AFTER ACTION REVIEW [REPORT SUMMARY]

TROPICAL CYCLONE IDAI RESPONSE

SBP
Standby Partnership

"The Standby support has been incredible. The speed with which you have identified the right people, the speed with which they have been deployed, it was a real saving grace for us."

– Deputy Representative, UNICEF Mozambique

THE STANDBY PARTNERSHIP

The SBP is a network of bilateral agreements between a range of partners that provide support via the deployment of gratis personnel to fourteen United Nations (UN) agencies. The partnership emerged in response to the increasing prevalence of global humanitarian crises, which required the UN to rapidly expand its human resource capability at short notice. The collaboration between UN agencies and deploying partner agencies is now an integral component of any rapid response.

THE FOLLOWING SBP AGENCIES LED THIS AFTER ACTION REVIEW:

AT A GLANCE: SBP SUPPORT TO TROPICAL CYCLONE IDAI IN MOZAMBIQUE, ZIMBABWE AND MALAWI*

98
DEPLOYMENTS
(71 MALES & 27 FEMALES)

15
SBP DEPLOYING
AGENCIES

12
SBP RECEIVING
AGENCIES

SBP SUPPORT TO TC IDAI IS ESTIMATED TO BE VALUED IN EXCESS OF

US$3M*

DEPLOYMENTS BY RECEIVING AGENCY
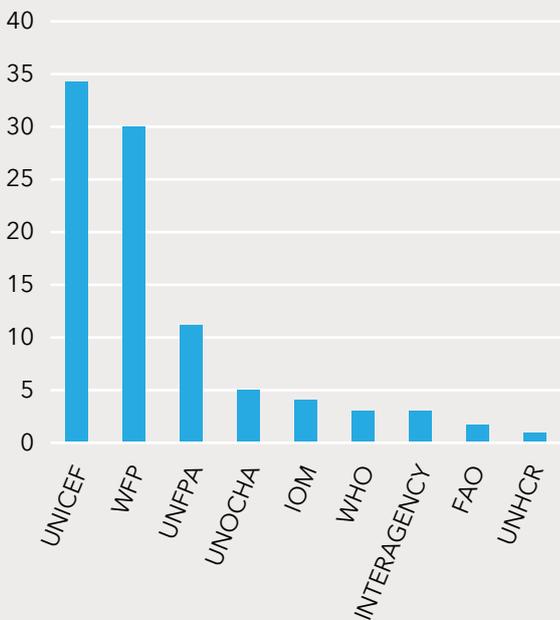
DEPLOYMENTS BY SBP DEPLOYING AGENCY
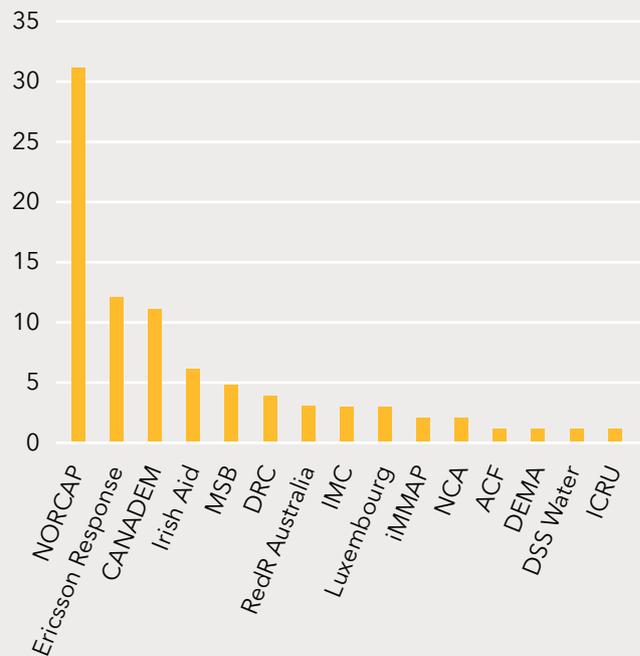
*Based on available partner data for the period March to July 2019.
*The Standby Partnership continues to deploy/extend deployments, so these figures will rise.

