2014 LEARNING REVIEW
Foreword

Back in 1999, two friends and I started a little drinks business with a simple aim: to make it easy for people to do themselves, and others, some good. We pledged that we would always give ten percent of innocent's profits to charity. Since we formalised our commitment by setting up the innocent foundation in 2004, we’ve been privileged to work with a series of world class charities fighting hunger.

When we met Action Against Hunger back in 2012, we quickly realised that they were special. Why? Not because their experts have been at the forefront of the fight against child hunger since the 1970s – although that is pretty special. It was because we recognised innocent’s entrepreneurial values. Action Against Hunger employ incredibly smart people and encourage them to pursue ambitious ideas. They challenge the status quo and take risks other organisations would shy away from. They aren’t afraid to try new approaches and then shout about what they’ve discovered.

This learning review reflects that ethos. Action Against Hunger evaluate their work at an extraordinary degree, and then share their successes and, just as importantly, their failures so that colleagues and other organisations can learn from them. They constantly push themselves to find new, better ways to do things, and invite staff from all over the world to join in a global debate about where the organisation is going. In this report, you will read about what Action Against Hunger has learnt from the evaluations conducted in 2014 and how this will influence the way they carry out evaluations in future. You will learn about the discussions which are shaping Action Against Hunger’s evolution. And you will find out how Action Against Hunger are able to help more people more effectively each year through targeted growth and spreading good practice across the organisation.

The innocent foundation’s work with Action Against Hunger aims to prove that empowering community health workers to tackle severe acute malnutrition in children can more than double current treatment rates. By evaluating the success of this approach in Mali and Pakistan, we will build a case for Ministries of Health all over the world to change their approach to childhood malnutrition, reaching many more of the 19 million children suffering today. We don’t know if it will work, but our confidence in Action Against Hunger encouraged us to take a calculated risk. Whatever the outcome, we hope you’ll be reading about it in the 2016 edition of this review.

So read, learn, enjoy. Get inspired to take a risk and do things differently, just don’t forget to come back next year and tell the rest of us what you discovered.
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The publication has been redesigned to look more attractive. It aims to convey a more positive tone and provide more impactful infographics which present a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. We hope you enjoy the new “look”!

The spirit of the Learning Review remains unchanged. The publication is still organised around three key sections: (i) a meta-analysis of ACF 2014 evaluations which allows us to learn from our experiences and to integrate learnings into future programming cycles; (ii) a selection of articles which serve to promote debate and discussion, raise burning issues and discuss new approaches and; (iii) a compilation of good practices identified during the evaluations in 2014 which have the potential to be replicated and scaled-up in other contexts.

So what is new about the publication this year? The content has been developed in a more critical way, looking at how ACF adds quality throughout the cycle of a project from design, to implementation, evaluation, and knowledge and information management for organisational learning; taking into account the ACF International Gender Policy.

This year’s edition also includes learnings from two new types of evaluations – Real Time Evaluations and Emergency Evaluations. The Learning Review strives to provide a platform to keep improving what we do and ultimately to maximise the results ACF delivers for its beneficiaries.

The first section takes a critical look at how ACF can improve the way it assesses its performance against evaluation criteria as defined by the ACF International Evaluation Policy and Guideline. It reviews methodologies used in evaluations and discusses how ACF can further improve the tools evaluators use to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data so that evaluations are based on solid evidence. It includes a short summary of overall ACF ratings against each evaluation criterion. It also makes some recommendations on how to improve evaluation practice and update the ACF International Evaluation Policy and Guideline going forwards.

The second section presents five articles. One looks into ACF’s Ebola response and the impact it has had on the nutrition work of the organisation. Two articles discuss how improvements can be made to monitoring, knowledge and information management at ACF. Another article reviews the implementation of ACF International’s Gender Policy and provides some recommendations for the future. The last article discusses two new types of evaluation undertaken by ACF on a number of occasions over the past year – the Real Time Evaluation and the Emergency Evaluation. The article reviews our experiences so far in undertaking these types of evaluation and provides guidance on the way forward.

The third section reflects on the definitions of good practices vs. best practices. It presents a compilation of good practices which have emerged through the evaluations conducted during 2014. The good practices included have been narrowed down to those which truly have the potential to be replicated and scaled-up in other contexts.

