

IV. Working Group Reports

69. Working Group No. 1 - UNDRO and MDUs, Co-ordination and Co-operation, Conceptual Aspects

The Working Group was directed by Mr. E. Blaser, Head of the Swiss Disaster Relief Unit. Mr. M. Thompson of OXFAM acted as Secretary.

The Working Group's discussions were based on twelve questions drawn from the Background Document (MDU/84-4).

Some preliminary remarks were made by various members, expressing a desire for clarification on the one hand for clearer definitions of what is meant by MDUs, and the definition of the disasters in which they may work, and on the other hand a reminder that the MDUs represented varied very greatly in their operational capacity, the types of disasters to which they could respond, the time span of their involvement, geographical areas of operation and acceptability to Governments. The term "MDU" is attributed by UNDRO to an organized group, whether governmental or non-governmental, which stands ready to engage itself in relief activities, at disaster sites outside its country of origin.

Other members expressed their particular interest in different questions - especially the whole question of the assessment of disaster damage in order to get a consensus and to quantify needs.

The meeting considered the questions in order.

Q.1. How could UNDRO assist new MDUs directly?

Q.2. Could UNDRO arrange an exchange of experiences and by what means?

Some scepticism was expressed that agencies would be willing to share their experiences with new and unknown MDUs. On the other hand, several representatives explained that they already shared their experiences with other groups and were very pleased to help other groups in any way they could.

It was suggested that UNDRO establish which countries want to establish MDUs and assist them in setting up these units, calling as appropriate, on the assistance of other established MDUs in this work. It was suggested that consideration be given to establishing regional MDUs to serve several countries with similar problems. UNDRO staff explained that some industrialized countries were at present considering the establishment of MDUs. With respect to developing countries, UNDRO staff explained that they were helping several countries to develop their disaster management capacity but not necessarily MDUs.

- Q.3. Relating to the improvement of the capability of established NGOs, how could UNDRO assist directly?
- Q.4. Could UNDRO arrange exchange of experience and by what means?
- Q.5. Is there a willingness among established MDUs to share knowledge and experience?

The question of improving the assessment of disasters by MDUs was raised, and following from this the question of how MDU interventions could be better co-ordinated on the basis of the early assessment of the disasters. It was suggested that UNDRO could assist with the training of MDU personnel in assessment.

Some members felt that it was doubtful whether international MDUs could make quick and accurate assessment of such complicated situations and suggested that national Governments own assessments of disasters should be accepted. However some action could be taken by UNDRO to help governments to make rapid and comprehensive assessments. It was further suggested that UNDRO could better help the MDUs through facilitating their work, through UNDRO's contacts with Governments, rather than duplicating the training that international organizations already run for their MDU personnel.

It was generally agreed that data base profiles of MDUs should be maintained by UNDRO as a central point of reference for all interested parties. One unanswered question was whether MDUs would include in this centrally held information the personnel resources available to them, which could then be made available to other agencies.

It was also suggested that UNDRO could assist MDUs in sharing information by convening seminars for agencies and MDUs which had been operational in a particular disaster to share the lessons learnt.

It was emphasized by several members that informal meetings at the technical level after an operation were a most useful way of sharing information and experience. Both the desirability and the willingness to share experience was emphasized by several members - and reference was made to mutual visiting.

- Q.6. With regard to Assessment Teams: Should UNDRO fly in experienced assessment teams?

Some members thought this would be useful to have an early and authoritative assessment by UNDRO to prevent the flood of assessment teams that follow many disasters. The meeting was reminded that effective assessment after a disaster was impossible without considerable planning and preliminary work before such a disaster.

As had been mentioned earlier, the difficulty of outsiders making a quick assessment of a very complex situation was emphasized. While an UNDRO team could perhaps be useful in the assessment of damage after a "simple" disaster (a flood or earthquake), this was not realistic in a complex situation where a natural disaster is complicated by strife and

political turmoil. UNDRO staff explained their practice that in the event of a disaster a relief co-ordinator is sent to strengthen the office of the UNDP Resident Representative, and in certain circumstances a multi-agency assessment mission is mounted. The meeting was reminded that national governments make their own assessments of disasters and UNDRO should work to help governments in making accurate assessments.