DEPLOYMENTS BY COUNTRY
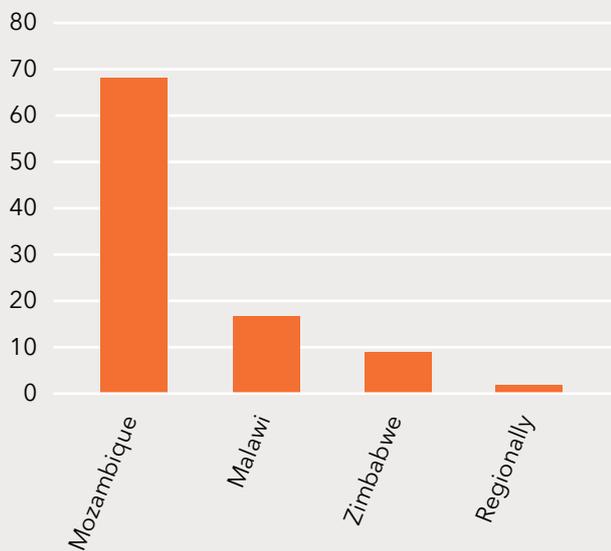
DISTRIBUTION OF DEPLOYEES IN MOZAMBIQUE

Please refer to map of Mozambique on page 8
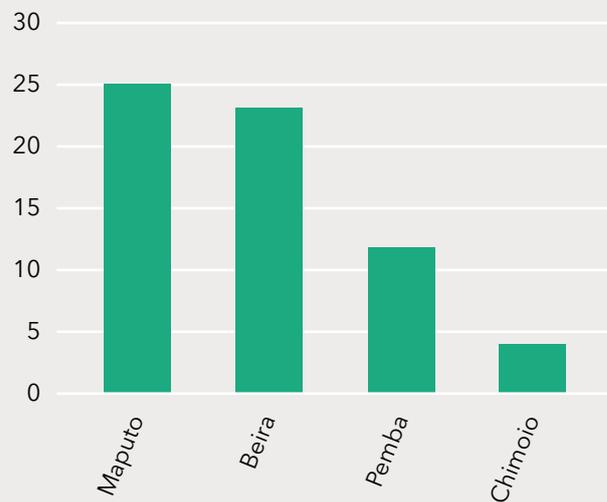
DEPLOYMENTS BY CLUSTER/SECTOR
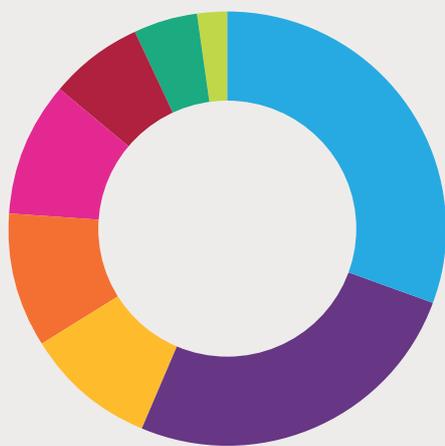
- 31% Protection (including GBV AoR)
- 26% WASH
- 10% Education
- 10% Food Security
- 10% Logistics
- 7% Telecommunications
- 5% Nutrition
- 2% Health

