

Evaluation of the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System (NOREPS)

Executive Summary - Evaluation Report 1/200



Norad

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the contribution and value-added to humanitarian action by the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System (NOREPS). The Norwegian Government set up NOREPS after the response to the Kurdish crisis in 1991 to improve the response capacity of the international humanitarian system through the provision of high quality goods and services. NOREPS is a public private partnership between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DCPEP), the Norwegian Red Cross, major Norwegian NGOs and selected Norwegian suppliers of relief goods. Innovation Norway provides secretarial and administrative support. NOREPS consists of three main components or deliveries:

- Goods from stockpiles or as in-kind donations. The NOREPS catalogue contains 75 different products for the relief market, from a total of 12 commercial suppliers. The products have all been vetted by the NOREPS system.
- An emergency staff roster system, NORSTAFF (and the regional variants).
- Service packages, which are made by up by the equipment needed, as well as the installation, and if required, the staff to manage them.

A 1999 review of NOREPS (Claussen et. al, 1999) presented a number of concerns both in terms of the network's administration, set up and lack of clear procedures for decision making as required for a preparedness system. One important concern was that NOREPS did not have a clearly defined mandate. The report also questioned the supplies of expensive Norwegian products into poor disaster prone countries, instead of locally produced supplies, as well as questioning the lack of competition for suppliers. The follow up of the review was the establishment of a formal mandate, and a more clear ownership of NOREPS placed in MFA.

The evaluation team had three questions to answer:

- the extent to which NOREPS was achieving its objectives;
- how compliant it was with humanitarian and other relevant principles; and
- whether the mandate and underlying assumptions were still appropriate given the changes in the context.

1.2 Findings

The team found that NOREPS has contributed to a more effective and coordinated humanitarian response. While some components have been more useful than others in different crises, all the components have played a role in improving humanitarian responses since 1991. The quality of goods, services and personnel is generally valued by clients to be high, and the timeliness of the response to be fast and efficient. We found that goods are dispatched and transported rapidly, and NORSTAFF personnel are reported to be deployed fast and efficiently. There is a more mixed picture when turning to cost effectiveness. A few products dominate the relief market within their category through commercial sales, while others rely almost exclusively on in-kind contributions because of their high cost.

There have been significant changes since the early 90's in the performance of the major operational UN relief agencies. There have also been changes in the nature of disasters, the global humanitarian system, the global economy, and in Norwegian aid policy. These changes mean that some of the components of NOREPS work are more relevant and appropriate than before, while others are declining in relevance.

The untying of Norwegian aid implied that some suppliers and their products had to give up the international humanitarian market, as agencies increasingly requested cash grants instead of in-kind contributions. However, the overall commercial sales have increased, and constitute now a larger percentage of Norwegian supplies than in-kind contributions.

The NOREPS service packages have been effective in emergency response. As with the NOREPS goods and staff, they have saved lives and allowed a faster response. The base camps established by DCPEP have been crucial in ensuring the rapid start up of humanitarian agencies in environments with limited or no infrastructure. Only the largest operational agencies (ICRC and WFP) have this capacity on their own. The DCPEP camps offer an opportunity for smaller UN agencies and NGOs to be more effective in the initial phase of an emergency. They also contribute to a more coordinated response through the physical co-location of agencies. However, some of the service packages would be more useful if they were smaller and more flexible.

While procurement, logistical capacity and stockpiling are improving, the agencies' own capacity to maintain trained personnel on stand-by is much less so. Even though some agencies have established their own surge capacity mechanisms, these mechanisms do not cover the demand. There is also little indication that this in-house capacity will increase significantly any time soon, as UN recruitment procedures continue to be long and cumbersome. NORSTAFF is the largest single component of NOREPS in financial terms. It is well appreciated by UN agencies, but does not have enough funds to meet all the requests it receives that deserve support. The evaluation team were impressed by NRC's management of NORSTAFF and the high reputation that NORSTAFF secondees enjoyed. However, the team recognise that their review of NORSTAFF has been as a part of NOREPS and that a more detailed and focused study is needed to review how NORSTAFF should develop.

The level of humanitarian stockpiles is increasing, and there are promising developments internationally that can make stockpiling more effective. Both the UNHRD Network and the cluster approach are contributing to increased standardisation, efficiency and more accessible stocks. However, humanitarian stocks are still not adequate to meet the needs. Stockpiles offer a real and efficient way of reducing death, suffering and distress in emergencies.

A rationale behind in-kind contributions instead of cash grants has been that the UN agencies have not had the sufficient capacity to respond quickly. While the former evaluation of NOREPS indicated that the MFA financed in-kind contributions were increasing on behalf of commercial sales to the international relief agencies, this review have revealed the opposite trend. The commercial sales are currently outweighing the MFA financed contribution. We see this as a healthy result of the untying of Norwegian aid and an indicator that the quality assurance system of NOREPS is working.

