Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique

Executive Summary

July 2020

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group

Acknowledgments

This Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation was commissioned by the:

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Executive summary

Purpose, scope and users of this Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

1. **Purpose and scope**: This Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) provides an independent assessment of the collective humanitarian response to communities impacted by Cyclone Idai in Mozambique. The IAHE primary focused on the scale-up activation period during 22 March through 30 June 2019. The terms of reference (TOR) of this evaluation asked to what extent the response met the objectives of the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) and other relevant plans and strategies and how mechanisms of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) supported the response. This evaluation identifies lessons learned from the system-wide scale-up and response to Cyclone Idai and makes recommendations for future responses and preparedness.

2. Due to various constraints, the Management Group for this IAHE agreed to exclude the response to Cyclone Kenneth from the scope of this report even though it had been included in the TOR for the IAHE. The main constraints included the limited time available for the field visit, budget limitations, security conditions and the consequent challenges in accessing many of the affected communities in Cabo Delgado Province. The response to Cyclone Kenneth has nevertheless been considered as a factor that significantly influenced the system-wide response to Cyclone Idai.

3. **Intended users**: The primary users of this IAHE are, at the country level, the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Mozambique; and at the global level, the IASC Principals, the Emergency Directors Group, and the Operational Policy and Advocacy Group.

Context

4. Mozambique is a country that is prone to natural disasters. The country was already facing high levels of food insecurity due to drought when the cyclone struck. Many communities that had suffered severe flooding during 2007 were also heavily impacted by Cyclone Idai in 2019. Cyclone Idai made landfall in Mozambique on 14 March 2019 as a Category 4 storm. A second cyclone, Cyclone Kenneth, subsequently struck northern Mozambique six weeks after Cyclone Idai, placing additional strain on humanitarian agencies and the Government of Mozambique's (GoM) capacities.

5. The GoM declared a National State of Emergency on 19 March 2019 and issued an appeal for international assistance. The Emergency Relief Coordinator subsequently triggered a scale-up activation on 22 March 2019. The scale-up activation period ended on 30 June 2019. The HCT supported Mozambique's National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC) in its role as the executive entity of the government responsible for the coordination of disaster response and disaster risk reduction. This IAHE examined three revisions to the HRP after Cyclone Idai made landfall: the first in April, the second in May (after Mozambique was hit by Cyclone Kenneth) and the third in August 2019.

Methodology

6. The evaluation team made a four-week field visit to Mozambique and subsequently visited regional offices in Kenya and South Africa during September 2019. The evaluation used quantitative and qualitative methods; these included desk reviews, interviews and direct observations. Data was collected from a total of 175 interviewees and a desk review of policy and strategy documents, evaluations, reviews, studies and relevant databases. A survey of 505 households, supplemented by focus group discussions, in areas affected by the cyclone in October 2019 captured the perspectives of a sample of the affected people

and enabled the evaluation team to triangulate the qualitative data. The data collected reflected a range of stakeholder perspectives including those of government authorities, bilateral donors, United Nations agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the private sector, national and international non-governmental organizations and the perspectives of people affected by Cyclone Idai. Following the field mission, the data was triangulated and validated during two workshops in Mozambique. Due to various gaps in the monitoring data, the IAHE team was not able to conduct a systematic assessment of the results based on the targets in the HRPs. The IAHE team thus relied to a large extent on qualitative data and the results from the Household Survey to make assessments about the response and draw conclusions.

Summary of key findings and conclusions

7. Joint preparedness by the international agencies and INGC helped ensure that the immediate humanitarian needs were accurately anticipated. The initial assistance provided was relatively timely, despite delays in reaching many affected communities due to the weather conditions, the scale of needs, and difficulties accessing some of the most affected areas. The GoM geared up its response even before Cyclone Idai made landfall on March 14 and appealed for external support on March 19 after declaring a state of emergency.