Several more general points were made about assessment teams. Agencies specialising in transport often had to face conflicting priorities where political personalities and assessment/relief missions were competing for transport. The meeting was reminded that many non-governmental agencies had their own staff, or links with local agencies over many years, with whom they had contact and on whom they depended for assessment, rather than on UN missions. Considering the unreliability of early assessment and national sensitivity about assessment of damage by outsiders, it was suggested that UNDRO could support the establishment of an information centre in the affected country that could be a focal point for all parties to establish the needs and which organizations could best respond to them.

There was a general consensus that UNDRO should assist with early assessment and information on disasters, sometimes using assessment missions, including where appropriate, expert personnel of other agencies.

Q.7. What are the most important disciplines of an assessment team?

It was emphatically stated that experience of the affected country and an understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the affected population was the most important element. Technical expertise is very important, but is not enough in itself, without cultural understanding. Of the technical disciplines, medical doctors, engineers and logistic staff were listed. It was noted with regret that engineers are still under-used and their role under-estimated in assessment missions.

Q.8. How could MDUs assist UNDRO in setting up assessment teams?

Discussion on this point was left to the possible establishment of a small group of MDU representatives to discuss in detail with UNDRO.

Q.9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of specialized and inter-disciplinary MDUs?

The group found this question something of a contradiction. Both types of MDUs have their usefulness in different situations. One factor governing their usefulness is the quality and effectiveness of international co-ordination of the overall relief effort. Good use can be made of the more specialized units with good co-ordination. Some members preferred the multi-disciplinary teams who could then respond to different and perhaps changing needs in the situation. The meeting was reminded that even the most specialized members of an MDU need also to have the flexibility and ability to improvise that comes from experience in emergency work. Speaking from experience, a delegate from a disaster affected developing country emphasized that from the point of view of government officials co-ordinating relief, multi-disciplinary teams were easier to work with.

Q.10. How could UNDRO and established MDUs assist countries in establishing their own internal MDUs?

The question presented a difficulty of definition. By UNDRO's definition, quoted above, an MDU works "outside its country of origin". It was established that UNDRO is not working to establish MDUs in disaster prone countries of the developing world, but is working with national governments of many such countries, at their request, in different aspects of their own disaster preparedness.

Q.11. How should a data based index of MDUs be designed and implemented?

It was generally agreed that an index of MDUs should be maintained by UNDRO but without detailed discussion of the information to be listed.

Q.12. Could UNDRO News contribute further to informing MDUs on the activities of other MDUs?

It was agreed that UNDRO News could be used to report MDU operations and developments of general interest, though the meeting was reminded that to try to do this on a comprehensive basis would be impossible because of the very large number of questions of many agencies in many different emergencies. Reference may also be made to the usefulness of UNDRO Sitreps in informing MDUs of the work of others in different situations. MDUs were reminded of the importance of keeping UNDRO informed of their activities for inclusion in the sitreps and UNDRO was requested to specify wherever possible the channels and operational agencies through which aid could be sent in particular disasters.

There was some discussion of general points, not in response to the background paper.

Some concern was voiced at the cost and difficulty of emergency air transport of relief supplies, which can consume substantial proportion of funds donated for the purchase of relief items. UNDRO was asked to facilitate free air freight where possible.

Concern was also voiced at the arrival after a disaster of non-essential and unsolicited relief goods sent for reasons of publicity or through ignorance. UNDRO explained that they now try to specify in Sitreps, what should not be sent, as well as what is specifically requested.

In answer to a question as to whether UNDRO had responsibility for disasters affecting internally displaced people, UNDRO staff explained that the lead agency from within the UN family was identified by the Secretary-General and this was sometimes UNDRO.

Overall the group particularly appreciated the contributions to the discussion of the representative of Algeria, Mr. Mohammed Boubekeur whose experiences were most useful.

70. Working Group No. 2 - Administration and Procedures

The Working Group was chaired by Mr. B. Posthuma, Chef du Service Assistance, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. F. Verhagen, UNDR0 acted as Secretary.

