



DEC Real Time Evaluation (RTE) – East Africa Crisis Appeal

Synthesis Report

January 2012

1. The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal for East Africa was launched through the UK media on 8 July 2011 and has raised GBP 75 million to date. This remarkably generous public response should be seen in perspective: it represents around 4% of overall international funding for the crisis response in the region; and particularly for the larger DEC member agencies, it represents a relatively small proportion of their funding for the crisis response (around 10% for some). That said, the DEC agencies together with their international affiliates represent the majority of the front-line delivery capacity of the international system. In that sense, this RTE can be seen as a snapshot of the performance of the wider system, and we believe that the findings of this evaluation of the response by DEC members will be of interest beyond the confines of the DEC.

The scope of this RTE was limited to the situations in **Kenya** and **Ethiopia**, including the situation of the recent Somali refugees in camps in those countries. Following the DEC ‘accountability priorities’, the performance of the DEC agencies was reviewed according to the *effectiveness* and efficiency of scale up, including preparedness; the *quality* of responses judged against established standards, principles and best practice; the *accountability* of agencies to aid recipients; and the extent to which *lessons* had been learned from previous responses, in particularly regarding the link between short and long term dimensions of crisis in this region. This short synthesis report highlights the main findings of the two separate RTE country reports and some additional cross-cutting issues.

2. In common with other appeals by international agencies, the DEC appeal has been framed in terms of one overarching ‘crisis’ affecting countries in East Africa. While this is justified by the common factors involved, and has some obvious advantages in presentational terms – not least the ability to draw on compelling images and statistics from Somalia and the related refugee populations – it over-simplifies the situations concerned. There are at least five distinct ‘crises’ involved, including the situations of the worst affected communities in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia, and that of the Somali refugee camps in Dadaab (Kenya) and Dollo Ado (Ethiopia) – not to mention the situation in Djibouti and

elsewhere in the region. Although Somalia was not included in the RTE for reasons of access, it was part of the appeal and to date accounts for around 35% of the planned allocation of funds. The situation in Somalia itself clearly remains of greatest humanitarian concern at the time of writing (January 2012), and has a major bearing on the prospects for Somali refugees in neighbouring countries.

3. Although these situations must be considered separately in terms of the particular factors and vulnerabilities involved, they clearly have features in common. In Kenya and Ethiopia, the failure of two successive rainy seasons has been the immediate cause of crisis, compounding the stress on households due to inflated food prices (typically around 40% higher than in 2010) and the ‘ratchet’ effect on household economies of successive recent poor years (2006-10). Then there are longer term structural factors at work: demographics, climate change and resource competition, and related political agendas. In both countries the result has been acute food insecurity for millions of people, crop failure, loss of assets and income-generating capacity for many (particularly among pastoralists), distress migration and acute water shortages. In anthropometric terms, the symptoms have included very high levels of acute malnutrition along with significant increases in morbidity and mortality. While the most severe symptoms have been seen in the Somali refugee camps, particularly in mid-2011, levels of global acute malnutrition as high as 37% have been recorded elsewhere (in Turkana, northern Kenya). Statistical evidence for such outcomes remains patchy, but in general there has been no shortage of information to inform decision making. In particular, early warning information on key ‘risk’ indicators (including rainfall, crop yields and changes in market prices) dating back to mid-2010 has been plentiful in both countries and largely accurate.

4. Judged in its own terms, the DEC-funded response has so far been largely successful and effective in achieving its aims. Following the July appeal, DEC funds allowed a scaled-up relief response by member agencies in the second half of 2011, on terms that gave much needed flexibility to the overall response. Agencies tended to use existing programmes and partnerships as a platform to extend their coverage, in some cases by a factor of three or more. This ‘incremental’ approach had a number of benefits: it played to existing strengths and competencies; it was a relatively efficient way of scaling up; and it ensured that for the most part, there was a good fit between relief responses and longer term programmes.

5. The **quality** and appropriateness of DEC agency responses was generally found to be high in both countries. As noted in the Kenya report, a number of factors were given as constraints on programme quality, in addition to the sheer scale of demands and the problem of institutional overstretch. Finding effective relief partners was a constraint for some organisations, as was monitoring the quality of delivery through partners – many of which were themselves overstretched. Staff turnover, and the impracticality and cost of repeatedly training new staff on standards and organisational values, was frequently mentioned as a major challenge. So too, in the Somali region of Ethiopia in particular, was the problem of recruiting or deploying suitably qualified staff.

