



Lessons Learned

Preparedness Tabletop Exercise Madagascar, 17-19 January 2023



Background

According to the recommendations from the workshop on the experiences gained after the “Tropical Cyclone season 2021/22” organized in June 2022, and after the request from the Bureau National de Gestion des Risques et des Catastrophes (BNGRC, Madagascar’s National Office of Risk and Disaster Management), lead of the national logistics coordination group, the Groupe Sectoriel Logistique (GSL), the World Food Programme (WFP) Madagascar Country Office, in collaboration with Global Logistics Cluster (GLC) and with technical support from other units, such as United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) and WFP Information Technology (WFP IT) team, supported the organization of a pilot Preparedness Tabletop Exercise (TTx). The TTx was designed to:

- test the functional capabilities and capacities of members of the national logistics coordination group (Groupe Sectoriel Logistique, GSL)
- strengthen the established procedures and mechanisms in the information management (IM) system,
- assess the operational structure set up at the country level.

The TTx built on the efforts of the 2021-2022 national supply chain capacity strengthening project that highlighted the need to reinforce logistics coordination across the entire emergency management cycle, strengthen information sharing and data management during crisis response, and improve the collaboration among the national government, humanitarian partners, and stakeholders. Furthermore, the aim was to reflect on the joint efforts to define a National Pre-positioning Strategy and update the logistics sector plan as part of the National Contingency Planning in preparation for the 2022-2023 cyclone season.

Project structure and main objectives

The TTx was designed as a ‘hybrid modality’ to include discussions on emergency preparedness procedures and simulate the onset of a crisis response situation (non-tactical simulation) through a face-to-face event in the format of a two- and half-day workshop held in Toamasina Region Atsinanana.

A variety of stakeholders was invited to participate, including representatives of key national institutions, the private sector, and humanitarian organisations, both United Nations (UN) agencies and International nongovernmental organisations (INGOs), covering different functions and sectors of intervention.

By focusing on logistics preparedness actions and requirements, the exercise intended to foster a collective effort that enables a more effective, concerted, and better-coordinated response, in line with the logistics sector plan and the National Contingency Plan.

The main areas of focus for the TTx were:

- Logistics sector coordination structure (BNGRC and Groupe Sectoriel Logistique – GSL, Logistics Sector Group)
- Information Management procedures and mechanisms
- Logistics Cluster Information Exchange platform (LogIE)
- Other cross-cutting topics discussed within the national logistics sector



TTx Exercise planning

This Preparedness TTx was a pilot aimed to localize as much as possible the planning and preparation of the exercise, proactively engaging national stakeholders, testing a different approach of designing and delivering ad-hoc trainings, recognising and leveraging on the national capacities, and promoting a modular approach that can be replicated according to the specific needs in the country.

The pilot included a set timeline under which a Concept Note was drafted jointly between GLC and WFP CO, with guidance from the BNGRC. A preparatory phase was scheduled aimed at developing the content and expected objectives of the simulation. Finally, the exercise roll-out and administrative details were arranged.

The preparatory phase was under the lead of the BNGRC with technical support from WFP CO and GLC teams and with the involvement and commitment of GSL. The main aspects that this pilot wanted to test included identifying an exercise management team composed of national actors bringing technical knowledge and experience from past capacity-strengthening initiatives and emergency responses. The exercise management team's responsibility was to design, plan, conduct, evaluate, and follow up on the exercise development and results.

Through pre-TTx sessions conducted online and in hybrid format, the team members had to define the scenario of the exercise, the areas of focus of the thematic Technical Working Groups (TWGs), the activities prioritized during the exercise, and guide the discussions within their areas of expertise.

TTx Exercise roll-out

The TTx was an opportunity to bring together various stakeholders involved in emergency preparedness and response. The focus was on logistics preparedness activities directly linked to the response operations during an emergency, where logistics functions play a critical cross-functional role to enable and support other sectors' interventions.