DEPLOYMENTS BY CROSS-CUTTING AREA
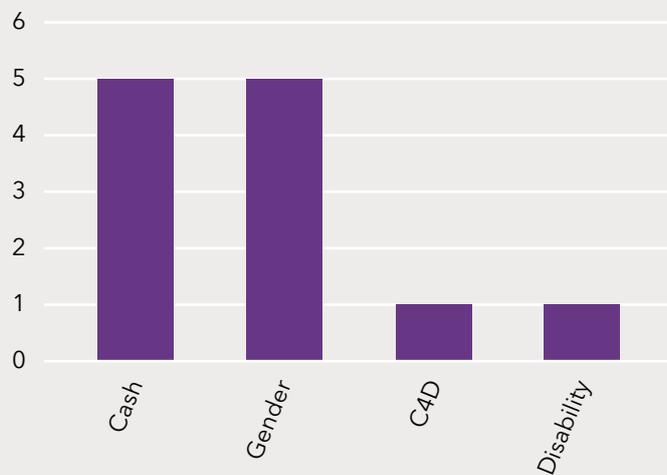
DEPLOYEES' GENERAL AREA OF EXPERTISE

- 6% Assessment
- 19% Information Technology
- 33% Coordination
- 41% Technical Specialists
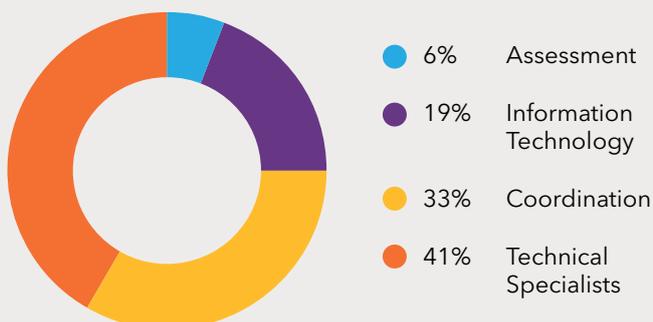
PATH OF TROPICAL CYCLONE IDAI

TANZANIA

ZAMBIA

MALAWI

Niassa

Cabo Delgado

Nampula

Tete

L. Cahora Bassa

L. Malawi

R. Shire

R. Zambezi

Zambezia

Quelimane

11 Mar

12 Mar

16 Mar

16 Mar

15 Mar

Manica

15 Mar

Dondo

Beira

Sofala

14 Mar

13 Mar

ZIMBABWE

Inhambane

Gaza

SOUTH AFRICA

Maputo

Maputo City

Floods Risk by District
- Very High
- High
- Moderate to High
- Moderate

⬤ Main towns flooded

▨ Flood affected districts
— River
▨ Lake

Wind Speed Zone
- Low (60 km/h)
- Medium (90 km/h)
- High (120 km/h)

Districts affected by drought
- In need of urgent assistance

— Observed Trajectory
⬤ Low Pressure System
🔴 Tropical Depression
⚐ Moderate Tropical Storm
⚐ Tropical Cyclone
⚐ Intense Tropical Cyclone

REPORT SUMMARY
SBP AFTER ACTION REVIEW

Please note this is an extract. The full SBP AAR report with annexes is available at **www.standbypartnership.org**

In March and April 2019, Southern Africa was hit by two cyclones, Idai and Kenneth, which left a trail of destruction in their path. Close to 2.2 million people were in need of urgent assistance in Mozambique alone. Following the humanitarian response, a number of members of the Standby Partnership (SBP) agreed to conduct a joint After Action Review (AAR) focused primarily on Mozambique. The purpose of the mission was to assess the overall responsiveness and impact of the entire SBP response on behalf of all agencies and partners. It was then envisaged that this work could serve as recent evidence to pinpoint weaknesses in the current system and improve the mechanism going forward.

The review found that SBP support to UN agencies responding to Tropical Cyclone (TC) Idai was timely, extensive in its reach and critical in nature. In many cases, UN agencies acknowledged they would not have been able to manage aspects of their operations or deliver particular emergency programmes without Standby support. Countless examples came to light during interviews of SBP deployees filling critical roles, most notably in emergency coordination. SBP deployees were also on the ground within a relatively short timeframe compared to other surge mechanisms and were in place for significantly longer (SBP deployments averaged three to six months, compared to two to six weeks for other surge).

