

# **Evaluation of the Effects of Using M-621 Military Cargo Trucks in Humanitarian Transport Operations**

**Evaluation Report 3/2007**

**Executive Summary**



**Norad**

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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background

Norad commissioned this evaluation of how over 500 ex-military M6 cargo trucks have been used for humanitarian transport purposes. *The overall goal of the M6 interventions has been to save lives and provide human protection.* The intended objectives were to respond to special needs for humanitarian goods and services where other transport means did not exist due to particularly difficult terrain and where the costs of transport could not be met.

The interventions were co-financed and implemented by the Norwegian Red Cross Society (Norcross) in partnership with one or more of the following implementing partner organisations: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its member Societies, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The interventions have taken place in Chad, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, North Korea, Pakistan, South Africa and Zambia in the time period 2002 - September 2007.

*The purpose of the evaluation* was to document the effects of M6 interventions (accountability purpose) and to identify the lessons learnt to improve future humanitarian operations intended to meet special transport needs (learning purpose). Relevant *cross-cutting themes* are considered.

In 2002 and 2003, the Norwegian defence authorities, responding to a request from Norcross, donated more than 1 000 military, all-terrain M-621 cargo trucks to the Society. The trucks, hereafter referred to as M6s, were produced in 1968-70. Over the years Norcross built up experience in supplying Transport Support Units (TSUs) for humanitarian transport operations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has been a major funding source for these efforts. TSU is a modular disaster preparedness product designed to cover special humanitarian transport needs. It consists of special vehicles and corresponding spare parts, mobile workshops as well as technical assistance and training of partners involved in the operations. The M6s have been the backbone of the TSUs and are the main focus of this evaluation. In May 2007, 527 trucks had been delivered of which 282 were still operational, although not always in use.

When assessing the interventions which are a focus of this evaluation it is important to have some ideas of the challenges facing humanitarian actors and the framework within which these challenges are met. The “humanitarian actors” include the governments of affected nations and their counterparts in bilateral relationships, some of the UN agencies, the components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the more established International Non-Governmental Organisations and relevant host-country Non-Governmental Organisations.

These actors share little beyond an interest in being active in humanitarian response. Each has an agenda of its own which colours the way it approaches the task of responding to a disaster. Common patterns include lack of coordination, a preference for high-profile sudden onset disasters, links to the overall political aims of the concerned organisation, a tendency to commit more funds than are actually delivered and an unwillingness to commit funds to systemic and long-term needs.

This “coalition of whoever is involved” is faced with environments where the population is under great stress, where infrastructure is commonly underdeveloped or recently destroyed,

where the affected population is often divided by latent or open conflict and where societal coping mechanisms risk being overwhelmed.

Leading disaster relief operations in such contexts involves constant compromise. Each of the nine interventions the evaluation team has studied have involved such strategic compromises.

In 2002, informal Norcross/WFP consultations revealed that there was a great interest in a transport support unit, consisting mainly of M6 for Southern Africa. The intention was to use the trucks particularly for the “last mile”, the distance between the last warehouse/hub and the distribution sites.

The operation was seen as a pilot project and regarded as a success despite initial problems. Norcross went on to offer similar resources in a series of relief operations. A total of NOK 146,5 million have been spent on the TSU interventions to date. Of this NOK 127,7 million are directly related to the M6 trucks and NOK 24,9 million refer to the cost of delivering the trucks to the areas of operation.

## 1.2 Findings

The 527 trucks were used in nine operations to distribute close to 240.000 tonnes of food and relief goods and reconstruction materials. They were also used to transport people. Close to 80.000 refugees and internally displaced people were relocated with their help. In all somewhere between 1,2 and 1,5 million people were assisted through the use of the trucks.