A total of forty-five (45) participants attended, from twelve (12) national counterparts, four (4) UN agencies, seven (7) NGOs/INGOs, and two (2) private sector representatives. All the entities gathered are among the key members of the GSL (list of participant organisations in Annex II). The exercise sought to empower local responders to lead and deliver such exercises and improve the national coordination mechanism; hence, over half (51%) of participants were from BNGRC/government.

The BNGRC took the lead in the organisation and roll-out of the TTx, and their management was represented by the Director of Operations, the Logistics Manager, and the first technical advisor of the General Director.

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Participants had the opportunity to practice their area of expertise and jointly discuss existing coordination mechanisms, strategies, procedures, and information management tools to highlight criticalities in logistics preparedness and identify resources and actions required to enable a faster and more efficient response to a crisis.

Through a simulated flooding scenario impacting infrastructures and access across the country, followed by injects submitted to the participants replicating an emergency context with several logistics constraints, the exercise allowed participants to analyse national stakeholders' capacities and ways to support filling any anticipated gaps.

To highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the current setup and resources, participants were divided into three working groups to discuss:

1. The Concept of Operations (ConOps) of the logistics sector/GSL
2. Logistics information management and data-sharing platforms
3. Civilian-military coordination

As referred to in the agenda (Annex I), participants also had the opportunity to visit the Tamatave port and airport, meet with dedicated authorities in these two key entry points, and ask questions about operational capacity and potential bottlenecks.

The added value of bringing participants to two locations during TTx was that it provided a platform for networking and strengthening the common understanding of standard operating procedures and familiarized participants with key entry points that are critical during emergency response.

TTx Exercise findings

The main findings, as brought up by the participants, were as follows:

- There is a need for stakeholders to engage in existing coordination mechanisms, such as the GSL, and contribute to the drafting and updating of the Concept of Operations (ConOps) as it defines major logistics bottlenecks and common needs based on the evolving situation on the ground, as well as planned activities and available resources that can support the humanitarian response.
- Participation of the logistics sector/actors in multi-sector needs assessments to better evaluate priority areas, critical interventions, and logistics gaps where humanitarian response is focused was strongly encouraged.



- Real-time logistics information sharing among partners and national stakeholders, including access constraints and the status of key infrastructures such as ports, airports, and telecommunications, and using an information exchange platform, such as LogIE, to allow a more effective supply chain planning and logistics activities in emergency responses is important.
- There is a need to have clear policies for coordination and engagement with the various national entities and military counterparts to maximize the available resources and deploy assets to cover logistics gaps when/where needed.
- The interest from various stakeholders to engage in capacity-strengthening initiatives and participate in similar types of simulation, with a dedicated focus on specific logistics aspects (e.g., stock management, transport, rapid logistics assessment of key infrastructures, customs, etc.) and the importance of targeting regional and local actors is essential.

Following the TTx, an online survey was circulated to participants, composed of ten questions. The survey was to understand their level of appreciation for the organization, the content, and the guidance received during the exercise and to collect comments and suggestions on areas to improve or add in a similar type of exercise.

A first email with the link to the survey was sent on 19 January, followed by a reminder on 8 February. A total of eighteen (18) responses were received that highlighted a general satisfaction with the design and rollout of the exercise, with clear tasks and objectives, and a common understanding of the role and value of the GSL fostering coordination and information sharing among relevant stakeholders during the emergency preparedness phase as well as during the crisis response.

The TTx will complement future logistics preparedness efforts. Feedback from the TTx will be integrated within the GSL strategy and sectorial plan to continue strengthening the capabilities at the national and local levels, mapping logistics gaps and needs, constraints, and resources available, and contributing to the contingency and emergency preparedness plans. As part of the preparedness actions for the next cyclone season (2023/2024), the GSL is expected to update the terms of reference (ToR). One of the main actions will be to integrate a regular simulation exercise (one per year) in the action plan (to be added to the sectorial plan). The aim is to leverage the lessons learned and strengthen the capacity to respond according to the context and climate outlook. A key part of this activity will be to involve more of the local-level stakeholders across the Regional logistics technical group.

