

***Notes from an 'After Action Review' of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
Core Management Group (CMG) meeting, Geneva 9/9/05***

These notes are from a facilitated discussion¹ that took place at the end of a 3-day TEC meeting – two days for fieldwork planning and one day for the CMG. They do not necessarily constitute agreements but are rather reflections by those present². Symbols mean the following:

- An observation
- ✓ Something that went well
- ✖ Something that did not go so well.

General :

- There is a 'head of steam' building up globally for joint evaluations, but there is clearly no one model for joint evaluations, and not all situations will be suitable for them.
- It is still too early to tell if the TEC is contributing to over-burdening the field. While the TEC cannot be responsible for this fault in the humanitarian system, it does not help the people who are actually meant to be benefiting unless the TEC can reduce the burden.

Composition of the CMG :

- ✓ There were no criteria for membership of the CMG, who self-selected at the first meeting in February. Self-selection based on mutual trust enabled the work to proceed. Members were thus also liable to seek consensus, partly based on having common ground as evaluators – ALNAP too being part of this - who do not need to go back to basic discussions, and who are also relatively free in their organisations.
- ✖ While there might have been a risk of delays in agreeing criteria for membership before starting work, greater clarity would be advantageous and might have ensured greater representativeness, for example of NGOs, international finance institutions and national actors. Donors were keen to be represented in the management group, and it was felt that agencies leading one of the TEC's 5 thematic of the evaluations should also be members.
- The management group should not be too large and its members should have and take responsibility for active involvement rather than being there to fulfil a criterion of representativeness.

Modalities :

- ✓ The CMG quickly took up meeting by teleconference, enabling more frequent meetings, although there were also some decisions made bilaterally. Having frequent meetings was valuable.
- ✓ There was good use of technology – telecons, shared documents, mapping – enabled the process of collaboration.
- ✓ The backing of ALNAP – a network with a natural fit to the TEC and an interest in joint evaluations – and the location of a secretariat there, enabled e-mail traffic to be managed and filtered, for example, and provided a focal- point of great utility.
- The TEC is an example of a self-organising network. It has kept on bringing more organisations on board. Developing its ways of working has been continuous, and got as far as

¹ The plan for the review discussion is attached as Annex 1.

² Attendees are listed in Annex 2.

discussing conflict-resolution among parties to the evaluation studies earlier in the meeting at which this review took place.

Working through the mandate :

- A difference from other joint evaluations was that the mandate to evaluate any part of the response to the tsunami was taken rather than given by the actors. The implications of this in the process are not yet clear but this is seen as an important fact. The nature of such a cross-cutting piece of work is that it is top-down. The self-appointed mandate means that it would have been helpful, as well as brought higher profile, to have got high-level external support early on.
- ✖ Time was not found, or taken, to coordinate the ToR of the different studies. The result of this has been a lack of collective ownership of the ToR. There should have been established early on a tighter strategic policy with each theme taking shape around agreed parameters. ToR should have been tighter, and more tightly bound together by referencing each other.
- ✖ There is some overlap and uncertainty between teams, with some taking a narrow and deep approach, and others going wider and shallower, for example. It is also recognised that studies are by their nature different. However practical cooperation is needed in the field. Although there is also no will for uniformity, there was a need for a common policy and control of the dispersed, or distributed process, should have been tighter. This will make the task of synthesis of the different evaluations much harder.

Momentum, timing and resources :

- ✖ The first meeting (in February) did not immediately provide clarity about roles and responsibilities, nor the actual nature of the various studies; it would have been helpful if that meeting had been more conclusive. Too slow progress after the February meeting speeded up after the first teleconference in mid-April.
- ✓ Having said that, the first month of activity was spent gaining mutual confidence and building relationships.
- There need to be dedicated time and resources at the beginning of the whole process. Having the Researcher/deputy Coordinator post and the Evaluation Advisor and Coordinator post (and his credibility) filled were both critical moments in making progress. The implication is that a small start-up budget is also necessary – in this case ALNAP by chance had available funds that could be diverted to this process. Note that acquiring funds takes time.
- ✓ Key ‘tipping points’ were : the appointment of the Researcher/deputy Coordinator, the appointment of the Evaluation Advisor and Coordinator, the ALNAP Biannual meeting in The Hague and the agreement on the ToR. After these the funding was committed, probably demonstrating a feeling of confidence among funders that the TEC was really happening (as well as the time it takes donors to approve funds). Getting some key funders to commit – especially once those on the CMG were seen to be supporting the process financially - seemed to have encouraged others to follow suit. The key seems to be generating enough confidence that it will actually happen.
- There were difficulties for most people in finding enough time away from ‘the day job’ for this additional and unplanned for work; not all colleagues within the CMG members’ organisations were happy about them taking this time. There is a real question about the opportunity cost for other work of running the TEC.