Overall the commitment to standards and best practice was impressive, and appeared to be the subject of consistent monitoring by agencies. In all the areas reviewed, agencies had made deliberate efforts to adhere to Sphere standards; where they have failed to comply, this is largely related to funding or access constraints. Programme approaches have been

well adapted to context, largely as a result of the experience gained through long term programming in the areas concerned. In terms of the balance between the need for rapid scale-up of response and maintaining control over quality and expenditure, agencies appeared to manage this well, though some trade-off with quality was noted, particularly where agencies expanded to new sectors of activity. This was noted as a problem at the time of peak refugee flows into Dadaab and Dolo Ado.

6. In terms of **accountability** to the aid recipients – both men and women – again the DEC agencies were found to have performed well, with many examples of thoughtful and innovative consultation mechanisms. Details can be found in the respective country RTE reports. The question of accountability was reviewed under the headings of communication, community involvement and feedback and complaints mechanisms. In each case, the evaluators noted a very positive shift of attitudes and practice from the prevailing approach of even five years ago. In particular, some agencies stood out in their ability to articulate the gender issues they were encountering, and steps taken to address them.

One point that was raised by third parties, particularly among UN staff, was that the DEC agencies were not as transparent as they should have been about the use being made of DEC funds. This was reported to make it difficult at times to coordinate DEC programmes within wider planning frameworks, since it was unclear quite what was being funded with DEC money and budgets were not shared. This was contrasted with practice (for example) in the UN OCHA-administered Humanitarian Response Fund in Ethiopia, where proposals were subject to peer review and a committee approval process.

As far as the evaluation team could tell, DEC funds appear to have been spent well and accountably. Despite the scale of the expanded drought response programmes, the evaluation team found nothing to suggest that agencies' current financial management and accounting practice was inadequate. No reports were received of funds being lost, diverted, misspent or otherwise unaccounted for. It should however be stressed that the evaluation did *not* include an audit function or a review of financial management processes.

7. In light of the available evidence of impending crisis from at least the beginning of 2011, the overall response by DEC member agencies – and indeed by governments and the wider international community – can be considered only a *qualified* success. Prior to the DEC appeal there was both (i) a general failure of *preventive* action from late 2010, and (ii) a collective failure to respond with adequate relief from the time it was needed in early to mid-2011. Although neither country saw catastrophic levels of mortality (except among refugees), the result of this system-wide failure was far greater suffering than was necessary in the circumstances. In particular, far more children and adults became dangerously malnourished, and more damage was done to livelihoods than would have been the case with more concerted preventive action and early relief. Many of the DEC-funded and other relief efforts were not underway until the last quarter of 2011.

8. There appear to be a number of reasons for the failure of early response, many of them outside agencies' control. Although some institutional donors (including DfID and the HRF in Ethiopia) did fund some early action, donor funds were largely not forthcoming until the more dramatic evidence of Somalia-related famine emerged in June/July 2011. In Ethiopia, delays in the system of bureaucratic approval for international agency projects were

cited as another main cause, although the comparative strength of Ethiopian early warning and response mechanisms was also noted. Other external constraints – including security and logistical factors – were real, and continue to affect programme delivery, but do not explain the delayed response.

Apart from the shortage of external funding, part of the delay must be attributed to factors *internal* to the agencies concerned. Some, especially the larger ones, suffered from a degree of institutional inertia, complicated by the need to get agreement across a family of international affiliates. While most agencies made some efforts in the first half of 2011 to meet the increasing needs (drawing on their own or existing donor resources), they did not really ‘change gear’ until the middle of the year – even though most said that they saw the crisis coming from late 2010, with plentiful early warning information. The downside of the incremental approach noted above was a tendency for ‘business as usual’ to be maintained beyond the point where it was appropriate.

