinct sector project proposals, which are not fully complementary. This has resulted in the absence of any phased approach to the response that is able to both prioritise and account for the changing nature of needs.
- iii. The FA was not an appropriate mechanism to respond to immediate needs and was therefore not effective from a humanitarian perspective. The process was too time-consuming and impractical given the number of agencies involved, institutional differences and constraints caused by bureaucratic procedures. To date very little of the FA funds have reached beneficiaries. Equally the FA is not sufficiently comprehensive to be considered as an adequate vehicle for addressing rehabilitation and recovery requirements. The FA, as executed in Bangladesh, falls between these two objectives.
- iv. As a fund-raising tool the FA was successful in raising the visibility of the crisis in Bangladesh and provided justification for many donor agencies to request additional funding for post-flood emergency response. The FA also served an important political function given the problematic position

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<sup>4</sup> A very recent ADB publication highlights the issue of leakage in food for work and public infrastructure projects in Bangladesh (ADB Quarterly Update, September 2004, pg. 14).

of the GoB and the mixed signals during the height of the crisis regarding the need for international assistance.

44. In addition, the review team reached the following specific conclusions:

### **Process**

45. At the time of the floods OCHA had not yet fully refined the FA guidelines (centrally) and as such, these provided limited guidance on the process of developing the appeal in Bangladesh.

46. In the flood response the OCHA FA guidelines were not fully followed. The scope of the appeal went beyond what was clearly feasible within the six-month time period. It did not indicate priority humanitarian needs, nor indicate any type of phased approach to programming of the response.

47. The formal launch of the appeal was, to a large extent, contingent upon political acceptance by the GoB. The GoB handling of the emergency throughout the critical stages of the flooding was coloured by political considerations; this position complicated decision-making for all players.

48. There is a lack of clear understanding about a number of important issues, such as the differences between an FA and a CAP and funding support and disbursement mechanisms. Certain UN agencies had unrealistic expectations about what funding may result from the process, and wrongly equated a consolidated appeal with a consolidated funding process.

49. Roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined prior to the crisis, and therefore too much management time was taken up discussing and negotiating inter-agency issues during the response.

### **In-country UN agencies and management issues**

50. The UN agencies in-country appear to have sufficient technical capacity to carry out functions of data collection, assessment and sectoral analysis, but there was clearly a gap in the collective ability to translate these needs into a coherent and fully integrated appeal.

51. UN implementation capacity to respond immediately to an emergency is limited to one or two agencies. It is very questionable whether some of the other UN agencies within the FA would be able to respond operationally within the six-month time frame. There are indications that one or two UN agencies viewed the FA process as an opportunity to raise funds for their regular long-term programming.

52. The FA is overly ambitious when considering the management capacity of UN agencies and their implementing partners. Funding on a scale envisioned under the FA would be difficult to disburse responsibly and may have created serious problems in terms of monitoring and accountability.

53. The mechanism of through-funding used by UNDP has not worked well. There have been significant bureaucratic delays, both on the donor side and UNDP, resulting in serious credibility problems with implementation partners. In part this is due to the fact that this was a new and, as yet, un-tested procedure.

54. The UN played a positive role in facilitating the response through the DER Secretariat at a technical level. However, UN leadership was not sufficiently proactive in challenging the position of the GoB, in terms of the need for additional international assistance for the humanitarian response.

### **OCHA Geneva**

55. The deployment of the UNDAC team was led from Geneva, and pushed politically through the Bangladesh permanent mission, without adequate consultation with the UN country team. The perceived indecisiveness of the RC a.i. and UNDMT in country was a major factor in the decision to launch the UNDAC team.

56. The UNDAC team was not the most appropriate mechanism for the challenges facing the UN country team. In spite of this, once the UNDAC team arrived in country, their flexibility coupled with familiarity of some of the team members with working within an emergency response framework was appreciated by the UN country team.

### **DER and Needs Assessment**

57. The DER and sectoral working groups are a positive development, with information sharing as a strong feature; this helped to some degree to avoid duplication and contributed to complementarity with other appeals.

58. As a rapid methodology, the DER-led assessment was adequate. However, given that it relied largely on government data, which was collected when water levels were still high, the final figures quoted for infrastructure damage were over-estimated.

### **Substance of FA**

59. The immediate emergency phase is now over, and the appeal period is almost halfway through, therefore many of the activities described in the FA will no longer be relevant. In addition, it may now be more difficult to differentiate between those needs caused by the flooding and those associated with chronic poverty.

60. There is no questioning of the scale of the needs facing those affected by the floods in Bangladesh. However, the FA does not take adequate account of the ability of the UN and its partners to implement the proposed activities in a timely manner; therefore, the review team concludes that the appeal target was not appropriate and too high.

## Donor Response

61. The FA was an essential trigger for many donors to request additional emergency funding. The disappointing donor response to the FA to date was driven by a number of factors other than the content or quality of the appeal, namely:

- i. Competing global humanitarian priorities at exactly the same time as the FA (the so-called “Darfur factor”);
- ii. Timing of the appeal relative to donor financial year cycles and availability of funds;
- iii. Level of media interest and exposure to the event in respective donor country.

62. The absence of any clear system for prioritising funding or interventions in the FA, presented problems for some donors who were unsure as to how a small contribution could be used most effectively within the framework of a very large appeal.