Fundraising:

- ✓ Getting commitments from some major donors brought in others, and gave wide buy-in.
- ✗ The down side is that multiple donors with short time-frames bring the kind of disadvantages that the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative is intended, among other things, to minimise, such as short contracts for consultants, potential increased administration, etc.
- ✗ Raising funds for the core of the TEC and between the studies was not sufficiently coordinated. There are differences over whether organisations managing studies get percentage overhead costs. It is advantageous to the managing agencies to get these, whereas if ALNAP or some other central funding mechanism had been in operation it would have been harder for them to find these costs.

Outreach out from the TEC core process :

- ✗ To do a cross-cutting evaluation it would be best to involve the country (in this case, countries) from an early stage. It is not clear how this might have been done.
- Communications need to be repeated and repeated. Everything is transparently on the web-site, but there is no way to know whether it is read by those who need to, or could profit from it. E-mail often also doesn't work.
- ✗ There was early on a default negative reaction. Responses to the TEC in, for example, Sri Lanka and Indonesia were very different, being generally less welcoming in the latter than the former, but this appears to have been more about local conditions than about the TEC, which has to deal with pre-existing situations.
- Views differ on the need for media exposure of the TEC at this stage, but not that a media strategy is necessary.

Residual issues :

- Subject-matter for the different studies involved making choices, leaving out important issues, particularly beneficiary consultation and accountability.
- It is not clear what the evaluations are against, except in general terms. In the absence of a LogFrame, there are no evaluation criteria, and no such criteria exist for 'the system'. There are a lot of 'quality' references but not to reflect impact. This in itself may make this set of studies interesting.
- It is necessary to prove the value of joint evaluations, not just assert it.

Annex 1 : plan for the review process

1) No detailed thinking [was] stated in the minutes of the CMG meeting that proposed and agreed to this review, but it is clear ... that this is about trying to capture your reflections on process, rather than on outputs so far. The purpose is two-fold : to help the TEC, and particularly the CMG, to continue to improve itself now; and importantly, to capture potential lessons for the humanitarian community at large over the longer term about how to organise and manage any similar processes.

2) The methodology is transparently subjective, although it is always advisable if you can adduce examples of what you express your views on. Afterwards [we will] document what was said, if not agreed, for your own and wider use. However I will be asking us all to treat what goes on within the room as confidential, and I will certainly make sure that anything sensitive – as opposed to constructively critical - does not make its way into any report that is available to others. Thus, within the limits of personal and professional respect, ... your openness.

3) Below [is] a possible set of headings for our reflections. The questions we will be asking ourselves will be the simple ones about what went well, what could have gone better, and what needs to be done or to change now. That is how ... to try and state your views.

4) It would be possible to organise such diverse subject matter in any number of ways, but ... indulge [this] way [of] trying to organise them here.

Internal : including the composition, leadership and management of the CMG and the support roles, relations with ALNAP, timing, and decision-making processes.

Semi-internal : including the remit of the TEC, learning from past comparable processes, outreach, and fundraising.

External / product : including responsiveness to views from the field, themes for the TEC, coordination of themes and their processes, quality aimed at (including eg gender issues, standards, Good Humanitarian Donorship, etc), and achievements against plans.

Annex 2 : list of those who attended the review on September 9th

Amy Cavender (WV, EC)	Andre Griekspoor (WHO)
Christoph Jakob (SDC)	Janey Lawry-White (UNDP)
John Cosgrave (ALNAP/TEC)	John Mitchell (ALNAP)
Laura Kitchin (ALNAP/TEC) (Minutes)	Mihir Bhatt (AIDMI)
Miles Murray (CARE, DEC)	Niels Dabelstein (DANIDA)
Rachel Houghton (ALNAP/TEC)	Simon Lawry-White (UNICEF)
Stefan Dahlgren (SIDA)	Susanne Frueh (OCHA)
Tijana Bojanic (IFRC)	Maurice Herson (ALNAP) (Facilitator)