

EVALUATION OFFICE

**UNICEF'S RESPONSE TO
THE EMERGENCY IN THE
HORN OF AFRICA,
2011–2012:
LESSON-LEARNING
EXERCISE**

Final Report — Executive Summary

August 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives and purpose

In December 2011, UNICEF senior management agreed to conduct a Lesson-Learning Exercise (LLE) on UNICEF's response to the emergency in the Horn of Africa (HoA). According to the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the exercise, the LLE aimed to provide a structured corporate reflection, drawing out major lessons and insights on which aspects of UNICEF's corporate response to the HoA emergency worked well, which aspects worked less well, and why. The aim was to provide practical recommendations to strengthen the operations supporting the HoA response, and UNICEF's procedures for addressing future emergencies, in particular any adjustments required to the Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure (CEAP) and its associated Simplified Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs) in the longer term. The ToR indicated that the LLE should focus mainly on UNICEF's internal operations, processes and procedures. The LLE is not a formal evaluation and thus has relied almost entirely on the views of UNICEF staff and on UNICEF documentation. No government, United Nations or non-governmental partners were interviewed, and there was no third-party verification of the views and statements of UNICEF staff.

Background

Drought has been a regular occurrence in the HoA throughout the past several decades, a situation which has been compounded by prolonged conflict in Somalia. UNICEF country offices (COs) in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia had been responding to the effects of such drought on women and children through their regular country programmes. All COs had anticipated an escalation of the drought in 2011 and had initiated scale-up interventions in early 2011. By July, the situation had deteriorated to a point where malnutrition rates reached alarming levels across the HoA, famine was declared in parts of southern Somalia, and the number and condition of refugees fleeing Somalia was capturing world headlines. UNICEF then executed a massive scale-up of programmes with an unprecedented corporate mobilization of support sparked by the first activation of the CEAPs for a Level 3 (L3) emergency response.

Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure

The activation of the CEAP for Level 3 emergencies was successful in quickly mobilizing very substantial resources from across the organization and from donors and UNICEF national committees. The personal involvement of the Executive Director (ED) added credibility to the L3 activation. The appointment of the Regional Director (RD) of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) as the Global Emergency Coordinator (GEC) was seen as appropriate, and he was credited with having performed well in the role, balancing the imperative for action with giving primacy to CO leadership of the emergency response. The Regional Office (RO) performed well in coordinating the COs and with headquarters (HQ), and managed the communications traffic between the offices well. Coordination between the RD as GEC and the Director of the Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS) worked well after an initial period of uncertainty, given that there was no precedent or plan for the GEC to be anyone other than the Director of EMOPS. Roles and accountabilities between CO, RO and HQ were not always clear. The Immediate Response Team (IRT) was not deployed, which the RO and COs were relieved about, although not everyone agrees that this was the right decision. Emergency Management Team meetings tended to focus too much on practical discussions of staffing, funding and supplies, and not enough on strategy. The first

implementation of the CEAP and the draft SSOPs, even if used in a form adapted for this emergency, provide many lessons for the future, and several clarifications and modifications are proposed.

Preparedness, early warning and early action

Both external and UNICEF early warning systems highlighted the prolonged drought and the deteriorating food security and nutrition situation in the HoA during 2010 and 2011. UNICEF COs started to react to the warning signs from late 2010–early 2011, building on their earlier prepositioning of stocks as part of emergency preparedness and response planning. The scale of the pre-L3 UNICEF response was constrained by the available funding. While COs were well aware of the steady deterioration in the situation in 2010–2011, the dramatic rise in malnutrition rates during the second quarter of 2011 in the worst-affected areas of the HoA was not anticipated. This led to mass displacement in and from Somalia. In Ethiopia, the national response, including UNICEF's contribution, came closest to being early and adequate enough. The scale of the combined response of international actors in response to clear warning signs was inadequate. UNICEF's L3 declaration came late, and in reaction to media attention on the refugee influx to Kenya, rather than in response to data available on the situation of children. UNICEF could have launched an L3 response well before July 2011, though without the global media attention on Somali refugees in Kenya and the declaration of famine in Somalia, the scale of the response would likely have been more modest. UNICEF staff sentiment on whether UNICEF's response was timely is somewhat divided.

