

2010

**JOINT EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS AND
RESPONSE PLANNING
WORKSHOP**



SUMMARY REPORT



OPM

This report captures the outcomes of a workshop convened by the office of the Prime Minister in Uganda and facilitated jointly with an Inter-Agency Team.

It is intended to serve as a tool for advocacy of good practice for other Humanitarian teams in the region. The collaboration between experts illustrates the motto **“Preparing Together for Joint Response”**



Joint Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning

Uganda has since 2000 experienced natural disasters (drought, landslides, epidemics, and floods) that have tended to become more frequent with the effects of climate change, and manmade hazards or terrorism, manifested by the recent bomb attacks during July 2010 in Kampala. Despite recurrent floods, drought, and landslides a combination of lack of preparedness and inadequate attention to the hazards by the Government has contributed to incalculable losses to both property and human lives. Some of the natural disasters were slow onset disasters like the cholera outbreak that could have been averted with adequate preparedness and prevention measures.

“Disasters do not just happen but are a series of events that if left unattended can lead to massive destruction of property and loss of lives”.

In an effort to mitigate the effects of these occurrences and plan for future responses a group of concerned humanitarian agencies together with officials from the Department of Disaster Preparedness and Management in the office of the Prime Minister (OPM) organized and convened an Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning workshop from 9th to 13th August 2010. The workshop brought together technical participants from the line ministries, NGO's and UN agencies.

The main recommendation from the workshop was the establishment of a taskforce under the disaster risk reduction (DRR) platform to follow-up on conclusions and outcomes of the workshop. Members of this taskforce were nominated during the workshop and include representation from OPM, UNICEF, WHO, OCHA, the Police, and Ministry of Health. Other recommendations from the workshop included: establishing a rapid response team under the DRR platform; consolidation of a rapid assessment tool; developing a multi-hazard early warning system for the country; conducting an annual humanitarian profiling exercise; setting up of a disaster management information system; establishing a system of minimum standards for humanitarian action; setting up a supplies and logistics planning and management tool for national preparedness and response; establishment of a contingency fund under OPM; operationalization of the National/District Emergency Coordination and Operations Centres (NECOC/DECOC); and conducting lessons learnt exercises to improve coordination, preparedness, and response.

The taskforce was mandated to commence its tasks almost immediately under clear leadership from OPM and outcomes fed into the national DRR policy being developed by OPM. It is envisaged that this would guide preparedness actions and concretize the formation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) for the NECOC to enable timely and efficient response to disasters as and when they occur in the country. A detailed work-plan and timeframe that will be used by OPM to follow-up on outcomes from the workshop was developed on the last day and is attached in the annex to the main report. All the action points from the session proceedings of the four days were consolidated and used for developing a work-plan.

Recommendations:

1. Task force under DRR platform with a clear work-plan

Most often good action points or recommendations from workshops are seldom implemented especially when roles and responsibilities are not assigned to specific persons, agencies, or departments. Very good outcomes from productive workshops have often ended up on book shelves.

Establishment of a task force under the DRR platform and with a clear work plan would ensure that outcomes and recommendations on the 10 key emergency preparedness and response (EPR) issues agreed upon during the workshop are implemented within the agreed timeframe.

The suggested composition of this task force included representation from the department of disaster preparedness and management of OPM, Government line ministries, UN agencies and NGO's that are current members of the DRR platform.

2. Rapid Response Team

Responses to disasters in the country by Government have always been haphazard and undertaken predominantly by key humanitarian agencies even with the recent formation of the NECOC. Clear lack of coordination from OPM was evident in the recent response to the Bududa landslides. OPM documented instances where the wrong items were delivered to Bududa and yet different items were required. Tarpaulins that were not even waterproof were delivered yet food items and shelter (tents) were most urgently required. Initial responses in Bududa did not target women and children separately and yet they were the most affected especially school going children.

A rapid response team would ensure coordinated response to disasters as and when they strike and would remain accountable to the affected community. The team would ensure that assistance is delivered according to need based on rapid assessments conducted within 48 hours of the onset of the disaster. It is expected that the team would have a diverse range of skills and able to identify issues particularly affecting vulnerable groups especially women and children.

3. Rapid Assessment Tool

All the key sectors in the country have at least an assessment tool that is used to collect information however there is no comprehensive tool representative of all sectors that is currently in use. Different methodologies employed by different sectors tend to specialize in sector specific indicators rather than looking at the whole picture. Of particular interest would be the effect of the occurrence on the most vulnerable groups in the community especially women and children.

Harmonization/consolidation of such a tool would enable universal acceptance of assessment results and can be used whenever disaster strikes.

An all-inclusive rapid assessment tool should be able to answer the immediate questions at the onset of a disaster “what”, “where”, “how many people are affected” and “needs”. Such a tool would be under the custodianship of the OPM. Consolidation of this multi-sectoral tool is included as one of the action points in the work plan for the task force under the DRR platform.