ACF International Gender Policy: Increasing the impact of ACF’s work through gender equality programming; March 2014.


The 2014 edition of the Learning Review has been put together by a brand new Evaluation Learning and Accountability (ELA) team. The injection of new blood into the team has allowed us to take a fresh look at the publication and come up with new ways of making it even more relevant, analytical and useful for its audience.
HOW MUCH HAS ACF SPENT ON AVERAGE ON EVALUATION IN 2014 (IN EURO, PER TYPE OF EVALUATION, PER PROJECT SECTOR)

ACF Evaluations in 2014

EURO SPENT ON EVALUATION BY DONOR FUNDING THE PROJECT

HOW MUCH HAS ACF SPENT ON AVERAGE ON EVALUATION IN 2014 (IN EUROS, PER TYPE OF EVALUATION, PER PROJECT SECTOR)

NUMBER OF ACF EVALUATIONS BY YEAR AND HQ

ACF INTERNATIONAL LEARNING REVIEW 2014
ACF Evaluations in 2014

NUMBER AND COST OF EVALUATIONS DISAGGREGATED BY SEX

EVALUATIONS OF ACF INTERVENTIONS DISAGGREGATED BY SEX OF EVALUATOR

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<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28%</td>
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20 8

3% 2%

€6,491

TOTAL COST OF EVALUATION OF ACF INTERVENTIONS DISAGGREGATED BY SEX OF EVALUATOR

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| Guinea: Evaluation of the impact of the Guinea Resilience Project on food security and nutrition outcomes. |
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| Mongolia: Evaluation of the impact of the Mongolia Resilience Project on food security and nutrition outcomes. |
| *Jane Keylock*                     |
| Sierra Leone: Evaluation of the impact of the Sierra Leone Resilience Project on food security and nutrition outcomes. |
| *Jean-Muslim*                      |
| Chad: Evaluation of the impact of the Chad Resilience Project on food security and nutrition outcomes. |
| *Sylvain Marilleau*                |
| Afghanistan: Evaluation of the impact of the Afghanistan Rural Development Project on food security and nutrition outcomes. |
| *Caterina Mantii*                  |
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| *Teresa Niyi*                      |
| Uganda: Evaluation of the impact of the Uganda Resilience Project on food security and nutrition outcomes. |
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| *Brian Majesty*                    |
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This section shares the findings of the meta-analysis of evaluations conducted between 18th December 2013 and 15th December 2014. An evaluation could be defined as the systematic assessment of the operations and/or outcomes of an intervention, compared to a set of implicit or explicit standards, as a means of contributing to its improvement (Shulman, 1991). In practice, an evaluation could have a range of objectives but in nearly all cases they relate to improvement, learning, and/or accountability. Of the range of possible evaluation approaches developed in recent decades, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria approach has acquired a hegemonic presence in the Aid Industry, providing a pre-established set of areas which are widely regarded as the most relevant and appropriate for the evaluation of humanitarian and development programmes.

The biggest strength of the DAC approach is its ability to use the same format to evaluate interventions, unifying language on the definition of programme quality. The latter is what enables comparison and measurement of progress over time. But this is also a defined weakness of the approach; the set of criteria has been defined by the richest countries in the world and guided by “donor vision”. The criteria are therefore unlikely to be the same for the other stakeholders involved, who might be willing to look at a different set of criteria considering their diverse social contexts and value systems. As such, using this approach potentially hinders their interest in participating in the evaluation process or using the findings of the evaluation.

Moreover, the approach focuses on judging the result dimension of interventions and risks disregarding the analysis of the implementation aspects (the process dimension linking inputs with outputs). This has the potential to hinder a real understanding of why objectives might not have been reached and therefore could limit further learning. These weaknesses invite a reflection of the convenience of complementary systemic approaches, such as Real Time Evaluations, which focus on processes rather than results with enhanced participation mechanisms to assure quality in ACF’s evaluation practice.