Human resources

The rapid deployment of human resources for this emergency was agreed to be one of the most successful aspects of UNICEF's mobilization. Personnel in all categories – surge, temporary assistance (TA), consultants and standby partners were seen to be of high quality. Country Representatives willingly released staff for surge deployments in response to the L3 activation. HQ, ROs and COs worked well together in planning deployments. Staff were very committed but some reached burn-out without sufficient attention to the stress they were under. In response to the L3 declaration, some staff cancelled leave, while others did not. These decisions were not consistent. While emergency recruitment was accelerated by the application of the fast-track recruitment procedure, arrival of personnel on site was sometimes delayed by slow deployment and lack of basic equipment.

Supply and logistics

UNICEF mounted its largest-ever supply operation for the HoA emergency, with Somalia the main focus, enabled by quick, flexible funding, on a large scale. COs were satisfied with the UNICEF performance in supplies – “Right goods, right time, right specs” (survey). All COs had prepositioned stocks following their emergency preparedness and response exercises before the emergency, including in zonal centres. In just over three months after the L3 declaration, by 31 October, UNICEF had delivered 10,500 metric tonnes of life-saving supplies for Somalia alone, and by January 2012, 21,000 metric tonnes had been delivered. At the time of writing, the great majority of these supplies for Somalia remained unused because of the Al-Shabaab (AS) ban on UNICEF activities in southern Somalia. Logistics proved very challenging in Somalia. UNICEF received US\$2.98 million in in-kind donations. COs reported long lead times for some supplies, both local and offshore. For some supplies, funding was not made available until late in 2011. COs are concerned about their capacity to monitor supplies and partners' ability to report on them. UNICEF needs to strengthen its emergency logistics capacity.

Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization for the HoA emergency was fast and effective, once L3 was declared by UNICEF, with almost US\$400 million raised by the end of 2011, some 95 per cent of the amount sought in the revised regional Humanitarian Action Update for 2011 (see chart below). This was a significant achievement given the prevailing difficult funding environment. A third of all funds raised came un-earmarked from UNICEF National Committees (NatComs), a vital contribution which allowed education and child protection, often neglected by donors in emergencies, to be funded. The RO managed the regional thematic funds well, according to COs. The ED's direct approaches to key donors are thought to have influenced their funding decisions. Some donors insisted on separate funding requests and reports, which created significantly more work for COs. Situation reports were considered by the Public Sector Alliances and Resources Mobilization Office to have been useful for donors.

Security

The emergency response in the Somali region of Ethiopia, northern Kenya, and especially in southern Somalia was constrained by poor security. UNICEF has been investing in additional security measures in the region. The security management environment has been changing as country United Nations Security Management Teams take a more proactive approach to enabling programming in high-risk areas.

Partnerships

UNICEF built on its existing partnerships and worked successfully with partners to scale up its emergency response. UNICEF also expanded and added NGO partnerships in all countries. The management of Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) proved challenging, as in previous emergencies, although COs showed ingenuity and adopted a risk management approach to minimise delays. Collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) on supplementary feeding in Somalia and with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on programmes in the camps in Kenya and Ethiopia also required a sustained management effort. UNICEF needs a new global agreement with UNHCR on its work in refugee emergencies, building on the current progress being made at country level. UNICEF also provided surge capacity to strengthen the coordination of the clusters/sectors it leads.

Planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation

For the HoA, UNICEF implemented a pilot version of the Humanitarian Performance Monitoring System (HPMS). This represents one of UNICEF's first attempts to implement such a system. A majority of informants consider that the HPMS has improved the quality of UNICEF reporting of programme results. The introduction of the system during the emergency caused some disruption to COs, which consider that the system was not well adapted and was too complicated and demanding. COs also consider that the intense work required to adapt to an evolving system impacted on the emergency response. Many partners have poor reporting systems and were not used to reporting on results, as opposed to activities. UNICEF should establish minimum standards for reasonable expectations of data for reporting and ensure that COs in high-risk countries are 'data ready' for an L3 emergency.

Advocacy, media and communications

The United Nations, including UNICEF, was largely unsuccessful in focusing international attention onto the growing crisis in HoA before famine was declared in Somalia. Once media interest began to focus on the HoA emergency in July 2011, UNICEF was successful in positioning the emergency as a 'children's crisis'. The UNICEF response to the emergency is thought of internally as 'media-driven'. UNICEF's bold messaging on the threat to children's lives probably increased its media coverage, and related fund-raising. The ED is seen as having made an important personal contribution to the advocacy effort. UNICEF was constrained by circumstances in its external communications in Somalia and Ethiopia, and chose to keep a low profile in the refugee emergency. The management of visits of journalists, donors and NatCom directors placed a significant management load on COs. UNICEF needs to include advocacy as part of its emergency planning process.

Long-term view: Disaster risk reduction and the resilience agenda

UNICEF has much to learn from the results of its long-term investments in building the capacity of national systems to respond to shocks. The extension of health and nutrition services that reach into vulnerable areas in Kenya, and especially in Ethiopia, helped to reduce the impact of the drought in those countries. UNICEF needs to build partnerships with organizations which are influential in the domains of risk reduction and resilience so that its programmes can have maximum impact in concert with others. For these countries the risks are already well understood. UNICEF will need to continue to advocate for the establishment of these services in the most vulnerable areas, whose populations are typically also the least powerful.

Further considerations

- ◆ UNICEF did not appear to have any concerted strategy for communicating with people affected by the HoA emergency, either to listen to the needs of populations directly or through partners, to engage them in planning, or to explain what services people can expect. UNICEF needs a strategy to allow it to fulfil its Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) commitments to accountability to affected people.
- ◆ UNICEF needs to recognise the limits of subsidiarity in ensuring that UNICEF COs are properly equipped to respond to emergencies.
- ◆ UNICEF still suffers from bureaucratic systems that constrain emergency response and should make sure that adequate technical support is available to prevent procedures slowing the response.
- ◆ UNICEF does not have an understanding of the cost-effectiveness of its emergency programmes, or any way of analysing it.

Summary of findings and lessons

1. The CEAP showed itself effective in rapidly mobilising financial and human resources and supply and logistics support. The personal involvement of the ED added credibility to this UNICEF L3 response, and will be important again in the future. The CEAP proved its worth at its first use. UNICEF has already amended the L3 SSOPs to take account of several of the shortcomings of the draft SSOPs in the March 2012 approved version.
2. The draft SSOPs for L3 tended to the assumption that CO capacity needs to be *replaced*, while in the HoA, CO capacity was not replaced but *supplemented* by the L3 activation. The revised approved SSOPs now allow for decisions to be made regarding the extent to which CO capacity is to be supported.

