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Immediate crisis response

In 2006, UNDP launched the immediate crisis response initiative, aimed at improving the timeliness and quality of its response after the onset of crisis. Known internally as the SURGE project, this initiative aims to ensure that specially trained UNDP staff are redeployed within days of a crisis to help UNDP country offices foster better recovery and development opportunities for people affected by crisis. These rapid redeployments are backed by newly developed standard operating procedures that allow UNDP to marshal resources from within the organization in support of UNDP country offices facing crises.

Key achievements

In April 2007, UNDP launched a rapid deployment mechanism, enabling the organization to deploy specially trained advisers to a crisis zone within days. The value of the immediate crisis response is directly linked to the quantity and quality of expertise within the network. In its initial roll-out phase, 63 UNDP staff members with expertise in at least one of 12 identified areas (including early recovery, coordination, operational support, resource mobilization and communications) joined the crisis response network. Forty-three of these experts have undergone training in preparation for their deployment. During the year, eight advisers provided support to four UNDP country offices in the aftermath of crises in Bangladesh, Liberia, the Solomon Islands and Sudan. For example, the provision of expert personnel in the first hours and days after Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh enabled UNDP, and in particular the UN Resident Coordinator, to take a strong lead in the coordination of the crisis and to move swiftly from crisis response to outlining the recovery framework.

UNDP also drew on its global network of expertise to develop standard operating procedures to guide its immediate crisis response. These procedures detail the critical steps and decisions that ensure effective positioning related to recovery programming, UN coordination and early recovery cluster lead responsibilities. 2007 also saw the development of a number of supporting tools, including a checklist for immediate response and templates for planning and resource mobilization. These are compiled in an electronic toolkit for UNDP staff, which is available online and regularly updated.

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COUNTRY EXAMPLE:

Preparing to support a better future

Five years of conflict in Darfur have claimed almost 300,000 civilian lives and affected more than 4.2 million people. Throughout 2007, Darfur remained the world's largest humanitarian relief operation, with hundreds of international organizations and 14 UN organizations providing support to an estimated two thirds of the affected population.

Despite continued insecurity, an important political agreement was reached with the Government of Sudan in July 2007 to deploy a full African Union/UN peacekeeping force for Darfur. This development heralded new opportunities for UN access and expanded intervention. Fuelled by the sudden prospect of peace talks and renewed international focus on the Darfur crisis, UNDP Sudan requested immediate crisis response planning support to strengthen its institutional presence in Darfur and to prepare for expanded programmatic engagement in early recovery.

The mission undertook an assessment of UNDP's capacity, as well as the prevailing operational, socio-political and institutional environment. Based on this work, the team developed scenarios for the partial and large-scale expansion of recovery activities. The mission also provided recommendations on how to improve programme and operations management capacity. The mission's recommendations fed into the development of the new country programme document for Sudan covering the period 2009-2012.



Sudan © UN Photo/Tim McKulka

From complex crisis to confident recovery

On 2 April 2007, an earthquake of 8.1 in magnitude struck off the coast of a remote part of the Solomon Islands. The quake triggered a tsunami: 52 people lost their lives and infrastructure, schools and homes in coastal areas were badly damaged. More than 10,000 people living in this nation of islands were affected.

Scattered island communities with limited communications and transport, coupled with under-resourced administrations, often conspire to make crisis response and recovery in the Pacific complex. Yet UNDP moved quickly, deploying an immediate crisis response mission to support the government in establishing an early recovery strategy and a coordination unit.

The UNDP immediate crisis response advisers brought with them experience from other parts of the organization, linking the Solomon Islands' response with best practices learned during the South Asian tsunami. With the advisers' support, UNDP worked with the Asian Development Bank and the government to draw up an early recovery strategy, which was ready three weeks after the crisis. The advisers also helped develop a critically needed shelter strategy and standards for housing reconstruction, currently implemented by the government. UNDP's swift and well-organized response built credibility with the government and other partners, leading to lasting and effective partnerships.