As stated in the ACF Evaluation Policy and Guidelines, ACF’s interventions are assessed in relation to seven criteria - relevance/appropriateness, coherence, coverage, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. In each case the interventions are judged on their ability to reach the standard set. Evaluators are requested to rate the intervention using the ACF set of criteria outlined from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). This section provides the average rating achieved by the organisation for 24 out of the 29 evaluations implemented in 2014 which involved the provision of ACF-UK support. For each of the criterion there is a brief introduction to how they are measured, followed by examples of how ACF’s interventions in various contexts have determined the collective performance of the organisation. At the end of this section a summary highlights the core aspects of the DAC analysis and offers a set of recommendations on how to improve key evaluation-related issues.

Introduction
Evaluating ACF performance through the DAC lens

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“A measure of whether interventions are in line with local needs and priorities (as well as donor policies), thus increasing ownership, accountability and cost-effectiveness”

Relevance & Appropriateness

In relation to the logical framework, relevance can be used to evaluate the wider elements of the intervention, such as the overall goal or outcome, whereas appropriateness can be used to evaluate inputs and activities.

Both criteria draw close attention to the extent to which the project design takes into account the local context. Thus, there should be a strong coherence between appropriateness and each project dimension (inputs, processes, results).

The validity of the objectives could be assessed looking at the adequateness of the needs assessment in terms of ability to identify clearly and in a participatory way, the differentiated basic needs of the affected population with a bottom-up approach to needs, were identified as key inputs which contributed to relevant and appropriate project design. Given that there were certain deficiencies in the monitoring system in place, the evaluation attributed a high score to the assessment of relevance due to the genuine realization of the population to actively participate in all project activities. Activities linked to women’s home gardening generated strong motivation and interest among women. This was probably bolstered by the fact that almost 50% of the local staff were women, leading to open, quality feedback from women and verifiable productive outcomes.

Another good example of relevance and appropriateness was an innovative Water project in the Ger area of Ulaanbatar in Mongolia. The project succeeded in implementing ecological sanitation to a cold and arid climate in a peri-urban context which suffered from water shortages. The provision of water points raised both the social and temporary and sustainable key issues they fitted in within the capitol’s major urban development plans, and sustainable due to the expected mass arrival of new migrants to suburban areas estimated at 30,000 families a year. One slight issue was that during the local context analysis of the project, key stakeholders involved in the legislation Commission were not involved until quite late in the process, a factor which should be addressed in the future.

On the other hand, despite having a sound needs assessment, the project design of a Food Security project in the Samangan province of Afghanistan sidestepped only a limited part of the deepest causes of livelihood deterioration and food insecurity caused by climate change and a lack of access to the basic materials needed to restart rural activities. While restricted to community leaders, community participation proved to be consistent, but a lack of feedback mechanisms giving voice to women and the most vulnerable community members identified some areas for improvement.

In another example, the evaluation of a Nutrition project in Mali in urban settings emphasized the need for a better knowledge of the urban context (no updated vulnerability studies were undertaken to inform project design) would have helped integrally to adapt to better deliver Nutrition interventions.

Finally, with regards to ACF’s response to the Syria crisis, although the programme was considered relevant, community participation was weak, with more than half of the beneficiaries of inputs and type of activities, evaluation reporting to have not been consulted by ACF Commission were not involved until quite late in the process, a factor which should be addressed in the future.

THE WRAP

A comprehensive understanding of the local context is needed for sound project design (including needs of women and men, key local stakeholders, local capacity and culture). This requires a participatory approach, facilitating equal stakeholder participation along the entire project cycle. Moreover, strong M&E systems need to be associated with the highest performing projects in this category.

DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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The need to assess the existing interventions, policies and strategies to ensure consistency and minimize duplication

Coherence

Measuring it

So far as the logical framework is concerned, coherence is most closely associated with the outcomes of a project. That is to say the extent to which the intermediate or longer-term contributions of different actors impact the humanitarian action.

Given its focus on wider policy issues, this is one of the more “political” DAC criteria. Outside the humanitarian sphere, the assessment should look at the extent to which policies of different actors were complementary or contradictory. Within the humanitarian sphere, it should look at the extent to which all actors are working towards the same goals. In order to operationalise its measurement a robust context-specific stakeholder analysis should be carried out.

Achieving it

Coherence in ACF’s evaluated projects was the second best score among the criteria set. There was no variation from the previous year, and the criterion score has been constant since 2011.

