

Lessons

for complex conflict emergencies

December 2013

LESSONS

from previous emergencies¹

Introduction

Learning from the past to inform the future is the core of WFP's approach to Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Knowledge Management. With each new crisis, the Emergency Preparedness Division makes available learning from earlier emergencies so that we can continually improve the way we respond. This is a standard operating procedure for all Level 3 and Level 2 emergencies, and has already been applied to the Sahel 2012, Syria, and Philippines crises.

Below is a summary compilation of issues that have arisen in previous emergencies, which are similar in nature and scope to the 2013 Central African Republic (CAR) crisis. This summary aims to inform Managers and staff involved in the CAR emergency response on previous experiences and possible challenges in order to improve the way we respond this time around.

Early Warning

- The Government of Uzbekistan is a difficult and strong counterpart, even though with this crisis, they made every effort to appear open and helpful. WFP was however caught out by the change in approach once the refugees started to return home. When implementing the initial emergency response, WFP (ODEP) should undertake some basic political and conflict analysis at HQ level to inform the new CO management. This could perhaps be an inter-agency initiative (Kyrg 10).
- Investment in prevention and preparedness to respond to a potential crisis in a timely manner and advanced planning for emergencies should be strengthened. (South Sudan 12).

¹, Kosovo 1999, Lebanon 2006, Pakistan 2010, Haiti 2010, Sahel 2010 and South Sudan 2012, Syria 2012
For more information on Lessons Learned of past emergencies, kindly refer to <http://epweb.wfp.org/ep2/learned/>



Management

- Establish a practical compliance structure at management level, as part of the accountability and transparency structure, at the beginning of the emergency (Sahel 10).
- “As we are already responding at Level 3, we are ahead of the curve for any system-wide activation. We will need to remain in communication over this period and no doubt you are regularly checking your emails. As a prudent readiness measure, however, over the holiday period we will adopt the simple protocol below, which aims to a minimal level of coverage while aiming not to be too intrusive on your leave and holiday plans:
 - For the actual official holidays, Divisional OICs should remain contactable by telephone and checking email regularly (at least each evening Rome time);
 - Each Rome HQ Division should provide in-person (as opposed to dial in) representation at each Operational Task Force meeting (Mondays and Thursdays) and, if possible, maintain an OIC within a two hour drive of HQ outside normal working hours.
 - Check that mobile telephone contact details in WFPGo are correct and confirm this as well as any corrections to HQ. Situation.Room@wfp.org by 18:00 on 23 December. This is especially important for those who will be Divisional OICs.
 - The Situation Room will carry out at least one communications check over the Christmas/New Year period by email and/or SMS. (Syria).

Human Resources

Deployment

- In a difficult environment such as the Republic of South Sudan, and in the event of a CR, WFP should consider prioritizing the deployment of Logistics staff with previous experience in the country and/or region (South Sudan 12).
- The reconnaissance team lacked some key staff that would have helped get the job done faster during the first days of the emergency.
 - Recommendation: Balance Start-Up Team –if the security situation allows it- also include a finance officer, a reports officer, a programme officer, a public information officer and support staff for the security officer (Leb 06).
- Staff being deployed from HQ were delayed due to the confusion on the procedures of how to get visas quickly.
 - Recommendations: a) Issue guidance on obtaining visas on the first day of the emergency, and intervene with relevant embassies to request fast-track visa procedures for WFP staff being deployed; and b) Create pre-deployment and arrival packages for all staff being deployed (LEB 06).
- In the event of a scale up that involves recruitment of new national staff, national staff on TDY should be paired with newly recruited local staff to mentor and pass on their knowledge (South Sudan 12).

- Following the Syria Task Force meeting, bottlenecks around the renewal of UN Laissez Passer for colleagues involved in the Syria operation have since been addressed under separate cover.
 - As agreed, WFP met with HR and the Protocol Office to discuss more generally how the issuance of UNLPs to staff engaged in L3 corporate emergencies could be expedited.
 - The most critical development is the agreement from the Visa Unit of UN office in Geneva to process all WFP UNLP applications that are marked ‘L3 Emergency’ within 4 working days. This change, in conjunction with some small process changes at the field office and HQ HR/Protocol Office levels, will result in a staff member waiting no more than 16 workings days from the time the application is dispatched to the physical receipt of the new UNLP (Syria)