3. Some regional and HQ advisers were unsure of their role in, and accountability for, the emergency response. In UNICEF's decentralized structure a simple clarification of responsibility may not be possible, but collective accountability through enhanced HQ-RO-CO networking during emergencies could provide a way forward.
4. For Somalia, as well as Kenya, early warnings did not lead to adequate response by the United Nations system, including UNICEF. By revising its approach to Early Warning Early Action, UNICEF can ensure that senior management is aware of, and responds to, growing threats.
5. The current recognised triggers for nutrition emergencies did not work to protect children in the HoA, partly because they are not adequately predictive of the situation children will face as a result of a coming crisis. By the time famine is declared, it is already too late for children.
6. If UNICEF's approach to emergency preparedness were modified, it could bring together CO preparedness and RO/HQ preparedness to allow for Level 1, 2 and 3 scenarios and response to be planned in advance in high-risk countries.
7. Prepositioning of supplies, especially in zonal centres, allowed the emergency response to start quickly, while the emergency supply pipeline was being filled. UNICEF-supported emergency preparedness exercises have had an impact beyond prepositioning, by drawing government and other partners into a joint process for preparedness planning.
8. The reinstatement of the emergencies recruitment team in DHR and the application of the fast-track emergency recruitment procedure proved vital to UNICEF's rapid deployment of personnel.
9. All COs had capacity gaps in one or more functions during the emergency, even though COs had good capacity and the RO had reviewed requirements with them. UNICEF could help to ensure that all gaps are filled by including a more thorough review of human-resource needs after an L3 declaration.
10. UNICEF has developed its supply capacity and network to the point where it can quickly mobilize on a large scale, including taking on the supply of products with which it has little experience. Logistics and supply monitoring were identified as outstanding challenges, in part because of the very challenging circumstances.
11. The rapid and generous response of public and private donors showed the trust enjoyed by UNICEF thanks to the strength of its country programmes in the region and relationships with donors at capital and country levels. The HoA emergency again highlighted the importance of un-earmarked funding for financing interventions seen by donors as less immediately life-saving.
12. The HoA emergency response shows how essential established partnerships are. Long-term investment in government and non-governmental organization (NGO) partnerships pay off in terms of access, influence and operational capacity.
13. The application of the UNICEF PCA presented challenges for UNICEF COs and NGO partners in the HoA emergency. UNICEF can learn from the measures UNICEF COs took to speed up the process. The March 2012 SSOPs for L3 set out how the organisation's procedures allow for streamlining of the PCA process. This will help, but lack of staff and partner knowledge of procedures will continue to be as much of a challenge as the PCA procedures.
14. UNICEF programming for refugees was hampered by the lack of clear terms of engagement with UNHCR. Building trust and improving cooperation at country level should lead in time to the agreement of a revised global memorandum of understanding (MoU).
15. High levels of media attention on a relatively small group can lead to it receiving too much attention and too many resources, compared with a less visible, but also severely affected, majority. This is inconsistent with UNICEF's equity focus.

16. Cluster/sector coordination arrangements vary between countries in the HoA and do not follow the IASC standard cluster approach in any country. Understanding their strengths and weaknesses would help to improve global guidance on the cluster approach. Sub-national coordination, though not always strong, has the potential to improve coordinated service delivery. Its improvement, however, will require the cluster system to be adapted at the sub-national level to intentionally merge groups of clusters.
17. UNICEF COs in the region aspire to more inter-sectoral working within UNICEF. There is potential for improving the effectiveness and value for money of UNICEF emergency interventions by integrating services at the point of delivery, backed up by integrated support from regional and HQ levels, rather than the individual vertical sector support that tends to prevail currently. This implies a more cohesive approach to UNICEF and cluster support to local governments and communities.
18. The introduction of the Humanitarian Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) was problematic and resource intensive, but results data did improve as a result of its deployment. UNICEF can use the experience gained to help define minimum requirements for performance data and start to build CO capacity in high-risk countries to meet these requirements.
19. UNICEF did not have the capacity at country level to consistently report on results from the emergency response, nor did most of its partners. The introduction of HPMS, while very challenging, has brought some improvement, but without more investment in advance of emergencies, UNICEF remains vulnerable to not being able demonstrate its performance.
20. UNICEF positioned the emergency as a 'crisis for children'. UNICEF had no advocacy plan for the HoA emergency, and has yet to integrate advocacy into its emergency response planning.
21. Given the marginalized communities, especially pastoralist communities, in the HoA, UNICEF needs to continue advocating for their social protection, while supporting emergency response capacity in marginal areas, for example, the mobile health and nutrition teams deployed to the Somali region of Ethiopia.
22. The development of national systems for social service provision in vulnerable and marginal areas reduced nutrition-related illness and deaths. There is potential to replicate this approach.
23. Accountability to affected people was hardly considered during the HoA response. As a member of the IASC, UNICEF has signed up to commitments in this area, which, taken seriously, will require profound changes in practice, but also bring real benefits.
24. UNICEF has bottlenecks to overcome in its emergency management processes. By deploying sufficient experienced staff to major emergencies, it can avoid blockages that held back the HoA emergency response. COs found that UNICEF procedures were a constraint on operational effectiveness, for example, data management, the processing of NGO agreements, and support to donor and other high-level visits. By documenting and exploiting the ways that COs succeeded in managing these obstacles, UNICEF can both establish good practice and help to clarify the levels of procedural risk that the organisation is ready to take to save lives.
25. UNICEF has no model for understanding or improving the cost-effectiveness of its emergency interventions. As financial resource constraints for emergency response and donor scrutiny increase, this could become a strategic weakness for the organisation.