The Working Group considered as background material Working Paper (MDU/84-5) "Administration and Procedures"; the Draft Convention on Expediting the Delivery of Emergency Relief (prepared by UNDR0 for submission to the forthcoming session of the Economic and Social Council); UNITAR study No. 8 "Model Rules for Disaster Relief Operations" and a draft agreement on "regional assistance for civil protection in emergency situations" prepared by ICDO.

It was felt that whereas administrative and procedural arrangements could be prepared and tested in advance in the aid-providing country, such preparedness measures were generally more difficult to ensure in the receiving country. As a consequence more difficulties of an administrative and procedural nature would have to be expected at the receiving rather than at the sending end. Also it would be difficult to devise standard solutions given the variety of emergencies and conditions prevailing in the disaster-stricken countries. The importance of advance preparation, including administrative check-lists, health requirements, customs clearances and establishment of detailed inventories, was stressed.

Once it had been decided to send a Mobile Disaster Unit, the Working Group identified four stages of activity, each of which required its own administrative procedures to ensure successful implementation of the emergency operation:

- Preparation in the home country once pre-alert has been declared and before departure
- Transit through third countries, including overflight and change of mode of transport
- Arrival/stay in the host country
- Departure from receiving country and return to home country

Accordingly, the Working Group recommends the development of a simple and practical Handbook or Brochure which should contain check-lists of the various actions required for each of the four stages, in addition to a few examples of multi-lateral and/or bilateral draft agreements between aid-providing countries/organizations and disaster-stricken countries. This would permit adaptability to individual cases e.g. short versus longer-term relief operations, governmental or non-governmental source of assistance, type of emergency assistance to be provided.

The Working Group also recommends that the study of the Draft Convention be pursued, in order to reduce many of the administrative and procedural difficulties now being encountered and to render emergency assistance more effective and less costly.

71. Working Group No. 3 - Stockpiling, Transport and Distribution

The Working Group was chaired by Mr. C. Guthrie, Senior Programme Officer, ILO. Mr. F. Alessi, UNDRO acted as Secretary.

On the basis of the questions put before it, the Working Group considered that in making its proposals it should be guided by experience gained by the various Mobile Disaster Units in past or current disaster situations.

I. Stockpiling

The Working Group agreed that stockpiling should concentrate on relief goods needed to prevent death or to ensure the survival of the affected population. A list of such immediately needed suppliers would include:

- (1) Food:
 - (a) cereals, preferably sorghum, millet, rice, maize; wheat presents acceptability problems
 - (b) edible oil
 - (c) protein, pulses, DSM (care to be exercised in its use), canned fish or meat
- (2) Temporary shelter:
 - (a) tents
 - (b) bedding
 - (c) blankets (2 x person)
 - (d) lanterns or candles
- (3) Cooking equipment:
 - (a) kitchen sets
 - (b) stoves
- (4) Sanitation:

soap, disinfectants
- (5) Primary health care:

WHO-type emergency health kits
- (6) Water equipment:
 - (a) hand pumps
 - (b) drilling equipment
 - (c) drinking water purification tablets
 - (d) purification equipment
 - (e) water tanks, cistern trucks (only in extreme cases)

(7) Tools:

to allow the execution of self-help activities by the affected population

- (a) shovels
- (b) axes
- (c) handsaws
- (d) ropes
- (e) nails, etc.

(8) Seeds:

(stockpiling limited to the national level because of need to have locally acceptable varieties.)

(9) Adapted communication equipment.

The need for standardization of relief goods was recognised, together with the opportunity of limiting the composition of a list of goods for stockpiling to truly essential items only, to cover only a short time after the occurrence of a disaster, for a limited population.

The desirable stock level would depend on the population of the vulnerable areas and the time foreseen for bringing in additional relief supplies. Emergency stocks should cover needs up to 90 days maximum (for food supplies).

The Working Group considered that stock location was especially important, and would depend on the availability of immediate transportation to the affected region and on its cost.

It is also essential that information of emergency stocks be centralized and kept up to date for regular dissemination. UNDRO could assume this role, through follow-up action with all the participating MDU's and the bodies already maintaining emergency stockpiles.