8. The international community responded with a Scale-Up activation, which proved to be a key contribution that helped to save lives and mitigate suffering for many of the estimated 1.85 million people who needed assistance. The rapid deployment of human resources and funding resulting from the scale-up activation provided the necessary additional response capacity. Inter-agency coordination, clusters and individual international agencies reinforced INGC's overall leadership role, supported and helped to build the capacity of local government officials, most of whom had had no previous experience working with international aid systems during a response to a large-scale disaster. The swift containment of the cholera outbreak and the timely distribution of food supplies to the affected people highlighted the value of joint preparedness, the scale-up activation and the collective action that supported the robust, government-led response to the cyclone.

9. The Scale-Up activation helped to strengthen collective accountability to the affected populations (AAP). The inter-agency Multi-Sectoral Rapid Assessment (MRA) relied on participatory approaches to gather data. An inter-agency feedback and complaints system, known as *Linha Verde*, was launched to enhance AAP and support the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), although it took several weeks to become operational. The survey results indicated that the vast majority of people in the affected communities thought that they had been treated with respect by the humanitarian agencies, although only a small proportion of the survey respondents knew what assistance would be provided before they received it or how to use the feedback and complaints systems.

10. The lessons learned from this response highlighted good practice examples along with areas where improvements could have increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the response and further mitigated the impacts of the cyclone on the affected people. Key issues are summarized below.

> Good preparedness significantly improved the timeliness and effectiveness of the response. At the same time preparedness planning would have benefitted from the use of anticipatory/early action triggers based on early warning indicators, greater use of cash-based interventions and a more meaningful involvement of the local civil society.

11. Several factors limited the effectiveness of the response, including limited use of anticipatory/early action triggers, cash-based interventions and civil society involvement. At the country level, in addition to the limited quantity of pre-positioned relief materials, major gaps in preparedness included: (i) the limited scope for cash-based assistance due mainly to government restrictions; (ii) the limited involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in community-based preparedness; and (iii) inadequate anticipatory/early action by the affected communities after they received early warning messages. Anticipatory/early actions were undertaken by only a relatively small number of agencies outside Mozambique; therefore, the response and the search and rescue (SAR) activities were not as timely as they could have been.

12. CSOs were not significantly involved in preparedness planning and played a marginal role during the response during the Scale-Up activation period. This was attributed to multiple factors including their limited capacities; their difficulties with language since most coordination meetings were conducted in English; their lack of experience working in large-scale disasters; and the fact that many of their staff and volunteers were themselves affected by Cyclone Idai. Based on the lessons learned from other large-scale responses, CSOs could potentially have played a larger role in community-based preparedness. During the response CSOs could have also helped communities to mobilize, to mitigate the impact of the disaster and more effectively address the protection and specific assistance needs of vulnerable groups.

> Aerial assessments added considerable value in guiding the initial response. Decision-makers were at the same time challenged to optimize use of resources due to gaps in the information management systems and the variable quality and availability of data.

13. After a promising beginning, the international humanitarian system struggled to develop a user-friendly system to collect, analyze, and communicate the assessment and monitoring data needed to guide decision-making during the successive phases of the response. Three agencies deployed technical experts and allocated resources to support a joint assessment cell. While the cell added significant value to the response, it did not manage to achieve its full potential due to the rapid turnover of coordinators and the lack of consensus on a shared system for data management. These problems led to assessment fatigue among local government officials and the affected communities; difficulties in acquiring a picture of multi-sectoral priority needs; and contributed to a lack of clarity about how best to support the transition to recovery during the post-emergency phase.

> The response benefited from a robust partnership between the international agencies involved and the Government of Mozambique. However, engagement between the broader international humanitarian system and the private sector could have been further optimized through greater preparedness and better coordination during the response.

14. Good preparedness by the Emergency Telecommunications, Logistics, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Clusters meant that they benefited from productive partnerships with private sector actors during the response. The bulk of private sector support was passed through the GoM using pre-existing mechanisms. The IASC system provided logistic support to private sector actors; but involvement of private sector with the international humanitarian system was limited by a lack of an engagement strategy – including relevant guidance about due diligence – and the lack of a dedicated coordination staff with the relevant expertise.