Review participants routinely commented on **"the particular mix of skills, experience and mindset"** that deployees brought to the response. On the whole, **the SBP mechanism provided the right people at the right time** – people with a critical mix of technical skills, emergency experience, relevant language skills, and interpersonal and cultural competencies – *who were also available to rapidly deploy*. The review identified three key areas in which the value of SBP support was particularly evident:

A. **Rapid scale up** – all of the UN agencies consulted lacked sufficient emergency personnel to enable them to scale up to remotely appropriate levels. Whilst a small number of agencies were already working on drought response in Mozambique and could divert staff, UN internal surge was not sufficient for agencies to scale up. UN agencies lacked Emergency Coordinators, Cluster Coordinators, Information Managers and Humanitarian Affairs Officers in particular - critical roles to the overall management of the response. UNFPA for example had one part-time emergency coordinator in place and was not intending to continue supporting that role prior to the cyclone. UNOCHA did not have a presence in Mozambique and UNICEF was present in Maputo only.

B. **Language skills** – there was a clear lack of Portuguese speakers available to deploy via UN agencies' existing surge capacity mechanisms. The Standby Partnership offered rapid access to experienced emergency personnel with Portuguese language skills. However, the number of available Portuguese speakers with the relevant technical expertise available through the SBP was exhausted quickly. This constrained the effectiveness of the overall response in the early days. As the emergency entered its second phase, Spanish and Italian speakers were accepted where Portuguese speakers were not available. There were also examples of SBP deployees originating from neighbouring countries (i.e: Zimbabwe, Malawi) who were proficient in local languages of Mozambique. In addition to their technical skills, these deployees filled critical communications gaps and were readily accepted by the affected local communities. In relation to language capability, the review identified a need for the SBP to prioritise recruitment of roster members with Portuguese (and other) language skills.

C. **Specific technical expertise** that was otherwise not available. The Standby Partnership filled critical gaps in profiles such as Education in Emergencies, Information Management and Cluster Coordination. The SBP further enhanced the *quality of humanitarian action* through the provision of experts working on cross-cutting issues such as Inclusion (Disability & Gender) and Protection Mainstreaming. Furthermore, the SBP through interagency support from CashCap[1] and the Protection Standby Capacity Project's (ProCap)[2] was instrumental in providing critical expertise to ensure the centrality of Cash Assistance, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Protection in the response. These examples illustrate the way in which the SBP responds quickly to emerging needs and priority areas, where UN staffing and other internal surge is overstretched.

KEY FINDINGS

1 **RAPID SCALE UP**
SBP deployees were selected, briefed and on the ground quickly. Minimal delays were reported by host agencies and deployees, which enabled the UN to rapidly scale up their operations during the first phase of the response.

2 **REACH**
SBP support was instrumental in enabling UN agencies to extend their operations into areas of Mozambique that were not being reached. SBP deployees were also critical in *mapping the response* – they extensively documented both geographic and operational gaps, and mapped the wide range of partners working on the response. This enabled the UN to quickly target gaps and expand into hard-to-reach areas.

3 **CRITICALITY**
Support offered via the SBP was critical to the UN response in Mozambique. In many cases, UN agency representatives acknowledged they would not have been able to manage aspects of their operations without Standby support. SBP deployees filled crucial coordination positions and in some cases led entire emergency programmes (where that capacity was not already available in the country – for example, Education in Emergencies).

4 **LONGEVITY**
SBP deployees were in place for significantly longer than all other internal surge (average of 3-6 months for Standby compared to 2-6 weeks for other surge). This level of continuity was consistently cited as a key point of difference for the SBP and contributed to the overall effectiveness of the response.

5 **TECHNICAL SKILLS**
The SBP provided rapid emergency expertise that was otherwise not available to or within UN agencies or available for local hire. SBP deployees provided a broad range of technical profiles, as well as emerging and cross-cutting skill profiles that are more difficult to fill (i.e: Disability Inclusion, PSEA, Cash Assistance).

6 **LANGUAGE SKILLS**
The SBP offered UN agencies rapid access to experienced emergency personnel with Portuguese language skills that were not available via internal or other surge. This was notable given that recent emergencies (Venezuela, Angola) had already spiked demand for Latin-based language speakers. Some UN agencies, however, reported difficulty sourcing SBP candidates with technical skills *and* Portuguese, particularly in the second phase of the response.

