

Sustainable post disaster reconstruction projects in remote locations – Darfur revisited



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The West Darfur Humanitarian Aid Project in Sudan..context in brief

- Darfur consists of 3 states and occupies the western area of Sudan. 256 000 sq km and population of 5 million people from a complex tribal mix. Large areas are prone to drought and desertification.
- Humanitarian fallout was an estimated 1 million Internally Displaced Persons / People (IDPs) by May 2004, located in West Darfur . Aid agencies and NGO's needed to work to get aid into this remote location and reconstruct the communities



The UN Sudanese Humanitarian Aid Project in West Darfur ..overall context in brief

- Situation in 2007/8 has recently worsened further despite schools being built and 60% of food supplies actually getting through. The IDP figures in 2008 , after 5 years of armed conflict, are around 2.5 million across the 3 Darfur states with 260,000 new IDPs in W Darfur for 2007 alone. In 2007 even Aid workers were raped and beaten, their vehicles hijacked (58 in 2007 alone and only 50% found), and more recently a UN aid worker was killed (an aid truck driver) in early 2008). Aid worker numbers have been pulled back , and a new appeal launch for \$40.3 million made by UNHCR 4 April 08 for protection and assistance to the Darfur IDPs, as personal security is at an all time low still.
- How do managers allow for and build this into the planning ?



The focus of this extended abstract

This extended abstract builds on a research paper published by Kestle, Potangaroa and Storey, (2006) that analysed a selection of the data collected in 2004 from interviews with key decision makers /managers, on the UN Humanitarian Aid Project in West Darfur. Those data were specifically tested against the key factors of the conceptual design management model (Kestle & London, 2002).

Analysis of further data collected from the same Sudanese UN case study regarding the realities of managing the project is reviewed here , but only in terms of the question :

“What were the realities , challenges and a few of the relevant ‘lessons learned’ in managing the pre-planning and operational stages of the UN Sudanese Humanitarian Aid project in West Darfur in terms of the logistics, the camps, the stakeholders and communications ?”

Background: The conceptual design management model

REMOTE SITES
- proximity to urban areas
- regulatory framework
- physical environment
- functional/aesthetic and social aims
- environmental impact/sensitivity

Conceptual Design Management Model for Remote Sites
(Kestle & London, 2002)

The situational management context

- Inaccessibility of the site geographically and politically.
- Remote, harsh and extreme in terms of humanitarian aid environments .
- This was the laboratory where the multi-disciplinary design management model was tested and also the work environment that produced the Humanitarian Response Review (2005) from which the UN Cluster System Approach evolved .

The specific challenges at the pre-planning and operational stages in particular according to the interviewed participants

1. Very few specifics on the scope or magnitude of the emergency before arriving in West Darfur . IDPs were in need of care and protection and the only instruction was “to assess and fix it” .
2. The scant briefings given of little relevance to the actual situation eg statistics on IDP numbers, available resources and amenities varied and therefore unreliable. Most useful info was from TV news and reading media articles before going to Darfur !!!
3. Logistical pre-planning almost impossible due to lack of any systems /processes being set –up beforehand ...then the extreme difficulty of setting up any systems in such a remote location

The specific challenges at the pre-planning and operational stages in particular according to the interviewed participants continued

4. The ‘remoteness of the site’ seriously impacted on the project and the participants’ roles and a repeated quote was “ *remoteness was the enemy of the programme*”.
5. No formed roads, frequent floods and washouts destroyed any tracks and resources in transit, (that had not already been looted).
6. Never any certainty as to when supply planes would fly or arrive at the marginally formed airstrips (that had no airport facilities) , nor what resources were actually on board.
7. Communications systems were non-existent initially, and were always unreliable. No satellite nor fibre-optic cable technology. Phones the only form of communication and only a Pulse mailing system, meaning reports were always outdated when received at HQ in Khartoum.

A selection of relevant ‘lessons learned’ at the pre-planning and operational stages of the UN Aid Project in West Darfur

- A clear plan of the area and an initial plan of ‘action and priorities’ needed before the relief personnel are brought in for the Emergency and Recovery Phases.
- Simple operating systems need to be set up so that computers can respond more effectively, given the primitive nature of the area.
- Realisation that logistically, up to 50% of resources will be lost to looting and/or freak weather conditions, and that wherever possible, coordination of resource transportation (road or air) needs to be better planned/organised and more closely guarded and monitored when in transit

A selection of relevant lessons learned at the pre-planning and operational stages of the UN Aid Project in West Darfur continued

- Mobile offices are needed, such as converted containers or caravans that are self-contained modules with UHS radios and email systems that are already operational before the specialist technical, field operations and relief personnel are brought in for the Emergency and Recovery Phases.
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- Planned future activities recorded and available to the subsequent managers and groups of aid personnel, as there is a lack of institutional memory with people moving on, and the next group tending to re-invent the wheel each time.

What this means in terms of the management context..... when revisiting the collected West Darfur data and the UN practice guidelines ...and what next??...

The UNHCR Handbook, 1999 stated :

"...There is no single blueprint for refugee emergency management; each refugee emergency is unique. However, experience shows that emergencies tend to evolve according to certain recognizable and documented patterns."

Testing of the design management model for remote sites in a humanitarian aid context was found to be effective in modelling and understanding the issues related to providing aid in remote locations. These findings published in 2006 by Kestle, Potangaroo & Storey, supported a further research stage of developing a project planning framework specifically for Humanitarian Aid (HA) projects.

Next steps ...



- The development of such a project planning framework specifically for HA projects has been further informed - firstly by research conducted and published at BEAR 2008 by Potangaroo & Kestle, (2008) that identified where and how Humanitarian Aid Agencies add value in humanitarian programmes, and secondly, in the research associated with this extended abstract, that reviewed a selection of the challenges and lessons learned at the pre-planning and operational stages, of the Sudanese case study, from a management perspective.

Further, the research undertaken in West Darfur begs comparison with the UN Human Response Review (2005) that formed the basis for the Cluster Approach in managing humanitarian aid operations. The Cluster Approach will be reviewed against the overall West Darfur case study findings in terms of the multi-disciplinary design management model for remote sites in a later paper
