



After Action Review Susan's Bay Fire

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Contents

.....	0
Background	2
Objectives	2
Methodology.....	2
Outcomes.....	3
Overall summary.....	3
Pillar lessons learnt and recommendations.....	4
WASH.....	4
Food and Cash Based Transfers.	4
Registration.....	5
Education	5
Shelter.....	5
Pychosocial support.....	6
Logistics.....	6
Site management, Freetown City Council, and security	7
Coordination	8
Next steps	8



Background

A fire broke out on in one of Freetown's poorest slum areas at Susan's Bay on 24 March 2021, affecting 7,093 people and 1,597 households. The NDMA activated the Pillar system and the Situation Room. This is the first inter-agency emergency response that NDMA has coordinated since its establishment in November 2020. The NDMA does not currently have permanent staff appointed or a budget, which provided many challenges for the Agency to lead and coordinate the response as effectively as it could have.

The Global Logistics Cluster together with the World Food Programme (WFP) commenced a Logistics Field Based Preparedness Project in Sierra Leone late February 2021. An international logistics Preparedness Expert has been deployed in country to assist with the set-up of the Project and development of a logistics strengthening action plan. The Susan's Bay fire response provides an opportunity to capture the lessons learnt on logistics capacity, gaps and tools needed. As there was no organisation/consultant currently in country supporting the whole of disaster preparedness and response with NDMA, the logistics Preparedness Expert agreed to a facilitate an AAR for all pillars and capture the recommendations for NDMA and pillar leads to follow-up on.

The AAR was deliberately held during the transition from response phase to early recovery to give adequate time to prepare and address identified needs before the rain/flood season. It is acknowledged that some pillars are still providing emergency response support.

Objectives

- To capture recommendations from the Logistics Pillar of the fire response to inform the logistics preparedness gap analysis and action planning workshop, and future logistics strengthening activities.
- To capture coordination lessons learnt to assist and advocate for additional resources, tools, and training.
- To capture pillar lessons learnt and recommendations to strengthen future agency, and pillar coordination and responses.

Methodology

Pillars provided a quick PowerPoint presentation on:

- What they did
- What worked well
- What didn't work so well
- What should be done differently next time.

Inputs were provided by the other pillars on recommendations.



Outcomes

The pillar AAR presentations were uploaded on the [Google shared drive](#)

NOTE: For the purpose of this report, the excellent work that was done by NDMA and the pillars is captured in the presentations, however this report will be a record of the lessons learnt and recommendations to assist formulate preparedness actions for next disaster.

Overall summary

- NDMA for their first inter-agency response with limited resources did well in initiating the response and calling on pillar system to support, however were unable to sustain the timely control and reporting needs for coordination due to a lack of staff and infrastructure, and need to progress existing disaster issues and projects.
- Left over money from the landslide disaster was utilised to purchase rice and oil and assist to resource some of the government volunteers and labourers assisting with the response. Left over NFI's were also able to be distributed quickly such as tents and buckets. Without this left-over donations and funding from the landslide, response would have been very difficult. NDMA is recommending that any unused donations also be stored in the same manner for future emergencies as the system worked, until they are fully resourced.
- Some relief items and donations provided were in excess of the size of the disaster and those in need. Factors leading to this were: the command, control, coordination, and planning/decision making was not timely enough; Public donations were not controlled; Some individual agencies and pillars made decisions without consultation/approval by NDMA.
- Donations were permitted to be taken to the disaster site where there was insufficient infrastructure and controls in place, and media coverage allowed on site. This encouraged further donations to site by others wanting publicity. The beneficiaries had full view of what was being provided. This caused security issues, tracking of donation issues, and accusations of corruption as goods that could not be distributed fairly were withheld. Excess of donations and donations for shelter recovery will now need to be removed from site which may expose NDMA to further accusations if not handled carefully. Donors may not be happy as donations were stipulated for Susan's Bay affected people.
- Official communication from the government via the Communication Pillar was lacking which could have prevented the issue with unsolicited donations and allow them to be provided, stored, and tracked accordingly on a needs basis. Greater engagement with the community was also required.
- The community was supported with the critical life saving measures by the pillar system which was a great outcome. However the volume and timeframes of provision to the affected community (water infrastructure and provisions, phones; months of cooked food; excess amounts of clothes, rice and oil, cash transfers; and school items) is causing unhappiness with the surrounded unaffected community. This – along with the future better built households – may lead to deliberate burning of houses with similar expectations. One case has already been reported and a water point tampered with and diverted to an unaffected area.
- A targeted timelined response plan needs to be developed at the onset, so all pillars know what they are to provide early in accordance with the plan, rather than making up their own plans. This along with early control of donations, and enhanced relief item/donation tracking and reporting will address duplicated provisions over the need and potential issues that arise with this.
- The National Disaster Plan currently in development needs to clearly outline the control and coordination mechanism for Level 1, 2 and 3 disasters, and include agreed thresholds for inter-agency response and support. This will assist define roles and support expectations of Line Ministries, the Freetown City Council, UN agencies, and humanitarian agencies for each level.