7 **LEADERSHIP AND 'SOFT SKILLS'**
This aspect is one of the most critical factors in the success or otherwise of SBP deployments. It was not uncommon for review informants to give more weight to the interpersonal attributes of SBP deployees than to technical and language skills. Deployees were variously described as good leaders and self-starters, operating with empathy, humility and commitment. This facilitated their acceptance by other response actors and in many cases members of the affected communities.

8 **IMPACT**
The complementary nature of SBP support clearly bolstered UN operations on the ground, whereby existing staff capacity (local knowledge, development expertise, depth) merged with emergency response capacity (coordination, specific technical profiles, speed). As a result, interview respondents felt that SBP support contributed to a quicker, more coordinated response and more inclusive programming.

9 **SUSTAINABILITY**
Sustainable outcomes were not a prominent feature of the majority of SBP positions – this is not uncommon for humanitarian surge and largely depended on whether the agency deemed the role as an ongoing requirement. However, specific examples did emerge of agencies taking significant steps to ensure the sustainability of deployees' work in preparation for their departure and in future planning for ongoing positions. On the whole, review participants generally acknowledged that sustainability should be better factored into all aspects of emergency surge going forward.

10 **BOTTLENECKS TO UN SCALE UP**
The volume of emergency surge, Standby deployments and urgent recruitments put significant strain on UN country office HR departments (which had limited access to any form of 'emergency HR surge'). This caused bottlenecks with regard to getting people on the ground and inducted quickly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 CRITICALITY OF LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES

Requesting agencies should consider in more detail and better specify how critical language skills are to the role. Ensure this is adequately conveyed in the Terms of Reference for the requested SBP deployment. Further, the wider SBP Network should prioritise the recruitment of roster members with Portuguese (and other) language capabilities – and actively seek out highly experienced local responders as part of this effort.

2 PRIORITISE SBP COORDINATION AT RESPONSE ONSET

During the critical first days of an emergency, the SBP Network should endeavour to convene a Webex or similar coordination call to discuss available personnel versus requesting UN agencies' surge needs. This would assist as a sort of prioritisation exercise and may reduce the element of competition between requesting agencies, and see deployees placed on the basis of critical need (seeking to ensure, in particular, that those with language skills in short supply are spread appropriately).

3 CONSIDER PRE-DEPARTURE CONTACT MANDATORY (BETWEEN DEPLOYEE AND UN COUNTRY OFFICE)

Pre-departure contact (e.g. Skype call) between the person deploying and the country office should be considered mandatory. The review found that contact prior to arrival sets expectations and flags any inconsistencies in understanding of the deployment for both parties. There were instances in Mozambique where this contact did not occur, resulting in misunderstandings and missing critical information.

4 DEPLOY GENERALIST COORDINATION PROFILES IN CRITICAL FIRST DAYS

SBP deploying organisations and UN receiving agencies should prioritise deploying generalist coordination profiles (e.g. Humanitarian Affairs Officers or similar) to UN country offices in the critical first days of an emergency. If built into their TOR, these people would be well placed to assist with incoming surge coordination and mitigate difficulties in getting deployees on the ground and oriented quickly.

5 ENSURE DEPLOYEES RECEIVE A FULL SECURITY BRIEFING

Deploying organisations and receiving UN agencies should reaffirm their commitment to deployees receiving a full and meaningful security briefing immediately on arrival. Deployees should also be pro-active in this regard and ensure they are receiving regular updates from UNDSS. Multiple deployees in Mozambique stated that they had not received a UNDSS (or agency) security briefing at the time of the review.

6 GIVE EQUAL WEIGHT TO SOFT SKILLS AND TECHNICAL SKILLS – SOFT SKILLS ARE AN ESSENTIAL ENABLER

Interpersonal competencies or 'soft skills' are arguably *the* critical factor in the success or otherwise of surge deployments. The SBP could find ways to acknowledge this and give greater emphasis to identifying and/or documenting soft skills in recruitment and selection for deployment. Online modules or similar could also be developed to support deployees in this regard.