Summary of principal recommendations

A summary of the main recommendations emanating from the exercise is included here. Further details on each of these recommendations is provided within a Recommendations section at the end of each chapter, as are additional recommendations. In these sections of the main report, where the following short-listed recommendations are repeated they are bolded in order to emphasise their relatively higher priority.

The Deputy Executive Director responsible for UNICEF's emergency operations is leading the preparation of the organisation's formal management response to the report's recommendations. Within the Recommendations section of each chapter of the main report, specific assigned responsibilities for each recommendation are articulated.

Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure (CEAP)

1. At their first revision in 2013, in the L3 CEAP and SSOPs, UNICEF should:
 - a. Clarify and expand on the purpose of 'single chain of command', together with a fuller background and rationale for the L3 activation;
 - b. Clarify that the L3 CEAP and SSOPs apply to all types of emergency, including regional and slow-onset emergencies, and making the links between L3 and Level 2 (L2) emergencies, the SSOPs for which will have been concluded by 2013;
 - c. Consider replacing the term 'no regrets' with a fuller explanation of how UNICEF can emerge at the end of the emergency response having achieved everything possible;
 - d. Develop a standard ToR for the IRT, including its role in reviewing the capacity needs of the CO(s), and agreeing on a staffing plan with the RD and Country Representative (CR), for agreement by the GEC, with periodic review;
 - e. Develop criteria for the nomination of the GEC;
 - f. Clarify that any thematic funding for the emergency is to be managed by the GEC, wherever the GEC is located, with associated tracking, monitoring and reporting on allocations;
 - g. Include the automatic deployment of an international security officer, where not already present; and
 - h. Ensure that COs engaged in an L3 emergency response are exempted from major organisational change initiatives as long as the L3 response persists (*see 13.4 below*).
2. Whether or not the Director of EMOPS is designated the GEC for an L3 emergency, the role of EMOPS within HQ as support to the GEC needs careful definition, including its role as the main channel for information requests and tasks to and from HQ to the RO and CO. Whoever is appointed as GEC, his/her immediate team must include at least one adviser who is an expert in UNICEF SSOPs for L2/L3.

Preparedness, early warning and early action

3. UNICEF should devise an emergency preparedness system for L2 and L3 emergencies that brings together HQ-RO-CO, and factors in current capacities in the country and region.

Human resources

4. At the onset of an L3 emergency, each CO involved should systematically review and report its human resource capacity and gaps to the GEC. The GEC, supported by the RD¹ and IRT, should then carefully review these and act to ensure that any capacity gaps are closed,

¹ Or Director of EMOPS if the RD is the GEC, and vice versa.

setting aside the CO's own self-assessment where necessary. At the same time, the GEC and IRT should address any capacity gaps in the RO.