> Overall, the coordination of the response was of high quality. Cluster coordination performance was variable, influenced by the profiles of the cluster coordinators, frequent turnover, the frequency of surges, the availability of funds and information management capacities.

15. The deployment of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) to the disaster-affected area along with OCHA surge support to the HCT was a critical contribution to the response. The quality of cluster coordination was variable with particularly strong performances by the Emergency Telecommunications, Logistics and WASH Clusters. A major factor in the success of the Scale-Up activation was the early decision to deploy an empowered DHC to oversee field-based operations and ensure there was a strong partnership with the government, which had already deployed its senior leadership to the field before Cyclone Idai made landfall. The DHC was a suitable focal point for several months while senior INGC staff were based in the field, but this resulted in some communication gaps since the HCT was based in Maputo.

16. The centrality of protection was widely recognized as a critical part of the Scale-Up activation. The PSEA Working Group played a particularly important role from the beginning of the response. The Protection Cluster was among those that struggled to provide sufficient support to its members, partly because it was the only cluster that did not deploy dedicated field-based cluster coordination surge capacities. The Global Protection Cluster's new global strategy (launched in early 2020) was seen as a timely opportunity to address such capacity gaps and provide support adapted to sudden-onset climate-related disasters.

> The Scale-Up activation significantly contributed to meeting humanitarian needs but did not adequately address the transition to early recovery.

17. The HCT and many of the cluster members made early recovery a priority during the Scale-Up activation. Humanitarian staff were regularly involved in joint recovery planning with development actors such as the World Bank. Clusters had their own transition plans; these were implemented with varying levels of success. However, since long-term recovery interventions were only planned to start in 2020, the assistance provided did not necessarily reflect the early recovery needs; a large proportion of affected communities started recovering during April and May 2019.

18. The lack of an overall transitional plan, as identified during the operational peer review (OPR) during May 2019 as a priority action for the HCT, remained an important gap. The proportion of HRP funding for early recovery declined during the later phases of the response. This raises questions about whether more attention should have been given to the cost effectiveness of the relief operation so a greater share of the limited resources could have been allocated to early recovery needs.

19. Many of the challenges in supporting early recovery could be attributed to the operating context, including the *ad hoc* approach of relocating internally displaced persons (IDPs) to resettlement sites in Beira and the need to respond to Cyclone Kenneth. National election processes during the last half of 2019 delayed the launch of longer-term recovery operations. Nevertheless, country-based stakeholders highlighted that many of the early recovery challenges could be attributed to structural factors related to the humanitarian-development nexus that need to be addressed at the global level.

> The wide variety of monitoring and data management systems, which generated data of variable quality and consistency, made it difficult to systematically measure overall operational performance.

20. The HRP was mainly perceived by the humanitarian agencies as a fundraising and communications tool that was not well-suited to monitoring operations in a rapidly changing operating environment. The HCT developed strategic benchmarks but only about half of the clusters developed workplans with sector targets that provided inter-agency tools to measure operational performance. The lack of a coherent framework to monitor humanitarian operations contributed to most of the clusters relying mainly on the 4W tool (Who is doing What, Where, When?) for performance monitoring. The result was an emphasis on coverage, activity and output-based reporting. A small number of agencies collected post-distribution monitoring data themselves, but the data were not used in a systematic way. There was broad agreement amongst stakeholders that performance monitoring could be improved while emphasizing that any monitoring systems should be field-driven and additional bureaucratic layers should be avoided.

> Few clusters and inter-agency systems appear to have processes that encourage systematic continuous improvement based on the lessons learned.