### Cross Cutting Issues

The eight cross-cutting issues important to consider in any evaluation are local context, human resources, protection, participation of primary stakeholders, coping strategies and resilience, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and the environment. The evaluation team found that Norcross did not pay enough attention to the local contexts where M6s were sent. Attention has been paid to human resources. Local staff received suitable training and, in general, rapidly developed the capacities necessary to fulfil their duties. Overall, the technical and basic management skills of the people sent into the field have been good to excellent. The evaluation team also found examples of personal conduct problems with some of the staff sent out.

In terms of protection, the UNHCR operation in Chad is probably where the M6 operation had the clearest direct protection impact. Primary stakeholders have not been involved in the decision-making processes. Meanwhile, the evaluation team has seen multiple, both documented and anecdotal, examples of implementing partners using established methods to stimulate such participation.

The evaluation team found that most stakeholders were uninformed about gender issues and has found no documented effort to analyse the potential links between HIV/AIDS and TSU operations. However, we have anecdotal evidence that a pattern of distribution points closer to the villages (made possible by M6 capacities) is relatively more important for people living with HIV/AIDS and for women e.g. the incidence of rape reportedly declined with the use of the trucks in North Kenya.

The evaluation team has not found evidence that the environmental impact of using these trucks is significantly worse than other trucks nor have we found evidence indicating the military background of the vehicles is a problem even in complex emergencies.

### Finance

The evaluation team has compared the costs of the M6s with some of the other trucks used in relief operations. We found the *annual cost* of an M6 truck to have been quite competitive. However, the *cost per tonne* of the M6 was much less competitive. The length of the operation is important as the shorter the depreciation time used, the more competitive the M6s become as compared to new trucks. The kind of programme within which the trucks are to be used is therefore crucial to its cost competitiveness. *It is further incontestable that real, delivered, maintained, old, smelly and expensive-to-run trucks are much more useful than highly*

*effective, less expensive, cleaner, more modern trucks that no one is prepared to pay the purchasing price for.*

Many of the disaster areas where interventions have been made have functioning local transportation markets. However, the evaluation team found that the M6 transportation niche is not filled, and is unlikely to be filled, by the commercial market.

### **Management**

The Norwegian Red Cross was repeatedly unable to communicate effectively. This is true internally and externally, at many levels. There was a disconnection between people with relief operation responsibilities and development programming responsibilities. Furthermore, key stakeholders within the Federation structure have not felt that the option to refuse M6 interventions has been realistic due to the perceived risk of losing favour with a key supporting member society.

There appears to have been an organisational culture within Norcross so satisfied with the apparent success of the programme that critical feedback was ignored and resistance to new interventions often bypassed. Established systems were bypassed causing additional costs, significant bad-will and unnecessary delays. It was considered OK to initiate the interventions without an exit strategy.

The role of the MFA in the M6 project followed established procedures that govern MFA - large Norwegian NGOs relations. A fundamental element is trust with quality assurance focused on the application process. MFA has a very low capacity to follow up on results and impact.

The M6 project triggered unusually thorough policy discussions within the MFA but alternatives to the M6 were never requested, presented or discussed. The main message communicated to MFA by WFP and Norcross (and IFRC?), was that the program was a huge success.

The project had solid (and enthusiastic) support from Norcross senior management and governance. However, the lack of sound strategies, planning documents and reporting routines begs the question whether there was an *informed* decision making. The evaluation team found that lack of strategic approach, planning and quality assurance in general reduced both the impact and effectiveness of the project. There has been almost no use of evaluations or reviews as tools for improving quality and impact. When external evaluations have been undertaken, there is little evidence that conclusions and recommendations have been acted upon.

### **Relevance and appropriateness**

The evaluation team found that there is a need for relief agencies to supply trucks for rough terrain and that such trucks will almost always be cheaper to run than air operations. Views differ as to the technical appropriateness of the M6s. The trucks are appropriate for particular circumstances, in particular areas with severely damaged infrastructure and/or flooding. They are not the only trucks available to fulfil such tasks. The appropriateness of M6 trucks is thus highly dependent on the design of the program, and how they are used. Were they used appropriately? This varies. A recurrent problem was oversupply which led to difficulties with NOT using existing resources. This in turn, in some interventions, led to inappropriate use.