63. There are significant differences in overhead charging structures for emergency programmes, both inside and outside of the FA. This appears to be an influencing factor for donors in decision-making about how and when to respond.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for the FA process in Bangladesh

64. Given the cyclical and predictable nature of flooding in Bangladesh, the UN system must be better prepared to respond; there are several options that could be considered:

Option 1: Respond to urgent humanitarian needs by launching an immediate integrated FA when the event is still on-going.

Option 2: Launch individual responses based only on those agencies with a known capacity to scale up in the short term (e.g. WFP, UNICEF), with the prior agreement of the RC and UNDMT.

Option 3: Decide not to make an immediate response, but to develop a more considered and detailed integrated appeal (such as a CAP) focussing on a protracted response that includes recovery and rehabilitation and a broader range of UN agencies.

65. Despite the known constraints of the UN system to respond rapidly, the review team recognises the very important role that was played in raising visibility through the launch of the FA. The FA is also a critical trigger for donor funding. Therefore, the review team recommends the first option described above for UN involvement in any humanitarian response to large-scale crises in Bangladesh. However, this must be contingent upon both the UN and donors making concerted efforts to reform and improve the existing FA process, and above all to make it faster.

66. In order to achieve this, the review team recommends that the UN in Bangladesh develop comprehensive contingency planning to address known systemic weaknesses and to prepare, as far as possible, for an immediate response involving a FA. This process should include the following:

### **Systems**

- Establishing realistic ceilings for appeals, based on the financial and management absorption capacity of agencies, whilst recognising the absolute scale of needs.
- Establishing pre-arranged financial agreements with donors that allow for the rapid transfer of funds within country.
- To carry out a joint UNDP-donor lesson learning and refinement process of the through-funding financial disbursement mechanism.
- Agreeing on a clear division of responsibility between UN agencies and having only one UN agency per sector for the humanitarian phase of the response, including for procurement of relief materials.
- Agreeing on common standards, approaches and indicators in each sector for the design of interventions and monitoring purposes.
- Agreeing on common unit costs, including cash for work rates.
- Identification and pre-vetting of suppliers, as well as establishing agreements for the supply of known material inputs in bulk.
- Analysis of rainfall and river level data and predictions prior to the flooding season.
- The review and up-dating of all aspects of the inter-agency contingency planning every year by April at the latest.

68. The DER sectoral groups are the most appropriate for reaching agreements on many of the above issues. Therefore these groups should be encouraged to continue and supported by donors during the “non-emergency” period; where appropriate these should link up with existing LCG sector groups. The DER sub-groups should be encouraged to develop templates wherever possible, to agreed upon parameters, in order to speed up the development of a FA document. The UN Bangladesh country team should be fully apprised of all available OCHA support tools and should share their contingency planning with Geneva on a regular basis.

### **Phased Response**

- The response should be planned by phases, with a first phase of interventions for immediate response of no more than 14 days, to be reviewed and possibly extended as the emergency unfolds.
- The initial phase should be limited to life-saving sectors such as: emergency feeding, water and sanitation; temporary shelter; emergency health provision and protection of vulnerable groups where appropriate
- The initial phase should be limited to UN agencies with known capacity to respond within 48 hours: i.e. UNICEF, WFP, WHO.

- A second phase of response to address post-emergency and livelihood needs as affected people return home, including interventions such as cash for work programmes, house-rebuilding and support to re-starting agriculture and other appropriate livelihood options.
- The second phase of response should last for a period of up to six months, and therefore should not include activities of a long-term nature (i.e. studies, major infrastructure rehabilitation etc.)

### **Wider recommendations for FA guidelines and process**

69 The review team recognises that some of the lessons emerging from Bangladesh will be relevant for other emergencies and the refinement of the generic FA guidelines. However, broader lesson-learning will only apply to contexts of a similar nature; i.e. natural disasters that are frequent, seasonal and reasonably predictable in nature (cyclones and hurricanes, river flooding etc.). Recommendations include:

- The OCHA CAP Section should, as soon as possible, review and modify the FA guidelines and allow for a refinement based on different natural disaster scenarios.
- An FA should always be based on good contingency planning that is regularly up-dated by in-country UN teams.
- Guidelines to include improved systems within the FA process to allow for identifying and updating of priorities as the emergency evolves.
- An FA should be launched within a matter of days following a brief needs assessment being carried out.
- FA should adopt a phased approach to response, which differentiates clearly between immediate life-saving needs and subsequent rehabilitation and recovery needs.
- Investigate the use of templates, within agreed parameters, which can be easily modified to specific country contexts.
- Provide training and guidelines for managing the process, as distinct from guidelines for producing the document (i.e. increased knowledge about funding disbursement mechanisms).
- Establish clear and transparent mechanisms for disbursement and prioritisation of funding, including transparent overhead charges.
- Clarify roles and protocols within UN system for UNDAC and other OCHA tools in FA process.
- Review approval of an FA at UN headquarter agency level and establish a fast-track decision-making process that can ensure a turnaround in hours rather than days.
- OCHA Geneva desks to invest in a process of familiarisation with disaster management issues and players in countries with most frequent and predictable natural disaster events (i.e. engage with UN country offices, government counterparts, IFRC etc.)

69. Finally the review team notes that these recommendations should be viewed in a broader context, through which the GHD forum ensures that

donors continue to encourage and support the improvement of the FA guidelines and process.