Pillar lessons learnt and recommendations.

The pillar leads and memberships for the fire response are at Annex 1. All pillars were invited but some did not attend.

WaSH

The drinking water provision was done well however hygiene needs further support and is a concern for potential infectious disease spread.

- Waste management – Still a gap (no partner).
- Drainage system is a problem (no partner).
- Latrines are being worked on.

Recommendations

- Connecting to GUMA main water supply pipes as soon as possible. Unaffected population is vandalising some water pipes to re-direct free water to their households.
- Consolidation of plan and sharing with NDMA.
- Better engagement with the community on hygiene and waste issues to prevent diseases.

Food and Cash Based Transfers.

Too much food was provided for the needs of the community and was a result of a number of factors including:

- Uncontrolled donations.
- Insufficient and timely tracking and reporting of food relief provision and donations.
- Insufficient pillar coordination and coordination with Government. Agencies within the pillar made their own decisions without consultation with the group or consultation/approval of government. (This was understandable and necessary initially before the pillars were activated as people were hungry.)

There was no quality control of food donations.

- Provision of powdered milk to young children that may contribute toward diarrhoea.
- No checking of food quality of donated items before distribution.
- Individuals directly distributing to beneficiaries onsite in the early days.

CBT

- Orange money registration is time consuming
- Individual agencies providing cash transfers to beneficiaries without consultation with pillars or government on need and targeting.
- Duplication of effort/provision on in-kind and cash donations.

Recommendations

- Early communication and control of unsolicited donations and distributions. No delivery to the site.
- Digitalized, real-time record keeping of food/all donations to improve coordination and fast track distributions.
- Early set up of and site management to enable food and water to be accessed /distributed in an orderly and secure manner.
- Better pillar coordination and recommendations to NDMA for approval to enable a targeted whole of response plan for food and cash distribution to beneficiaries.
- Standard Bureau need to be present in future to ensure quality control of donations and prevent expired and inappropriate food donations.

Registration

Overall the assessment and registration process were done well and was ready within 48 hours but was time and resource consuming. There is an expectation from pillars of more detailed data at the onset which will further slow the process. There needs to be a balance of immediate data needed for life saving measures to ensure data can be provided quickly for planning.

- Issues raised that some affected people including injured, families of injured, and those with disabilities missed out on registration as they were offsite or not able to make it when the assessment was being done.
- Verification and later registration of true affected people who missed out on registration proved difficult, due to so many false claims of neighbouring people who wanted access to the relief items.

Recommendations

- The mandatory phone field needs review or guidance as assessment officers were putting their own phone numbers in or relatives that were not in the affected population.
- Dedicated, beneficiary targeting teams established to ensure registrars immediately ready to respond.
- Pre-registration data to be shared with NDMA for triangulation purposes.
- Households to be issued with a unique Household ID number to facilitate identification during the response
- Avoid multiple concurrent registration exercise to reduce exclusion from registration pillar team
- MIRA tool review by technical representatives of various pillars to ensure that all necessary information is collected during initial assessment (being mindful not to make tool too heavy).
- A working group should be established to review the data collection tool. NaCRA needs to co-lead this.
- More training needs to be conducted on the MIRA tool, and support and health training should be included for the assessment teams.

Education

Whilst there is no established school in the Susan's Bay community, there are students that attend neighbouring schools. Concerns were that the school children were missing classes to line up for food, and the need to ensure that children due to sit their NPSE exams can catch up on missed lessons. The provision of lessons on-site also acts as a child friendly space.

- Lack of adequate tent and site for lessons and child friendly space
- Some agencies targeting children with materials are beyond the scope of what MBSSE intends to offer.

Recommendations

- Mobilize partners and resources to ensure a coordinated response.
- Preposition Supplies to facilitate timely response.
- Procure tents and accessories to establish safe learning spaces for children as a quick response strategy.
- Step up field visits to ground zero for first-hand experience and monitoring of interventions.