Staff-Wellbeing

- A further issue related to national staff was the importance of ensuring that conditions for national staff, particularly those in remote areas of particular hardship, were equal to those of other agencies. It was reported that the retention of national staff was sometimes difficult as other agencies provided better living conditions and incentives.
 - In areas where conditions are very difficult, WFP needs to make sure that conditions for national staff are considered so that staff are retained and that WFP does not lose them to other agencies. (South Sudan 12)
- Ensure counsellors continue to be deployed to future emergencies as required. One respondent recommended that counsellors should be fully engaged with emergency work on the ground while providing counsel along the way (described by one respondent as “the Médecins Sans Frontières model”) (Haiti 10).
- In large-scale emergencies with heavy impact on WFP staff, consider deploying counsellors to areas where staff will be evacuated to, or to R&R locations (eg. the official safe-haven) (Haiti 10).
- Subject to conditions on the ground, consider implementing mandatory rest periods to support sustainable working hours and mitigate the risk of exhaustion (Haiti 10).
- Ensure emergency-specific medical services and partner agreements are identified and communicated to staff, for example by inclusion in information packages. (See 2.7 - one respondent also proposed that medical contact details could be pre-loaded on the SIM cards distributed to staff) (Haiti 10).
- Institute leave policy for staff - including those on TDY - in order to manage stress levels (Sahel 10).

Resource Management

- Devise a safe and viable system to make sufficient levels of cash available to emergency managers being deployed to emergencies (Leb 06).
- WFP should consider formalizing the creation of a Supply Chain Management Working Group as a sub-group of the task force (South Sudan 12).



Donor Relations/Public Information

- Review procedures for clearance of press releases and press messaging to avoid lengthy clearance delays (Leb 06).
- As the situation in Syria becomes more complex and since L3 corporate emergency is declared, donors interest on WFP operations in Syria and the neighbouring countries is growing.
 - In order to ensure consistency, kindly note only CD, Regional External Relations Officer and EC/DEC are authorised to deal with donor representatives at the field level. Emergency Coordinators in each of the COs, who are already doing a great job in liaising with donor focal points in their respective countries, will also continue doing so.
 - All other staff are requested to refrain from giving any statement to donors or external parties unless instructed otherwise by CD or EC/DEC. Any donor requests at the field and regional level should be referred to Regional External Relations Officer or HQ External Relations Officer and they will take it from there (Syria)

ICT

- A stock of VHF radios, GPS and satellite phones (Thurayas) should be held at the logistics hubs for call forward as these items are generally unable to be imported by staff (South Sudan 12).

Security

- Create surge capacity to support corporate emergencies (Leb 06).
- Surge capacity for Security Officers must be a priority in a CR environment, particularly those with a higher security level (South Sudan 12).
- There was excellent collaboration with the UN office in Jerusalem to which WFP seconded a Liaison Officer, which facilitated the concurrence of convoys and avoided casualties during the period of bombardment. However, the division of Lebanon under two Security Coordinators was an unnecessary complication for the delivery of assistance.
 - Recommendations: Draft guidance/procedures to include the point that only one Security Coordinator should direct the movement of personnel and goods in the area where the humanitarian operation is taking place (Leb 06).
- Define clear roles and responsibilities of the security personnel both UNDSS and WFP during the onset of an emergency including the security staff deployed in support of the Logistic and Telecommunications Clusters. b) Review the policy for the use of armoured vehicles (Leb 06).
- Determine whether feasible/useful to have stand-by stocks of security gear in Rome due to delays in deployment while equipment was en route from Brindisi (Leb 06).

- Despite the deployment of a second international Security Officer for four months, it was still difficult to meet the requirements of the CO. As an example, on a number of occasions security assessments were done after logistics had been obliged to erect the rub halls, and for security this meant that it needed to ensure that staff were adequately and thoroughly briefed on this.
 - The importance of consulting with security should be borne in mind when expanding operations and establishing offices and warehouses (South Sudan 12).
- Security personnel reported the difficulty in bridging requirements of UNDSS with WFP operational requirements. In particular, they cited their inability to approve field missions that did not involve the mandatory MOSS-compliant two vehicles.
 - A fleet of MOSS-compliant vehicles should be ready for call forward for CRs (South Sudan 12).

Programme

- There was a considerable delay in the food distribution once the food arrived in country. WFP in Lebanon was trying to work with local municipalities and NGOs who were either not available or busy with their own work.
 - Recommendation: Consider direct implementation, depending on the situation. Deploy more staff who have experience in distributing food in emergencies, and who could do the first distribution rounds until alternatives are in place (Leb 06).
- WFP traditional food aid commodities did not easily match Government of Lebanon food requirements for the affected population or the population's needs. WFP does not have a "first response food items" culture, and generally provides bulk food commodities instead of "ready-to-eat" items e.g. MREs, HDRs, etc, (the exception being HEBs, which have limited utility in many situations).
 - Recommendation: a) Define a Ready-To-Eat food strategy, which looks beyond HEBs, and which takes into consideration the varying social and cultural habits of the populations being assisted. (Leb 06)
- Field Level Agreements (FLA) proved to be too difficult to implement during an Emergency.
 - Recommendation: Review FLAs and adjust for flexibility during times of emergency (Leb 06).
- In corporate response, WFP should adopt a culture whereby the Programme Unit, through vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM), provides provisional estimates that can be used for planning purposes. These can then be refined once better information or assessments are done. Seasonality should also be factored in during the planning phase and thus influence the timing and choice of transfer modality. (South Sudan 12).
- The joint WFP/FAO food economy assessment was undertaken as soon as WFP re-entered Kosovo. This allowed WFP to start out the operation with a clear Exit Strategy, and to lead the food aid sector discussions in a convincing manner with partners and donors (Kos 99)
- The determination of ration sizes and their duration should take into account all factors affecting food intake, including redistribution, inter-familial sharing, and the absence of nutrient-rich commodities for extended periods of time. Criteria for reducing rations should be established and applied systematically (Sudan 03).