5. UNICEF should develop an emergency deployment procedure to add to the fast-track emergency recruitment procedure to ensure that the arrival of staff on emergency deployments is not held back by various clearances and practical arrangements such as lack of equipment. Country-level briefing and handover notes for staff should be part of that procedure.

Supply and logistics

6. Emergency logistics management is under-resourced in UNICEF and needs to be strengthened. In particular, more emergency logisticians should be available for deployment from the Supply Division (SD) without weakening the Division's own logistics capacity).
7. Supply monitoring at the point of distribution remains weak. UNICEF needs a strategy for training both programme officers and UNICEF partners in supply tracking and reporting.

Resource mobilization

8. Using lessons learned from the HoA emergency, UNICEF should advocate with donors to allow transaction costs to be reduced by not having to prepare separate proposals and reports for separate donors. UNICEF can appeal to the special conditions pertaining during an L3 emergency to press for the use of the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) or its equivalent. For UNICEF-specific funding, donors may require in exchange that the UNICEF appeal and 180-day plan (or equivalents) include some more detail on targets and planned results.

Security

9. An L3 response taking place in a high-risk environment should trigger the deployment of a dedicated international security officer, if one is not already in place.

Partnerships

10. UNICEF needs to conclude a new global agreement with UNHCR regarding its engagement in refugee settings. This will require careful, unhurried negotiation, drawing on the trust generated through positive experiences of improved relationships at country level.

Sector integration

11. UNICEF should develop and test models to increase the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of its emergency response through integration of sectors at the 'point of delivery', especially in remote, vulnerable areas – whether via community centre, school, water point, or health post.

Results

12. The HPMS should be introduced into high-risk countries as part of UNICEF emergency preparedness. UNICEF should make every effort to avoid having to introduce the HPMS at the height of an emergency. Whether the system has been introduced to a country or not, when an L3 emergency begins, surge capacity to support the system should be automatically deployed to each country involved. In general, COs in high-risk countries need increased capacity for data management on an ongoing basis and access to surge resources during L2/L3.
13. If the HPMS is to become a standard part of UNICEF emergency response, (1) it needs to be officially launched via a programme instruction, once the pilot phase is deemed to be complete, and (2) it requires a medium-term investment plan to ensure successful roll-out and support between and during emergencies.

Situation monitoring

14. Given its role as an advocate for children beyond its programme and cluster responsibilities, UNICEF should give serious consideration to separating situation monitoring from results and performance monitoring in emergencies, in recognition of their being very different processes, and to protect the integrity of each. UNICEF needs to clarify what situation monitoring in emergencies is, and what it requires.

Advocacy

15. Advocacy should be an integral part of UNICEF emergency planning, with its own objectives, activities and indicators alongside the programme sector plans.

External communications

16. UNICEF should continue to ensure that there is media presence on the spot as soon as possible after a major emergency begins. In doing so, every effort should be made to avoid any negative effect on programme effectiveness, and additional personnel should be provided not just for communications but to support the logistical needs of visitors. Where there are limitations, such as limited seats on internal flights, CO management will still need to make judgement calls on the movement of these resources.

Resilience

17. UNICEF should engage with sympathetic donors to explain how it has already contributed to resilience in some of its programming in the HoA, and how further financing can reduce vulnerability (*see also under Resource Mobilization*). This includes engaging with the 'Resilience Champions' to explain how further financing and partnerships can reduce vulnerability.

Accountability to affected people

18. UNICEF requires a plan and resources to meet its IASC commitments for accountability to affected people.

Response capacity

19. In L3 responses UNICEF should strengthen its review of CO emergency response capacity at the outset of an L3 emergency, to make sure that capacity is increased according to the scale of the emergency response required and to ensure that gaps and weaknesses are addressed.

Process bottlenecks

20. UNICEF must be ready to put resources into removing process bottlenecks, which will otherwise slow up emergency response. If UNICEF is not ready to simplify its bureaucratic systems further for emergencies, it must compensate with the necessary technical expertise to prevent procedures becoming obstacles.