II. Transportation and Distribution

In considering this matter, the Working Group made a distinction between the implications for short-term emergency operations in the event of a sudden disaster and those for long-term assistance in case of emergencies continuing over a long period.

A. Short-term emergencies:

The Working Group studied 3 phases:

- (i) central assembly point in the donor country for the MDU, including equipment and personnel
- (ii) transportation to the stricken country
- (iii) distribution within the stricken country.

It was recognised that the donor organization is responsible for phases (i) and (ii). Responsibility for phase (iii) lies with the recipient country which should provide the necessary equipment, authorisation and personnel to execute relief operations with the support of MDU's.

Concerning phase (ii) the Working Group recalled that it had been decided in the past (by IATA) that airlines should provide free transportation of relief personnel and goods to the affected country. It is recommended that UNDRO raise again this request with the appropriate airlines and bodies.

Should special transportation arrangements be necessary, they should be centralized through UNDRO to maximize efficiency and reduce costs.

B. Long-term emergencies:

1. Responsibility

The Working Group felt that national authorities cannot be replaced in the execution of emergency operations, but that they should receive support from MDU's and international relief organizations. National distribution networks should be strengthened, rather than substituted for by international assistance. The extent to which international relief bodies can assume responsibility for emergency operations should be examined on a case by case approach. Care should be exercised in keeping a single body responsible for all emergency relief. Requirements for accountability in respect of international assistance should be clearly specified by donors and agreed with recipient countries.

2. Requirements for immediate assistance

Preliminary arrangements should be developed to ensure the availability of funds, equipment and trained personnel.

Concerning transportation vehicles, steps should be taken to develop agreements between donor countries and major manufacturers to create emergency stocks which could be immediately drawn upon.

Technical personnel of both donor and recipient countries are to be trained to be able to face emergency situations.

3. Co-ordination of assistance

The Working Group recognized the importance of centralizing information on all relief activities. This could be achieved either at the national level, through the UNDRO/UNDP Resident Representative or through UNDRO in Geneva and for food aid, through WFP field offices and through WFP headquarters in Rome. This information should include, and be accessible to all donors, international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

V. Recommendations of the Meeting

72. Pre-disaster Planning

1. The meeting, taking note of the fact that UNDRO has an existing data base containing some information on stockpiles,

Recommends that governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations, keep UNDRO regularly informed of their stock positions. A specific list of basic stock items is included in the report of Working Group No. 3.

2. Having identified four stages of activity (see Working Group No. 2 report), the meeting recommends:

the development of a simple and practical handbook, designed for the use of MDUs, which should contain check-lists of the various actions required for each of the four stages, as well as examples of multi-lateral and/or bilateral draft agreements between aid providing countries/organizations and disaster stricken countries.

3. The meeting recommends that efforts be made, by UNDRO, to monitor the strengthening of transport and logistics infrastructures in disaster prone areas, where the absence of adequate facilities would jeopardize effective response.

73. Assessments

1. While recognizing that the primary responsibility for the assessment of a disaster situation lies with the national governments, the meeting

Recommends that UNDRO assist with early assessment and information on disasters, sometimes using assessment missions, including, where appropriate, expert personnel of other agencies.

2. The meeting recommends that, in the event of intervention by an MDU, that a member of the MDU team be granted, by the national government, immediate access to the disaster area in order to ensure their most timely and effective response.

74. Intervention

1. The meeting recommends that MDUs inform UNDRO of their proposal or offer of assistance as soon as possible in order to obtain the full support of the UNDRO/UNDP Resident Representative/Co-ordinator, and to make the best use of donated resources.

2. The meeting recommends that the operational responsibilities of assisting international and national agencies be defined and co-ordinated, according to the needs of the situation, by the receiving government.

3. The meeting recommends that MDUs:
- (a) take with them adequate supplies for their own immediate subsistence, and
 - (b) that, in their relief activities, they make every effort to maximize the use of locally available human and material resources.

75. Evaluation

The meeting recommends that post-disaster meetings in which interested and/or assisting agencies, including MDUs, would participate, be convened under the aegis of UNDRO or the lead agency, to share, record, and learn from the experience gained.