

## Flexibility and Measurement: Mutually Exclusive?

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Introduction of the work of SIF – 48 Tsunami rehabilitation teams in Sri Lanka and reconstruction projects in Aceh, Indonesia. SIF as member of the Tsunami Reconstruction Facilitation Committee which disburses US\$50 mil donated by the Singapore public to Tsunami affected communities.

1. All development assistance and humanitarian action involve project management. Whether to deliver food, build homes or offer medical help.
  2. Projects are carried out in fluid, complex, and often chaotic conditions, esp in post disaster and post conflict situations.
  3. Projects must adapt to changing needs and conditions in the reconstruction sites.
  4. Eg. Habitat for Humanity Singapore was given about \$8 mil to build houses in Aceh. But a few factors interfered with the construction projects:
    - Puasa (fasting month) in Nov 05
    - Monsoon rain Oct 05 to Jan 06
    - Rural roads damaged – due to aftershocks and the Monsoon
    - Inflation of prices – esp construction materials, due to NGO competition for materials, shortage of supplies and suppliers' profiteering
    - Habitat responded by setting up resource centres to secure raw materials from overseas and considering prefabricated building materials, but Acehnese dislike and mistrust it – can be dismantled and destroyed by another earthquake.
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1. Hence accountability on the basis of preplanned timelines, resource requirements and project scope (deliverables) is extremely difficult. Things change on the ground.
  2. Responsible project management in humanitarian and development work must involve decision making and tradeoffs. If all go as planned, there is no need for project managers. Uncertainties and risks are always present. Good project management might mean giving up something desirable in order to achieve optimum overall result.
  3. Virtually everything about a project plan can be changed – timeline, scope, resources, etc. E.g. reduce the number of houses to be built to keep minimum quality standards if there is building materials inflation. Extending the deadline for completion of an orphanage if there is labour shortage. Or change the sequence of rebuilding clinics and offering medical care if there are bureaucratic obstacles and bottlenecks? Always have to adapt, to find a way to work smarter to achieve the same results.

## Questions:

1. How can flexibility in adapting and adjusting to changing realities be managed with accountability?
2. Under what circumstances can project plans be adapted or adjusted responsibly? Can there be a responsible way of making exceptions and adjustments?
3. TRFC-approved projects – They must have a project plan detailing project parameters, work breakdown structure, schedule, resource requirements, budgeting plans, risk management plans, project monitoring and tracking reports, closure reports. They spell out what work needs to be done to achieve project objectives, and what actions need to be taken to respond to the changing dynamics of the project work.
4. E.g. In order to manage risks in a humanitarian relief work, aid workers sometimes have to take an immediate and special focus on the protection of women and children by taking measures to curb incidence of sexual and domestic violence, a problem in disaster zones. But they are often not foreseen in project plans until aid workers begin work on the ground. These problems might escalate with loss of family members, networks of support, livelihoods, and security in general – putting mental strain and additional stress on families and victims such as widows and orphans. Need to take special immediate steps to provide security and sanitation in camps and temporary housing.
5. Recently, the Architecture Dept of Universitas Syiah Kuala (Banda Aceh) and UN Habitat did a 3<sup>rd</sup> party quality monitoring survey on housing reconstruction in Aceh. Index based on beneficiary perception – are houses allocated without malfeasance, and proper provision of labour and materials – As a result of published findings, Save the Children and Oxfam intervened and temporarily halted their projects.

So, how is it possible to be accountable to diverse stakeholders, funders, volunteers, overseers, and beneficiaries in the midst of changing circumstances, all at the same time? Difficult, like “herding cats on ice”. Here are some lessons:

- Flexibility and adaptation do not mean that changes have to be arbitrary. They can be made according to a pre-planned process. E.g. there can be a process to report changes to deliverables (deliverables), resources (money, people and political support), or time (schedule). These can be documented and reported to key stakeholders in a timely and regular fashion, detailing the rationale behind the tradeoffs and adjustments. Changes hence can be done in a systematic, transparent way – visible to stakeholders.