- Where there are large disparities in food needs amongst targeted groups, ration sizes and the duration should be weighted towards the most vulnerable/food insecure end of the spectrum, rather than taking an average which would result in considerably less assistance being provided than the most vulnerable require (Sudan 03).
- WFP should determine the extent to which it is meeting its objective of targeting women and children with high nutritional value commodities and devise strategies to rectify problems identified (e.g. in relation to actual consumption within the household) (Sudan 03).
- WFP also needs to ask more gender specific questions in the post-distribution monitoring, and pay particular attention to monitoring assistance for extremely vulnerable groups (Darfur 06).

Civil-Military Coordination

- Collaboration with NATO was essential in the Kosovo emergency. While good collaboration was achieved, military does not always understand operational principles of humanitarian organizations
 - Intensify military liaison training in WFP (Kos 99)
- Ensure general awareness of, and where necessary staff training on, principles of humanitarian civil-military coordination in general, and their application by WFP in emergencies specifically. Consider including in WFP emergency training programmes (Haiti 10)
- Ensure readiness to deploy experts in aviation coordination, both for civilian and for civil-military aviation coordination (Haiti 10)
- Consider implementing guidance for civil-military Air Operation Coordination mechanisms, building upon experience in Pakistan with Joint Aviation Coordination Cell (Pak 10).

Procurement

- In addition to the biscuits, a strategic stock of MREs at all times, as in all emergencies biscuits are appreciated, but cannot be the only food given to people even for a few days. MREs usually have a long life and we can develop/design a cheaper option to the ones currently available (Kryg 10)

Sub-Office

- Review the security setup at Sub-Offices and, if needed, explore ways to match resources to needs (Sahel 10).
- Ensure that Sub-Offices are MOSS-compliant (Sahel 10).
- Appoint Focal Points for administrative matters in Sub-Offices, in order to facilitate access to key documents (Sahel 10).
- Seek approval from the Country Director (CD) to transfer cash to the Sub-Office through UNHAS (Sahel 10).

- Develop a pipeline format that clearly shows requirements, shortfalls and arrivals per Sub-Office. A weekly pipeline split by Sub-Office would show when and where shortfalls are expected; decisions on allocation of new arrivals within the country could then be based on this pipeline (Sahel 10).
- Maintain a regular schedule of meetings with heads of Sub-Offices (Sahel 10).
- Consider ways to better consolidate information at Sub-Office, CO and RB levels and to ensure that CD, DCD, PI and concerned technical areas jointly formulate messaging in line with WFP's communications strategy (Sahel 10).
- Develop and circulate administrative guidelines and operating procedures for office set-up in emergencies, in conditions where such services are critical but basic facilities and systems may not exist (Pak 10).
- Consider reviewing fast-track procedures for provision of cash/operational advances, especially with regards to support for scale-up of operations in emergency scenarios (ie new Sub-Offices and hubs, or other occasions where cash held in remote locations). Consider also revising delegations of authority and/or fast-track procedures for assigning signatories for imprest/sub-imprest accounts in new offices (Pak 10).
- Respondents in Chad also deplored what they considered to be insufficient support and resources for reporting as this had made the management of reporting streams from six new Sub-Offices especially challenging. Increased training in qualitative reporting was mooted as a partial solution to these challenges (Sahel 10).
- Numerous respondents, in particular those based in Sub-Offices, highlighted the poor state of WFP vehicles. These vehicles are essential for their work, and they recommended that greater efforts be made to ensure proper maintenance and improved availability (Sahel 10).
- WFP urgently needs to review the allocation of staff to different locations. In this operation, there were too many staff in country offices in capital cities and too few with sufficient experience and seniority at field offices and sub-offices. (Tsunami 2004).
- Field monitoring visits by WFP staff are not regular. One FFW project had never been visited/monitored since the start of the project in April 2010. Monitoring checklists for the different activities (school feeding, FFW, nutrition) are not consistently and uniformly used by monitors. There was a lack of proper planning for the coming months on monitoring and evaluation of projects. The SO did not regularly and comprehensively monitor and follow-up on the status of their projects. There were lapses in some food storages. (Haiti 10).