

Logistics Cluster Response to Tsunami, October 2009

The Logistics Cluster for Samoa was activated on October 05, 2009 with the aim of supporting the Government of Samoa National Disaster Management Office in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that impacted the islands of Samoa, American Samoa and Niuatoputapu in Tonga.



Context:

At 06:48 local time on Tuesday 29 September, 2009, a magnitude 8.3 earthquake occurred approximately 200 kilometres south of the island of Samoa, triggering a tsunami that hit the islands of Samoa, American Samoa, and the small

island of Niuatoputapu in Tonga, resulting in fatalities, casualties and extensive damage to infrastructure in the affected island nations. By far the greatest number of fatalities occurred in Samoa, with 143 people losing their lives to the tsunami as of 14 October.

A proclamation of a State of Emergency was made by the Head of State, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, under advice from the Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, on 01 October, facilitating the activation of a Cluster response to the disaster, as well as relaxed rules for the rapid importation of emergency relief supplies.

The Government of Samoa National Disaster Management Plan 2003-2006, and the Samoa National Tsunami Plan Review of January 2008, ensured that the Parliamentary Executive Decrees were already in place to activate the Disaster Advisory Committee (DAC), with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) taking functional control and management of the disaster response, including the logistics functions.

Objective:



With the activation of the Cluster response, WFP was in a position to send in a Logistics Cluster Coordinator from the region, who arrived on a late-night flight on Monday 05 October. Since NDMO were already managing the logistics operations, the objective for the Logistics Cluster was to focus attention on the overall logistics coordination of the disaster response between Government Departments, the International Donor Community, the humanitarian agencies (including the Red Cross), and the commercial organizations and private individuals that were engaging in emergency relief assistance for the affected population. With support from the Prime Minister via a DHL Disaster

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Response Team, it was possible to set up a logistics coordination forum meeting almost immediately, and the first one occurred 36 hours after arrival in-country.

Meetings

Coordination meetings have been held twice-weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and have been well attended by the separate entities referenced above. Various initiatives have been raised and, in many cases, actioned at the meetings including, but not limited to:

- A Letter of Accreditation written to the Government of Samoa Disaster Advisory Committee to facilitate Customs privileges for all notified Entities under the Logistics Cluster
- A simple data-entry form for expected incoming aid, whether tentative or confirmed, so that NDMO would have a comprehensive overview of relief assistance materials
- Facilitating a working group of concerned parties for the arrival of the naval ship HMNZS Canterbury, the first vessel carrying relief assistance materials to enter Samoan territorial waters. Procedures and guidelines established for this vessel would provide a basis for all subsequent receipts of relief assistance shipments
- A scheduled list of commercial shipping expected to arrive in Samoa until the end of 2009 was both circulated and posted to the Pacific Disaster Net website
- Encouraging the Government of Samoa to identify suitable alternative premises for the storage, clearing and handling of unsolicited containerised relief assistance, to ensure that this can be handled without detriment to the ongoing emergency and recovery phases of the disaster response



Logistics Information Management

NDMO established tracking mechanisms for relief assistance very early on, recording incoming items by the donating Entity, and items despatched to affected villages. In tandem and in support of NDMO, personnel from the Ministry of Finance were tracking despatched items by donating Entity. Whilst there are some gaps



in the data, the vast majority of information has been captured, and is being consolidated so that donors can verify the delivery of relief assistance to the affected villages for their respective organizations. Logistics Cluster has been encouraging this compilation and consolidation process by emphasising the importance of this tracking process to donors

Handover of Logistics Coordination to NDMO and Conclusions

With the initial emergency response to the tsunami beginning to transition into the early recovery and reconstruction phase, the logistics coordination mechanisms will be formally handed back to the NDMO, and Logistics Cluster will cease operations on 24 October.

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The deployment and integration of the Logistics Cluster as part of the tsunami response in Samoa has, in conclusion, been a valuable intervention, and it is important to emphasise the numerous elements that, collectively, have contributed to the success of this mission. The positive and immediate support from WFP HQ and Regional Bureau for Asia, as well as the Global Logistics Cluster Support Cell, to facilitate the response to this somewhat remote island nation; the work carried out by the UNDAC team in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami which established the overall coordination mechanisms prior to Logistics Cluster arrival, making it possible to quickly be assimilated into the emergency response; the initiative of the DHL DRT to get endorsement for a logistics coordination forum from the Prime Minister; and the active involvement and participation of Government Entities, Donors, International Humanitarian Agencies and Private Enterprise in the Logistics Cluster meetings which ensured the widest possible forum for information exchange and action on logistics issues.

But by far the most significant element contributing to the success of the tsunami response must be the excellent preparatory work on Disaster Management and Response carried out by the Government of Samoa, and the professionalism, dedication and resolve of all the Government Departments, and in particular the NDMO, to oversee and manage what has widely been seen and commented upon as probably one of the most effective coordinated disaster responses by a National Government. The Government, and the People, of Samoa can be justifiably proud of their achievements in responding to this tragedy with such aplomb.

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