Among the top scoring projects were both WaSH projects in Afghanistan (Ghor and Samangan), where ACF coordinated with the relevant government bodies, implementing national and regional regulations which had been developed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation. Evidence of ACF’s actions shows that they correctly interpreted the government’s strategy which aimed to decentralise the responsibility of water structures and other assets and create ad-hoc community structures for maintenance and caretaking. ACF’s gender mainstreaming was also taken into account by the inclusion of specific training on hygiene for women.

In Mongolia, the evaluation looked at internal and external coherence. ACF’s decentralised solutions were deemed to be suitable considering the new urban development plans of Ulaanbaatar. In order to move towards maximising external coherence, ACF needs to ensure regular coordination with the Municipality and the appropriate Mongolian institutions, since it is already the key WaSH “player”.

Another top achiever in terms of coherence was a WaSH project in Indonesia, where ACF’s support was identified as being closely linked to the Indonesian development strategy and relevant ministries. Good coordination with other aid actors, including local and international NGOs, was also reported, highlighting promising perspectives for more cooperation between the governmental and nongovernmental development partners.

The evaluation based the maximum score for coherence on the high complementarity between ACF’s work and the interventions of other partners, highlighting several instances of coordination (participation in international partnerships or coordination meetings with local and international aid actors), as well as specific tools or mechanisms to avoid duplication of efforts which lead to increased overall aid support among aid actors. However coherence with de-facto authorities’ policies and strategies could not be measured.

Another top achiever in terms of coherence was a Livelihoods project in Abkhazia, where the evaluation based the maximum score for coherence on the high complementarity between ACF’s work and the interventions of different stakeholders, from governments to implementing partners, have contributed towards a strong performance in the coherence criterion.

DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR

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<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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</table>

THE WRAP

Like previous years, communication, coordination and complementarity with different stakeholders, from governments to implementing partners, have contributed towards a strong performance in the coherence criterion.
Coverage

Measuring it

In the logical framework, coverage is usually incorporated in results statements and indicators relating to the numbers and types of the affected people targeted. Results statements should be clear concerning the numbers to be covered, as well as particular groups being targeted. Vulnerable groups should be disaggregated by socioeconomic status, age, age and ethnicity.

Evaluation of coverage focuses determining who was supported by the humanitarian action, and why. Even though the evaluation of coverage could take place at an international, national/regional and local level, in practice it is usually measured at the regional and especially at local levels. Targeting should be undertaken in a comprehensive manner from geographical, political, community and intra-household perspectives.

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Achieving it

Coverage of ACF’s programmes achieved the third highest score among the criteria set, with a slight increase from the previous year and a steadily increasing trend since 2011.

In ACF’s projects, coverage was mostly assessed based on the geographical reach of a project, focusing mainly on whether the most vulnerable parts of the population were reached and whether targeting was appropriate.

In a Food Security and Livelihood project in the Samangan province of Afghanistan, high comparative outreach capacity and geographical coverage of remote areas was achieved by ACF (compared to national government programmes or other NGOs). However, the targeting criterion was considered to be too general and not adapted to the context, which proved to cause problems in the selection of beneficiaries.

On the other hand, during a Food security project in the Daykundi province of Afghanistan, even though the coverage rate was high, largely due to fact that the intervention focused on a geographically restricted area, the selection of beneficiaries was accurate, matching activities to different vulnerability social profiles (from direct aid distribution for the poorest categories, to decision-making responsibilities for better off households).

Furthermore, a Water and Nutrition project in Pakistan was another top achiever under this criteria, with selection criteria to identify beneficiaries enabling the targeting of vulnerable groups to take place homogeneously, as well as communities as a whole, even though village selection was not investigated under this evaluation. In Jirka, Sallman and Zor, the evaluation was carried out such that the criteria was appropriate in the selection of beneficiaries.

The apparent trade-off between coverage and effectiveness is an issue ACF continues to find ways to reconcile.
Efficiency

Measuring it

Efficiency is mainly covered in the input and output columns or rows of the logical framework.