Shelter

There was very limited emergency shelter, mattresses, and blankets available for distribution at the onset. Some of the community was taken in by unaffected family and friends, some constructed makeshift shelter from the rubble, some took the tents. Some who got access to shelter relief were convinced to allow other community members to temporary share accommodation.

- Only 75 tents and 50 tarpaulins were initially available for the immediate emergency response in the first 24 - 48 hours.
- Due to the need of preventing people from sleeping outside, tents and makeshift shelters were being erected before the Shelter Pillar had done an assessment and developed a plan.
- Some of the most vulnerable did not get access to the provided shelter relief items. Some beneficiaries were jostling to get access to the stores that arrived onsite as there was insufficient for everyone, and security was not adequate.

Recommendations

- A stockpile of shelter items is required to be pre-positioned for future emergencies.
- Earlier assessment and response are required by the Shelter pillar so people aren't sleeping outside for long.
- Protection pillar needs to be included in the assessment and decision making of shelter provision.
- Recovery and longer-term considerations need to be included immediately in the emergency shelter provision for unauthorised building locations.
- A plan is needed quickly for the donated shelter items and how they will be distributed and erected.
- Communications and community engagement are very important in the emergency and recovery phase particularly if there are limited shelter supplies available. The community must be included in the decision making and planning.

Psychosocial support

Overall the Psychosocial support and protection pillars were actively engaging across pillars and communicating the needs of pillar to support the vulnerable. The following were identified as not going well:

- Late establishment of the Protection Desk due to identification of space and logistics.
- Limited coordination among Partners in delivering PSS supports.
- Delay in commencing the distribution of meals and food supports increased the level of anxiety among the victims.
- No immediate free health care for the victims.

Recommendations

- Strengthen coordination and service mapping for quality service delivery to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Timely establishment of the Protection Desk to ensure monitoring and referrals.
- Enhance advocacy and awareness on emergency preparedness.
- Resource mobilization to enhance timely establishment of the Protection Desk as and when disaster occur.
- Training on safeguarding, child protection, and psychosocial supports for Social Workers at all levels.

Logistics

There were significant issues initially with logistics due to access to the site, late site planning and resourcing in terms of infrastructure and security, and decisions to allow donations to be transported to site for PR purposes. A number of resource and capacity building needs were captured.

- Public donations were permitted to be dropped at site when there was no storage, and no distribution plan (for publicity purposes).
- No storage available at site to securely store relief items from beneficiaries and weather – security risk, perishing risk.
- Stock was visible to beneficiaries:
 - Security issues for staff onsite;
 - Raises questions on why they are not being handed out;
 - If removed once delivered to secure safely - raises corruption issues.
- Tracking system was manually recorded in paper- based book and not converted to Excel quickly enough for reporting purposes.
- Reporting on partner stock available, and stock stored onsite was not sufficient or timely enough to enable pillar coordination for distribution planning.

Recommendations

- Warehouse/ government space needs to be pre-identified for relief items and donations to be sent. A banner can be erected for media events.
- Early communication on donations and where items can be sent needs to be issued on Day 1 by NDMA. Have drafted in preparedness.

- No relief items or donations permitted to go to site until they are ready for distribution. Requests to deliver for donations for media purposes must be rejected and directed to Warehouse (large) or Red Cross (small) for sorting and repacking.
- Tents need to be erected onsite for goods to be stored and protected while awaiting distribution.
- Pre-positioned stock needs to be captured in preparedness.
- An electronic stock tracking system needs to be implemented immediately with sorting function so reports on needs and stock available can be provided.
- If possible, secure directly input items received into spreadsheet rather than a book.
- Develop a numbered Waybill and GRN notepad with duplicate carbon copies to save time and enhance accountability.
- Logistics must push pillars to come-up with distribution plans (supported by reports) so goods don't perish, and useful items are provided to beneficiaries.
- Logistics officer onsite must be rotated to reduce fatigue.
- Set up a donations working group with donors, NDMA, and anticorruption agency to form an agreed SOP and infrastructure that manages security and logistics issues of donations, PR needs of donors, tracking and accountability of donations and managers concerns of donations not getting to beneficiaries. Make donors part of the solution.