Overall, agencies struggled to scale up to meet the challenge of the emerging crisis in the first half of 2011. It was not until the dramatic pictures from the Somali refugee camps in Dadaab hit the news in June, thanks in large part to Save the Children’s effective media work, that the international community woke up to the severity of the situation. Only at this point were conditions judged right for major public appeals to be successful, and the DEC appeal was launched in the wake of appeals by Oxfam and Save the Children. Subsequently, famine was declared by the UN in parts of Somalia itself and international donors were galvanised into action on the crisis in the wider region. This unlocked the funds required for agencies to respond to scale.

It is striking that in both Kenya and Ethiopia, it took an essentially ‘foreign’ crisis (in Somalia) to spur international action to respond to the clear but less dramatic crises unfolding in each country.

9. The extent to which agencies drew on **lessons learned** from previous drought responses is described in the country reports. While most agencies had taken into account their previous experience in country and in particular regions, they appeared to suffer from some loss of institutional memory concerning their longer-term engagement in each country, and lacked the perspective that might be provided by long-serving staff in country. Most of the staff interviewed had been in post a relatively short time and were on comparatively short contracts.

While many of the issues noted above concerning the delay in response relate to a period *prior* to the DEC appeal, and go beyond the question of the use made of DEC funds, they have a bearing on the question of agency preparedness and responsiveness as well as on the ‘fit’ between agencies’ humanitarian and development agendas. On the evidence considered during the RTE, there is much work to do in future to ensure greater responsiveness and coherence between these different modes of engagement. Indeed, much of what was missing from the response in terms of early action does not fall into either the standard humanitarian or development categories, and the best agency responses were those that recognised this and adapted their approaches accordingly. This is less a matter of switching from ‘developmental’ to ‘relief’ modes and back; but rather of adjusting the scale and priorities of existing programmes to reflect the prevailing realities, and of providing the

necessary technical and surge capacity to allow this and any necessary expansion to happen effectively. Crises of this kind are entirely foreseeable and should be manageable as such.

Similarly, the best of the responses were those that recognised the vital need both to provide relief and build the resilience of households and systems faced with the likelihood that similar shocks will recur and the need to halt the 'ratchet' effect noted above. In that sense, relief and disaster risk reduction are closely related in contexts such as these.

10. The previous point relates to a more general line of argument concerning 'lessons': the need for a shift of perspective from 'crisis response' to 'risk management', something that to date had only partly been achieved. Some new initiatives, including new forms of risk financing (including weather-based insurance), were helping to point in this direction. But meanwhile some more immediate steps could be taken, including the routine adoption of 'crisis modifiers' in all development programmes in drought prone areas to allow for quicker and smoother adaptation to extreme circumstances. A more general shift was felt by many to be required away from the use of *outcome* indicators such as nutritional data towards the use of *predictive* (risk) indicators as a basis for early intervention. The necessary complement to this was an agreed policy framework for early (preventive) intervention and specific funds to enable such interventions.

The RTE team felt that there was both a need and an opportunity to better link work on disaster risk reduction, social protection, relief and recovery. Yet 'getting the right people in the room together' appears to be a problem – and one that is compounded by the way in which institutional responsibilities are allocated across different departments and budget lines in donors and agencies.

11. Finally, the evaluators noted that the DEC agencies, along with their colleagues in the wider international system, seem still to be trapped by the familiar conundrum: scale up is impossible without institutional donor funding; funding only flows when the situation is demonstrably critical (i.e. through outcome indicators like high levels of acute malnutrition); and by that time, efforts at prevention are too late, and the window for early relief has been missed. The DEC funds have certainly helped bridge a gap in this respect, but the gap itself will remain until genuine consensus is reached about not only the *need* for early action, but also on *how*, *when* and *on what* to focus concerted action in order to prevent the worst aspects of such crises. Many of the elements of this consensus appear to be in place, but tragically not enough in practice for the many in the region who could have been helped by earlier intervention.

This synthesis report was written by James Darcy, the team leader for the evaluations conducted in both Kenya and Ethiopia by Valid International Ltd for the DEC. Full evaluation reports for Kenya and Ethiopia are available from the DEC.

Acknowledgements

The authors of the evaluation reports would like to thank all those who gave their time and advice so generously during the conduct of both the Kenya and Ethiopia evaluations

Valid International Ltd, 35 Leopold Street, Oxford, OX4 1TW, United Kingdom
helen@validinternational.org www.validinternational.org