Assessing efficiency usually involves looking at the characteristics of key structural elements enabling the implementation of activities (funds, infrastructure, staff, leadership, coordination, financial control, partnerships, procedures, culture, planning, etc.) as well as a financial analysis of relevant areas of the expenses (costs per sector, comparison of inputs nationally and internationally, transportation costs per type, etc.), and the ability to deliver outputs on time. It is also worth taking risk factors into account (change in political priorities, partners’ commitment to the intervention, economic stability, infrastructure, organization’s capacity and leadership) which might cause interventions to be inefficient.

Achieving it

Efficiency was the second lowest score among the criteria set, showing a slight increase from the previous year. This is encouraging considering that the score had been steadily decreasing since 2011.

Several projects have dealt with delays, access challenges, cancellation of activities, insecure environments and the lack of capitalisation from previous experiences. Nevertheless, the qualitative attitude of ACF staff and the ability to catch-up with work plans have balanced these challenges. ACF’s evaluation reports from 2014 highlight delays in the start of activities and poor synchronisation between activities or between activities and the seasonal calendar (particularly for food security projects). There were also a number of suggestions from evaluators for programme to focus on maximizing cost efficiency by planning logistics and materials better.

In line with that, a Food Security project in Bahr-el-Gazal in Chad, highlighted the practice of procuring materials from the local market whenever possible, as well as the advantages of producing higher quality constructions when seeking tenders from different suppliers. The latter was weighthighly in the measurement of efficiency despite the lack of supporting follow-up documents for accountability or inventory tracking.

For a Disaster Risk Management project in Pakistan, the evaluation recommended that ACF considers managing major procurement to reduce financial risks, and to include partner staff as members of the procurement committees so as to increase the sense of ownership while ensuring goods and services purchased were in line with local requirements.

Others, like a Nutrition Programme in Sierra Leone, were found to have an inefficient use of human resources, as the evaluator argued that the same quality could have been achieved with fewer staff. If a more “hands-off” approach had been put in place sooner, the dependence on ACF may have been lessened and would have allowed time for other activities to take place (such as community-based participatory discussions or efforts to strengthen links between different stakeholders).

One example of efficiency was seen in a Food Security and Livelihoods project in Afghanistan which made savings in support costs lines, re-allocating it to project activities. This was quoted by the evaluator as being an “uncommon good practice that scales up benefits for beneficiaries and attests the agency’s capacity to optimize the use of funds”.

The WEtRap

Evaluators focused heavily on procurement, human resources and budgets to assess the efficiency of interventions. The way forward will be for ACF to further develop risk analyses and monitoring in its interventions and for evaluators to take a more holistic approach to evaluations by developing a deeper understanding of key structural elements, a cost-efficiency analysis and a review of risks affecting the intervention.
**Effectiveness**

**Measuring it**

In the logical framework, effectiveness is assessed as the contributions of outputs to achieving outcomes.

Assessing effectiveness involves a logical framework analysis and an examination of the main reasons why the intervention achieved or did not achieve particular objectives, including the process by which the change was brought about and the suitability of the resources allocated. It is also advisable to look at the levels of stakeholder participation both for project design and for the analysis of implementation mechanisms, including feedback from the affected population over the intervention through sound M&E systems.

**Achieving it**

The Effectiveness criterion showed an average performance compared to the other criteria, with an increase compared to the previous year and a slight recovery trend after a big fall in 2012. Most projects evaluated seemed to achieve their objectives against the indicators that were articulated in the proposals, even when delays in the launch of activities were reported.

For a Food security project in Chad, the delays were due to internal coordination, procurement and security issues, resulting in detrimental impacts on physical construction and output quality.

The Nutrition Project in Mali also achieved its objectives despite some delays, but the lack of involvement of partners in the design and monitoring, as well as the lack of coordination with other actors working on the same or similar contexts may have hindered effectiveness.

A project in Zimbabwe which focused on building disaster resilient communities was the top achiever on effectiveness owing to the attainment of all logical framework indicators (and even a number of indicators in the M&E Plan), along with the hard work of the team and its experience of working in the region. No remarks, however, were made regarding the implementation processes involved. It was mentioned that the M&E system prioritized the monitoring of a number of relevant indicators over the identification of “lessons learnt”, hindering the integration of M&E lessons into the project implementation.

In other cases, such as during an Afghanistan Food Security project, the activities had observable positive results but it was reported to have a poor monitoring system due to a lack of simple indicators linked to easy data collection. Moreover, surveys were not directly linked to the outcome of the intervention.