Multi-hazard Early Warning System

Most Government sectors have some sort of Early Warning System (EWS) that is used to inform and prepare for response when a hazard strikes. There are EWS for food security, health, floods, drought, insecurity, wildfires, all measuring specific indicators related to the sector. However a comprehensive multi-hazard tool that monitors and captures multi-sector information on all hazards is largely lacking.

An effective early warning and response system should include the following dimensions: probability (how likely is it to happen); predicted severity (how bad will things get); substantiation (evidence to support the early warning analysis); and appropriate action/response.

Consolidation of an effective early warning system capable of providing timely and accurate information that can be used to mitigate and respond to disasters when they occur is envisaged.

Humanitarian Profiling and Hazard/Risk Mapping

Humanitarian profiles were originally compiled for the conflict and drought affected districts of northern and north-eastern Uganda undergoing a humanitarian crisis but no studies have been conducted to compile or update a national humanitarian profile. Various hazard maps do exist and have been used for mapping natural hazards, manmade hazards, and epidemic outbreaks (both human and livestock). However, most of the maps have not been regularly updated.

A humanitarian profile is required for resource mobilization; contingency planning; programme planning; monitoring; transparency and accountability; and information sharing. Annual humanitarian profiling exercise would ensure that a complete and accurate humanitarian profile of the country is regularly updated. Similarly hazard maps need to be regularly updated to inform humanitarian response.

Disaster Management Information System

A national information management system for disasters is non-existent though different ministries have information systems e.g. Health – HMIS, Education – EMIS, MOLG – LoGICS, Planning Authority – CIS with no linkage to a national system.

Establishment of a national Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) would ensure that timely and accurate information is available to inform response to disasters when required.

OCHA already has some information products that if handed over to the appropriate Government institution and the necessary training provided would be capable of providing timely and accurate humanitarian information.

A set of Minimum Standards

Different standards for humanitarian action have been used by humanitarian agencies during response to disasters in the country including SPHERE, HAP, the Good Enough Guide, etc but there is no set of national standards currently in use in the country

A system of minimum standards ensures that appropriate response is equal to needs of the affected persons by provision of the basic necessities required for survival during emergencies.

The SPHERE charter sets the ideal minimum standards in humanitarian interventions that can be edited by each sector to develop an appropriate set of national standards for humanitarian interventions in the country.

Supplies and Logistics Planning and Management Tool

Locally purchased items and donations from the private sector for emergency response are normally handled by OPM that also stores and transports the items to affected areas however the present system is unable to manage supplies and logistics for large scale emergencies. Humanitarian agencies have their own systems for managing emergency life saving supplies.

One of the recommendations from the workshop was the establishment of a supplies and logistics management system capable of responding to emergencies with a minimum caseload of 50,000 affected people. The established system should also have the capacity to handle bigger caseloads if the emergency persists.

Contingency Fund for Rapid Response

Internationally UN agencies and international NGO's are able to tap into their strategic reserves at headquarters, apply to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and/or quickly issue a flash appeal to donors in the event of a major crisis. However nationally in Uganda such a fund does not exist and OPM has to rely on emergency releases from ministry of finance that are authorized by a cabinet sitting during an emergency.

The process is time consuming, bureaucratic, and unable to provide timely and effective response to save lives.

Establishment of a contingency fund that would be managed by the department of disaster preparedness under the OPM to ensure timely and effective response was recommended during the workshop. The fund could be held at the ministry of finance but with potential for immediate release to OPM with minimal bureaucratic procedures.

Disaster Management Policy and Framework

National effective disaster preparedness planning and response is only possible within a clear Government policy framework. The current disaster management policy is still in its draft form pending approval by parliament. Similarly the National Emergency Coordination and Operations Centre (NECOC) Standard Operating procedures (SOP's) have not yet been approved.

It is essential that both the disaster management policy and the NECOC SOP's are fast-tracked and approved by the legislature in order to provide a framework that would guide preparedness and response in the country.

Lessons learnt

Despite the recurrent drought, floods, landslides, cholera outbreak, and the recent bomb blasts only one lessons learnt workshop has ever been convened to improve preparedness and response to disasters. The 2007 floods lessons learnt report provides the basis for preparedness and future response to floods when they occur.

Similarly lessons learnt workshops as well as simulation exercises should be conducted for the Bududa landslides and the Kampala bomb blasts to improve preparedness and response to future disasters as and when they occur.

Conclusion

The adverse effects of climate change are envisaged to continue and even worsen evidenced by the increase in flood, landslides, and recurrent drought in parts of Uganda. Similarly the World including Uganda has never been the same since 20/11 and terrorist attacks via suicide bombing and other forms are bound to continue and increase on a larger scale. Without adequate preparedness the destruction from both natural and manmade hazards would be catastrophic. The recommendations from the recent EPR planning workshop if fully implemented would enhance preparedness, mitigate the effects of the hazards if and when they occur, and provide the appropriate policy framework to guide response in the country.