Site management, Freetown City Council, and security

The area of the site provided many challenges in terms of access, commercial property use, security, and communication with beneficiaries. Decisions on whether to relocate or support beneficiaries on-site and develop a site plan needed to be quicker to enable the coordinated response and delivery of life saving relief items in a fair manner. What didn't work well:

- Site planning and implementation with sufficient security was not done quickly enough.
- Allowing donations to go direct to site direct caused significant problems.
- Some MDAs did not liaise well with NDMA initially – *e.g.* Min of Lands visit of site, and drone survey happened before DG NDMA had been briefed.
- All key areas of response covered, with exception of sanitation. This is now a serious concern, potential source of disease.
- Susan's Bay overshadowed a number of other previous incidents which still needed support – *e.g.* Kissy market (which happened same night), Binkolo, and Leicester Road. FCC and NDMA lacked capacity to deal with concurrent disasters.
- Initial response severely limited by lack of access, hydrants, equipment etc.
- Despite excellent response from volunteers on the ground, there was no clear Aid Station for casualties to be taken to on the site. If there were more casualties, it would have been challenging.
- FCC Disaster Response Team lacks capacity.
- There was no register of who was on-site from which agency if there was a security incident

Recommendations

- Establish better controls of who is permitted on-site.
- Have a sign in and out register for agencies assisting with the response.
- Reinforce the FCC Disaster Response Team to increase resilience, so that FCC can be represented in every pillar.
- Advocate early for a permanently manned Situation Room in NDMA
- Advocate early for a donation system that discourages drop offs at site.
- Ensure existing disaster responses are factored into briefings, to keep them high on the agenda.
- Recommend email invitation system that encourages participation by Zoom/Teams if needed and if received early enough to free up resources to attend.

Coordination

This small-scale response provided great opportunities to capture coordination capacity building and resourcing needs for the NDMA for the upcoming flood season. Lack of resources was the major issue with NDMA staff trying to cover incident coordination roles both at National and Field levels at the same time which is not possible. Systems, tools, and training from this response can be carried over and enhanced for next time. Things that didn't work well:

- Some pillars, agencies, partners, didn't work through the established system.
- Lack of control for donations going out to the site.
- Insufficient communication in terms of donation management to the public.
- Insufficient resources to cover all aspect of the National and field Coordination.
- No response plan to determine what would be given to the affected population and for how long.
- Unable to sustain the timely update of incident action plan and situation reports.



Recommendations

- Develop a National Preparedness and Response plan.
- No action/decision should be taken in the field without the approval of the Incident Commander.
- Need a fully resourced incident coordination team for national and field coordination.
- Improved Inter-Pillar coordination with incident action plan and situation reporting.
- Establish effective battle rhythm for the response.
- Discourage receipt of donations at the incident site.
- Better utilisation of the EOC & online media (Zoom).
- Establish a 4W and contact list to assist response planning.

Next steps

Pillars members continue to meet (as a working group) to address the recommendations in preparedness for the next disaster, after the response. This is coordinated through NDMA for endorsement.

Annex 1 – Pillar Leads and membership for the Susan’s Bay Fire emergency response.

<p>Registration – NCRA /WFP St George Foundation Handicap international Measure for Impact Center for Dialogue Caritas F/t SLRCS CONCERN Worldwide AAH NCRA UNDP</p> <p>Shelter -NaCSA CONCERN SLRCS UNOPS Caritas CRS St George Foundation</p> <p>WASH – UNICEF/Care /Goal UNICEF IPC CRS AAH Concern Worldwide</p> <p>Food & Nutrition -WFP/ Caritas/ SCI CRS Caritas Action Aid SCI Center for Dialogue Trocaire Social worker SL SLRCS Plan International</p> <p>Education - MBSSE / UNICEF SCI Plan Action Aid Handicap int</p>	<p>Health -MoHS/IPC MOHS/One Health IPC Health Alert SLRCS</p> <p>Communications and Social Mob - Min of Information and Communication UNICEF Center for Dialogue Health Alert SLRCS SLMET UNDP</p> <p>Social Welfare - Social Worker SL/ Handicap Int SLRCS SLMET Children’s Advocacy Trocaire UNICEF AAH</p> <p>Coordination- NDMA/ ONS / FCC (support from WFP)</p> <p>Site management and Security -ONS/ SLP/FCC ONS SLP RSLAF NFF</p> <p>Technical – UNOPS (drone) / SL Institutes of Engineers SLMET</p> <p>Logistics – NDMA/ WFP/RSLAF SLRCS DSTI</p> <p style="text-align: right;"> Pillar leads</p>
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NAMES	INSTITUTIONS	DESIGNATION	MOB. NUMBERS
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