21. Only two clusters, the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) and the Logistics Cluster, planned to conduct After Action Reviews (AARs) at the global level to capture relevant lessons from the Cyclone Idai response that could be applied during future responses. The ETC carried out a survey to gather cluster member feedback and measure user satisfaction to inform its AAR. These two clusters were among the three top performing clusters during this response. This indicated a serious gap in accountability since it was unclear how other clusters would apply lessons to avoid similar shortfalls during future responses. The OCHA-led assessment cell also faced challenges and it was equally unclear how lessons learned would be used to improve its operation during future responses. A related issue was the lack of clarity among stakeholders about the mechanism to ensure follow up to recommendations that result from this IAHE or the OPR.

Recommendations

22. A total of 13 recommendations are targeted at the HCT in Mozambique, the IASC Emergency Directors Group, the IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Global Protection Cluster. The recommendations for the HCT are largely aligned with the Action Plan developed during the OPR. As described in the Methodology section of this report, most of the recommendations listed below were reviewed in-depth with stakeholders from the humanitarian agencies and various government ministries during two validation workshops, which were facilitated by evaluation team members in Maputo, in December 2019. The list below is a **condensed version** for this Executive Summary. The full recommendations can be found at the end of the main report on page 58.

Recommendations targeted at the Mozambique Humanitarian Country Team

R1. **Further improve preparedness, early warning and anticipatory action** by supporting INGC, other government ministries and CSOs to strengthen capacities at national and community levels.

R2. **Develop and implement an engagement and capacity-building strategy for civil society stakeholders** to enable them to play a more effective role in humanitarian action.

R3. **Use the results of this IAHE, and other relevant lessons learned, to inform advocacy and resource mobilization strategies during future disaster responses to help ensure that the humanitarian community is supporting the priority needs of affected communities**, especially households which are struggling to recover and vulnerable members of affected communities with special needs.

Recommendations for the Emergency Directors Group

R4. **Improve information management and communication systems for the assessment and monitoring data needed to provide a real time overview of the priority needs of affected communities**.

R5. **Ensure that there is an adequate roster of cluster coordinators and information management staff** with the necessary skills, gender balance, experience and language abilities. There should be suitable incentives in place, so these personnel are available for a deployment duration that ensures adequate continuity of staffing and optimizes value-added for the clusters.

R6. **Improve coordination and engagement with the private sector with the timely deployment of a private sector coordinator having relevant experience in large-scale disasters**. This should be supported by a roster of staff members who are trained and experienced individuals.

R7. **Strengthen and improve the decentralized humanitarian leadership coordination model to provide more effective support during a large-scale disaster event**. This is especially critical in such countries as Mozambique, in which the government typically decentralizes decision-making to the affected areas during a disaster response.

Recommendations targeted at the IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group

R8. **Capture and share lessons for clusters and replicate as appropriate** (including in other clusters) to improve preparedness and achieve a more consistent and integrated performance.

R9. **Require each global cluster to carry out After-Action Reviews within six months of the Scale-Up activation.** These AARs should systematically consider the users' (cluster members, HCT) feedback and generate an action plan that promotes continuous improvement using the lessons learned. Similar inter-agency learning reviews should be routinely conducted for inter-agency assessment coordination cells.

R10. **Improve the relevance and value of future IAHEs of Scale-Up activation responses.** Improvements could include the systematic inclusion of household surveys to assess the collective outcomes and give a meaningful voice to affected communities; assessing anticipatory actions; and using proxy indicators to assess cost effectiveness to better understand options for prioritizing limited resources.

Recommendations targeted at the Emergency Relief Coordinator

R11. **Develop guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams, supported through the deployment of technical specialists, to help with the development of multi-sector performance benchmarks** for responses when there is a Scale-Up activation. This will help track overall performance and better inform decision-making.

R12. **Ensure that humanitarian and early recovery needs are adequately analyzed and communicated in a timely way** so that support by the international community is adapted to priorities of affected communities during successive phases of the response. Based on lessons learned from the response to Cyclone Idai, improvements are needed more at the multisectoral level than at the level of individual clusters.

Recommendation targeted at the Global Protection Cluster

R13. **The Global Protection Cluster should use the launch of its revised global strategic framework** to clarify its role in responding to varying disaster scenarios, including sudden-onset natural disasters.