The evaluation team found that the M6's are relevant and appropriate if used for the tasks for which they are designed. TSUs would be more relevant if not linked so tightly with the M6 trucks.

### **Effectiveness**

Did the M6 do their job? Yes. Undoubtedly. They delivered x from a to b, and in doing so saved lives and prevented human suffering. Were they the most effective solution to the task they were supplied for? Cost effectiveness is dependent on life-cycle cost of the trucks which remains unclear both for the M6 and the alternatives. Some of the interventions have been

criticized due to the cost of air transportation. This is unjustified if the trucks replace helicopters. Costs and delays incurred due to insufficient preparations are much more serious.

### **Efficiency**

With the exception of initial start-up problems, overall the trucking fleets run under the programme had good, professional transport management and maintenance. Efficiency problems caused by the technical specifics of the trucks have been compounded by the tendency to oversupply. Overall intervention efficiency would have been significantly higher if Norcross had been capable of improving connectedness, including better compliance with IFRC standard procedures and more ambitious investments in the capacity building of partners. The ambition and orientation of capacity building implemented was generally only geared towards narrowly defined fleet needs.

The lack of administrative tools like Standard Operating Procedures and appropriate manuals were clearly and repeatedly identified as a serious problem from the very start of the programme.

Coordination with the IFRC was at times dismal. The failure to address this in a timely manner significantly decreased intervention efficiency.

### **Connectedness**

The evaluation team found that the absence of strategy, agreed mandates and working procedures has led overall connectedness to be dependent on personalities and local conditions.

### **Conclusions**

The evaluation team's overall conclusion is that:

*the use of the M6 trucks has undoubtedly saved lives and alleviated suffering in operations where they have been used.*

The evaluation team also concludes that many of these lives could not, realistically, have been saved in any other way – given the logistics necessary and the availability of resources that the people affected, the national authorities concerned and the international community were willing and able to mobilise. All the following conclusions and recommendations should be understood in reference to the overall conclusion.

The Transport Support Unit concept is universally hailed as useful and should be maintained and developed over the coming years. Future TSUs should be needs driven. They should include special transport capabilities equivalent to those of the M6's only if needed in a particular context.

The weakness of the MFA quality assurance mechanisms for this project is attributable to a systemic weakness, not this project.

Norcross lack of systematic strategic planning, administration and follow up of the project can be attributed to a general organisational culture. The board and senior management has a particular responsibility, as quality assurance has never been asked for or accounted for.

The lack of formal procedures has also facilitated innovation, creativity and speedy solutions – all crucial to successful response to emergency situations.

## **1.3 Summary of key recommendations**

- Norcross should develop an overall strategy for the use of TSUs. Norcross should continue to offer the M6s as a resource, until the current, upgraded stock runs out. What to do with the remaining stock should be one of the issues to be addressed in the strategy.
- Norcross should develop a plan to address its documented inability to learn. The plan developed should involve all levels of the organisation i.e. Governance, Management, staff and key volunteers.

- If Norcross chooses to continue with TSU interventions Norcross should ensure that the use of TSUs is better “anchored” and communicated within IFRC.
- Norcross needs to develop clear procedures for how to request, implement and exit TSU support with guidelines to be followed in the process.
- If a coherent strategy is developed, Norwegian government should continue to support Norcross capacity to supply the international humanitarian system with relief transport capabilities.
- Norwegian government should consider ways of improving its ability to triangulate information received from its major NGO partners.
- Norwegian government should review its relationship with large Norwegian NGOs and Norcross. In line with the principles of good donorship, MFA should develop its capacity to actively monitor how programmes and projects funded by the government are actually implemented. Even experienced and highly professional organisations need the support of a critical, pragmatic, external pair of eyes from time to time.

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