Conversely, the effectiveness performance of many projects and programmes varied considerably depending on which of their objectives were evaluated. Some projects which involved support for Water and Sanitation infrastructure and other types of infrastructure, ACF needs to work more to ensure quality and adequate construction with a maintenance plan. In projects or programmes with training and capacity building activities, the general feeling is that ACF can be quite effective in supporting beneficiaries and local communities, positively contributing to the intervention objectives.

**THE WRAP**

A solid project design with SMART objectives and indicators has proven to be key when assessing effectiveness. Furthermore, well-functioning M&E systems are a strong asset towards providing quantitative and qualitative data for sound analysis.
Sustainability

Measuring it

In the logical framework, an evaluation design should clearly cover the linkages between outputs and outcomes. The assumptions columns may also include information about risks related to sustainability or connectivity.

Achieving it

Based on the review of the evaluations from 2012 to 2013, the sustainability of ACF’s support varies quite significantly between projects and between the different areas of intervention. Overall, this is the lowest rated among all the criteria set, therefore evaluations need to improve clear handovers of projects and activities through government ministries and investing in local capacity through trainings and workshops.

In Chad, where a Food Security and Livelihoods project was implemented, ACF’s role was to ensure the Prevention and Management of Conflict were already in place, and understood and accepted by communities. The project made efforts to reinforce the function and sustainability of these committees, enhancing the continuity of the project’s work, but failed to manage the development of contingency plans for the management of cereal Bank. It also did not provide training to build the capacity of the Committees to effectively respond to crises (a very important factor considering the volatility and insecurity of the region).

Another project in Afghanistan in Ghor received a low rating on sustainability due to poor community mobilization and empowerment, and particularly a lack of engagement of women who were key stakeholders for water in this part of the country. Communities have limited knowledge and understanding of ownership for the water assets provided by ACF.

Moreover, the economy and the security situation were external factors which were beyond the control of beneficiary or donor in Afghanistan. ACF was also rated poorly due to poor community mobilization and empowerment, and particularly a lack of engagement of women who were key stakeholders for water in this part of the country.

The assumptions column may also include information about risks related to sustainability or connectivity.

THE WRAP

Local capacity building at the institutional and community levels, well-articulated partnerships and community participation and ownership have once more proved to be at the core of sustainability performance. External factors stated in the assumption/risk column of the logical framework should also be carefully monitored and assessed to analyse sustainability.

A clear example of how linkages between outputs and outcomes can be challenged was the livelihood projects in Abkhazia. Based on a short-term strategic approach, livelihoods were supported with small grants. This was done assuming that the beneficiaries would have the capability to improve handovers of projects to the local communities, governments and businesses. A good example of this was a multi-sector integrated project in North and South Kivu in the DRC, where the delay in starting a community-based structure management and exit process jeopardised the sustainability of the work of these committees.

As a proxy to measure this criterion, evaluations could identify and assess the nature of partnerships (especially the ones that already exist between international and national NGOs), partnerships and capacity, whereas the linkages between the relief and recovery phases have been established. This could be evidenced by the existence of an exit strategy (requiring availability of funds, timelines, institutional responsibility and details on handover to local organizations).

On the flip side, ACF’s work in South Sudan in Jonglei was rated as a good example of how partnerships and capacity building have been incorporated in project design, focusing on implementing activities through government ministries and service provider institutions, enhancing the continuity of the project’s work, but failed to manage the development of contingency plans for the management of cereal Bank. It also did not provide training to build the capacity of the Committees to effectively respond to crises (a very important factor considering the volatility and insecurity of the region).

As a measure of whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after the donor funding has been withdrawn and project activities officially cease.
Impact

Measuring it

Impact can be considered as a higher-order measure and thus relates to the outcomes or changes in the outcomes, as reflected in the logical framework. As such, the logic of the framework serves as the basis for thinking about the outcomes expected from an intervention. Impact can be considered as the breadth of the outcomes and thus can be understood as a third level of measurement, following the objectives and indicators.