The NOREPS stocks, held by OCHA in Brindisi, are regarded as both a relevant and appropriate mechanism, which could respond to identified needs and demands. However, the management and follow up has not been efficient. It still has a great potential to serve according to its purposes if the management arrangement is changed. Maintaining stocks is neither within the OCHA mandate nor skills set, and the agreement should be shifted, preferably to the UNHRD. The content of the Brindisi stocks should also be discussed with the relevant clusters, in order to meet the cluster defined standards.

The team finds that the granting by MFA or refusal of requests for in-kind donations of NOREPS goods was not predictable. The team recommend that in-kind donations be limited to support for the UNHRD managed stockpile system at the average level of all in-kind donation for 2003 and 2004¹. This implies significantly increased Norwegian relief stocks, as well as the establishment of policies and mechanisms (transport fund, automatic replenishment fund, and delegated authority for use) to increase predictability and reduce the administrative load on MFA.

The team also found that NOREPS project logic has been coherent, and that NOREPS has been reasonably, and increasingly, coherent with humanitarian principles and with Norwegian aid policy.

There are still huge flaws in the international system when it comes to enhancing local capacities to respond to sudden disasters. While the MFA and some NOREPS partners (e.g the Norwegian Red Cross and NGOs) could significantly increase their efforts in this respect, the team does not find NOREPS a particularly suitable mechanism for this objective.

1 2005 and 2006 were exceptional years because of the Tsunami and Pakistan earthquake responses.

While the NOREPS components and products are generally well known and recognised in the international humanitarian system, a large percentage of agency and MFA officials were not familiar with the NOREPS brand.

The team finds that the NOREPS forum is a unique arena for communication between Norwegian suppliers and humanitarian actors. The team recommends that the forum continue and that it should have its role reinforced by a formalisation of the present arrangements so its level of activity is less vulnerable to changes in personnel at MFA.

Overall, NOREPS has been a valuable part of the international humanitarian response system, but is in need of a more strategic approach to ensure that it continues to respond to needs and gaps.

1.3 Recommendations

The team recommends the MFA, in consultation with the NOREPS members, establishes a clearer strategic framework for NOREPS and each of its components. NOREPS needs a transitional approach for the next five years that preserves the components of NOREPS, but makes them:

- responding more strategically and targeted to current needs;
- more flexible in being able to respond to a wider range of humanitarian emergencies than at present;
- more predictable, both for the members and for the clients who use their services;
- more integrated with the international relief system;
- more coherent with Norwegian aid policy.

This is a transitional approach for a limited time because the international humanitarian system is undergoing profound change at the moment.

The products

MFA should phase out in-kind contributions over a five year transitional period.

Stockholding of Norwegian product should continue, with a much more strategic and targeted approach.

In this period, in-kind contributions should be channelled mainly through the UNHRD system for use in both small and large emergencies. The MFA needs to agree with OCHA and the main clusters on specifications, volume and release authority.

The MFA should establish clear rules from the use of donated stocks so that requests for goods from the stockpiles can be processed without reference to the MFA. The MFA should replenish stocks automatically up to an agreed level (e.g. the average cost of NOREPS in-kind donations for 2003 and 2004).

Personnel

- NORSTAFF should be ensured continuation, but with more predictable funding. MFA should consider a financial framework agreement with NRC instead of case by case grants for secondments. MFA and NRC should also consider expanding the scope of NORSTAFF. Given the limited focus of this evaluation on NORSTAFF, the team recommends a strategic review of all of the personnel arrangements.

Packages

- The base camp packages should be further expanded, with the development of smaller and more flexible modules to broaden the range of emergencies in which service packages can be used. MFA/NOREPS should use the DCPEP membership of the International Humanitarian Partnership, to broaden its own relationship with the IHP.

Organisation and Management

- MFA should make sure that a strategy for NOREPS is developed, and that it is included in a future Norwegian strategic framework for humanitarian assistance.

- MFA should shift its approach to the NOREPS components from the administration of grants and ad hoc contributions to wider framework agreements. More emphasis and resources should be invested in the monitoring of the actual use and results of the different NOREPS elements. More strategic focus and less administrative workload would be beneficial for NOREPS.
- MFA, in coordination with IN and the partners, should establish a new framework for reporting to allow for easily accessible statistics for NOREPS.
- MFA should continue supporting the NOREPS forum.

Cross-cutting issues

- MFA needs to develop a gender strategy for humanitarian assistance, which should take into account the particular NOREPS components.
- MFA should consider if NOREPS members should be required to make a formal commitment on their opposition to corruption.

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