7 ENHANCE FEEDBACK FROM UN TRAININGS

This AAR highlighted the importance of both technical and soft skills. Many SBP deployees undertake UN trainings (with support via the SBP Training Secretariat). Given that soft skills are easily observed in an interactive training setting, SBP deploying and receiving agencies could find ways to enhance feedback channels related to roster member/deployee performance during UN trainings to inform deployment nominations.

8 DUTY OF CARE ABOVE ALL ELSE

Receiving UN agencies and deploying organisations should remain cognisant of the primacy of duty of care for deployees. The strengths that became evident through this AAR – the flexibility and commitment of deployees, the longer length of deployment compared to other surge, a willingness to live in remote areas – can push deployees to their limits, leading to burnout or other issues. These positive aspects of SBP support should continue to be secondary to overall duty of care.

9 RECRUIT A CENTRAL SBP COORDINATION FOCAL POINT

The AAR review team faced significant challenges in collating and corroborating data to inform this mission. A central coordination or information management function would assist the overall SBP response to be more effective by collecting information at the response outset, identifying gaps or duplication, and informing after action activities.

10 COMMIT TO TAKING SBP AAR LESSONS LEARNED FORWARD

This AAR has identified that SBP support was critical to UN operations in Mozambique. By virtue of this, it also highlights the significant challenges facing the UN system in resourcing humanitarian crises in 2019. Some of the lessons learned from this AAR exercise are unique to this particular context, others are longer-standing issues that require action on the part of both deploying and receiving agencies. With regard to the overall impact of SBP support, issues pertaining to sustainability and localisation in particular warrant further discussion.

SELECTION OF QUOTES FROM THE FULL REPORT

"It helped that I had been in Geneva. I knew about the Standby Partnership. I knew the resource and we had used it before. We wanted the best people so we were following multiple tracks – surge and Standby."

- Deputy Representative, UNICEF Mozambique

"In the beginning the bar was set too high; we wanted technical and coordination staff with Portuguese. Next send Latin speakers, and then - send anybody!"

- UNFPA representative, Maputo

"She has experience from Africa and speaks Portuguese, which makes her move like a fish."

- UNFPA representative, Beira, on working alongside an SBP deployee

"The specific value of Standby Partners is so personality driven. We are guests here in this country, there are standards, there are customs, you need to be polite, introduce yourself, know what questions you can and can't ask. The Standbys that I see here seem to know that. They demonstrate extreme flexibility and agility. There is an intangible 'values' element to all of this."

- SBP Deployee

"It's not just the knowledge they bring. It was amazing to see how they come in and just get going. We're mostly development people here – we talk, we consult, but these people get in and get everything moving fast."

- Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF Mozambique

"For Cyclone Idai and Kenneth, we never could have done this operation without surge… and sustain it. We would have cracked."

- Country Representative, UNFPA Mozambique

"The Standby Partner [deployees] have been instrumental in getting cluster partners mobilised. Their prior knowledge of cluster operations has meant they can run coordination structures at the sub-national level on their own."

- Head of Office, UNICEF Beira

"We're UNICEF but not. It's a fine line but you cannot underestimate the value of that line for the clusters."

- SBP Deployee (Cluster Coordination)

"Standby deployees arrive and start working at a completely different pace. They are fast, they get things moving. That can be difficult for country office staff at first, but I've seen it work well here. There is a respect for both sides, an acknowledgement that each of us brings something to the response."

- IOM representative

"The duration of Standby support allows for huge improvements to continuity that would otherwise be weakened by rolling internal short missions."

- Head of Office, UNICEF Beira

Flooding in parts of Nsanje District, Malawi, following Tropical Cyclone Idai, 18 March 2019. UNICEF/ Juskauskas, Kunje & Chipukunya.