Recommendations and Follow-up Actions

Stakeholders should consider holding this type of exercise yearly to further strengthen emergency preparedness mechanisms and review previous performance.

Some considerations and proposed follow-up can be made, both on the preparatory phase and the management of the TTx, to ensure an effective engagement of all stakeholders, the transfer of the skills and knowledge to more national counterparts, and finally, more efficient, and effective national preparedness and response strategies and interventions.

Additional recommendations on the status of the LogIE platform utilization in the country and suggested ways forward will guide discussions with national stakeholders and WFP/GLC decision-making.



Planning phase recommendations:

- The identification of the exercise management team is to be done quickly to allow enough time to design the scenario and injection, as per the agreed TTx Concept Note. National stakeholders and GSL members are to be selected and actively participate in the pre-TTx preparatory sessions based on their technical expertise and the areas of focus of the simulation.
- BNGRC focal point/s to be nominated as part of the exercise management team.
- Consider giving participants a brief 'emergency humanitarian logistics' training prior to the exercise or during the opening sessions for them to familiarize themselves with tools and processes referred to during the TTx, such as the ConOps, (multi)sector needs assessments, CivMil coordination, and to clarify on the Cluster activation versus GSL role in the country context.

Exercise implementation recommendations:

- The facilitators' role is critical to manage the exercise and guide the discussions among the working groups (at least 1 facilitator per WG); facilitators can be internal (BNGRC or WFP/GLC) and/or external.
- Greater emphasis on the ConOps document and the importance of information management (IM) and LogIE platform, with examples provided and dedicated practical sessions included in the agenda, is needed.
- A third main topic/task on Civilian-Military coordination - participants need to have clearer guidance to facilitate a better understanding of both national processes and humanitarian approach in terms of military assets mobilisation.
- GIS and mapping capacity to be maximised and used during the exercise, either through BNGRC and other Government entities, WFP GIS, or OCHA IM units. This could include information on the prepositioning strategic plans by humanitarian organisations and stakeholders.
- Timeframe to be adjusted to allow enough time for both the table-top exercise and the practical simulation and to ensure a comprehensive final discussion session on findings and recommendations from participants.

LogIE Follow-up:

- To continue training and awareness sessions with GSL members and, more broadly, humanitarian actors on the use and functionalities of LogIE to ensure knowledge retention. Additional dedicated trainings are required for both central and field staff, especially for MTP and other key national counterparts.
- Technical aspects to be considered, such as lack of resources for field personnel, transfer of data, and visualization of information (GPS coordinates not always available or referred to among national stakeholders' reports/alerts).
- Validation and editing aspects critical to ensure timely information sharing in an emergency - consider reinforcing the support to the BNGRC if the Operations Centre/CRIC is activated to facilitate information consolidation and validation.
- BNGRC should engage in using the platform more widely to include an additional set of critical information, such as shelters, health centres, to support preparedness activities, planning of emergency needs assessments, and inter-sector crisis response.
- Collaboratively draft a transition/exit strategy that considers a possible handover of the platform to the national level to increase ownership and accountability and ensure easier follow-up on technical aspects and continuity and the support role of WFP CO should be explored.



ANNEX I

AGENDA

Time	Activities	Facilitator
<i>Day one - 17 January 2023</i>		
9h00	Participant arrival	
9h15	Opening ceremony	BNGRC, WFP, GLC
9h30	<u>Context and General briefing</u> 1. Scenarios: CYCLONE AND FLOODS based on the lesson learnt from the previous emergency 2. Methodology and technical approach: Inject/Handout working group per area of focus (at least three groups): Coordination, Information Management, Customs focused on joint activities between operational groups rather than internal activities within each Functional Area	BNGRC, WFP, GLC
10h15	<i>Coffee break (continuous work)</i>	
10h15	<u>Working session/Tabletop: PHASE ONE / PREPAREDNESS PERIOD</u> Inject 1/Handout 1: Situation overview Inject 2/Handout 2: Logistics assessment	Focal point/Facilitator
13h00	<i>Lunch Break (continuous work)</i>	
13h00	<u>Working session/Tabletop: PHASE ONE / PREPAREDNESS PERIOD (SUITE)</u> Inject 1 and 2 Based on the scenarios retained (National Level)	Focal point/Facilitator
15h00	<u>Working session/ SKILL DRILL</u> Field operation: Ex -> Port or airport assessment + field coordination (field visit)	BNGRC
16h30	Coffee break (back to the workshop venue)	
16h45	<u>Working session/Tabletop: PHASE TWO / POST DISASTER</u> Inject 3/Handout 3: warning phase Inject 4/Handout 4 : Operation plan	Focal point/Facilitator
18h00	Closure of the first Day	BNGRC, WFP, GLC
18h15	Facilitator debriefing and key findings	Focal point/Facilitator
19h00	Preliminary briefing for Day 2	Focal point/Facilitator
<i>Day two – 18 January 2023</i>		
8h00	Facilitator briefing and goals	Focal point/Facilitator
8h30	Participant arrival	
9h00	<u>Working session/Tabletop: PHASE THREE / DISASTER RESPONSE</u> Inject 5/Handout 5: Transport and storage Inject 6/Handout 6: Secondary transport	Focal point/Facilitator
10h15	<i>Coffee break (continuous work)</i>	

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10h15	<u>Working session/Tabletop: PHASE THREE / DISASTER RESPONSE (Suite)</u> Inject 7/Handout 7: field bottleneck and logistics gap	Focal point/Facilitator
13h00	<i>Lunch Break (continuous work)</i>	
13h00	<u>Working session: SKILL DRILL</u> Field operation: Ex -> Port, airport and customs bottleneck + logistics gap and field coordination (field visit) Civil-mil coordination Private sector mobilization (addressing the logistics gap)	BNGRC
16h30	<i>Coffee break (back to the workshop venue)</i>	
16h30	IM Management tools: LogIE Leverage and capitalize on existing information management platform for a better decision-making mechanism	LogIE focal point (Bernat), BNGRC
17h30	Closure of the Second Day	BNGRC, WFP, GLC
17h45	Facilitator debriefing and key findings	Focal point/Facilitator
18h30	Preliminary briefing for Day 2	Focal point/Facilitator
<i>Day Three – 19 January 2023</i>		
8h00	Facilitator briefing and goals	Focal point/Facilitator
8h30	Participant arrival	
9h00 <i>Including Coffee break</i>	<u>Working session: POST SCENARIO PHASE / RETEX</u> based on self-evaluation / Reviewing the overall learning, look ahead to next steps and complete feedback evaluation on the exercise event as a whole Open discussion for a better coordination mechanism	BNGRC
12h00	Global review of the coordination mechanism within GSL: ToR, SOP (thinking as a team)	Open
13h00	<i>Lunch Break</i>	
14h00	Closure session: global key findings and next step	BNGRC



ANNEX II

ATTENDEES

Nr Attendees	Entities
UN	
2	GLC
8	WFP
1	OCHA
1	UNICEF
Government	
9	BNGRC
2	MTP (Ministry of Public Work)
4	MTTM (Ministry of Transport) : APMF (Agence Portuaire Maritime et Fluviale) ACM (Aviation Civile de Madagascar) ATT (Agence de Transport Terrestre) RAIL
1	Firefighter
2	CPC (Civil protection)
2	BRAS (Operations support brigade)
1	Ministry of health
2	Air force
NGO/INGO	
1	CRM (Malagasy Red Cross)
1	MEDAIR
1	HI (Humanité et Inclusion)
2	ACF (Action Contre la Faim)
1	CARE
1	WHH
1	SAF/FJKM
Private sector	
1	VIAMO
1	PSHP (Private Sector Humanitarian Platform)
45	