Considering the nature of ACF’s projects, and the methodologies and resource availability to measure such criteria, it would be clear that the scope of the latter could go far as a preliminary attempt in the “likelihood of impact”. Together with the before-and-after comparisons and proper final evaluation timing allowing the existence of endline data, measurements in context should be aimed to increase the likelihood of long term impact outcomes. A definitive “likelihood of impact” is not attainable; should several indications of the same or slightly higher effect be obtained, one could claim that a larger number of proxy impact indicators. As such, the likelihood of impact can be measured against endline data.

Achieving it

Impact has got one of the lowest scores of the seven criteria measured, with the biggest decrease compared to the previous year (-4.5, and a slightly flat trend since 2011.

The 2014 evaluations showed that impact and behavioral change in some projects were easily assessed as a result being more observable than other factors which change over time. In order to assess the same outcome, resulting in biased impact estimations, before-and-after comparisons could still be useful although for monitoring trends but not as a method to measure causal effects. A thorough impact or effects measurement would require an ex-post evaluation. Ex-post evaluations can be directed towards improving programme design, learning about the why of impact and identifying what works and what does not work.

A thorough impact or effects evaluation looks for the changes in the outcomes that are directly or indirectly, produced by an intervention, intended or unintended. Positive and negative, primary and secondary, short, mid and long-term effects produced by an intervention, directly or indirectly, unintended or intended or not.

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DAC Analysis in a Nutshell

Looking Forward: Recommendations for improvement

Relevance/Appropriateness and Coherence are the best-project performance areas (rated 4.3 and 3.9 respectively). Both of these have seen a rise in rating from the 2011 assessment. DAC scores should be taken with caution. The interpretation of each criterion could vary, leading to subjective ratings and further potentially biased interpretation of each criterion could vary, leading to subjective ratings and further potentially biased performance assessments. In particular the scores attempt to measure core concepts behind each criterion which have, in some cases, been slightly adapted in the ESP from the DAC guidelines. Besides, judging by the base of evidence used by evaluators to assess the criteria, further concept adaptation or even potential misconceptions are likely to have taken place, probably resulting in ratings which do not necessarily correspond to the original core concept behind each criterion.

For example, in various cases coverage is not assessed based on numerical facts or on whether the largest possible proportion of the population in need was reached, but rather on whether the right people were selected as beneficiaries.

Another example is impact, where there have been several references related to effectiveness and monitoring data. In particular, the reference to the term “impact” has proven to take several nuances, which can be illustrated by a literal reference to “impact of project activities”, which is an obvious misconception of the term.

Moreover, even if these scores where 100% unbiased, modern should be in mind that the analysis has been done out of a total sample of 24 projects which in no case should be representation of the entire universe of interventions implemented by ACF.

Impact (or more precisely “likelihood of impact”) is the third lowest performing area (3.5), with a slight decrease in comparison to the 2011 rating. The limited availability of quality and relevant quantitative data to measure trends, both through baseline/end-line surveys or well-functioning M&E systems is hindering further “likelihood of impact” related analyses.

Effectiveness and Coverage were both rated in the middle of the 2014 criteria set (both 3.7) with opposite historical trends. On the one hand, coverage presents the second biggest increase of the criterion set since 2011 (13.6%) and effectiveness the second biggest decrease since 2011 (0.5% decrease). As for the latter, several evaluations pointed out the lack of consistent or complete monitoring data which hindered their ability to evaluate the project’s progress against its objectives.

Evaluation questions. Even under a pre-set evaluation approach, considering the unique nature of every project, it is generally desirable to customize questions under each criterion in order to draft an evaluation questions sheet and useful to stakeholders. Stakeholder participation in the development of evaluation questions should be encouraged if the likelihood of the use of findings is to be increased.

Methodological triangulation. All evaluations used more than one option to gather data, such as interviews, observations and documents. Nevertheless, questionnaires and further quantitative analyses have been recently used, hindering not only a further validation of data but also a deeper and wider understanding. The ELA will address this issue in two different ways: consistently ensuring that evaluation plans are in line with methodology and techniques for data collection are outlined and working towards a better integration of design criteria, data collection and analysis.

Recommendation Follow-up. Many recommendations stated in 2014 evaluations are similar to the ones made in previous years for similar projects. A management response for the recommendations should be submitted by the project manager with a clear action plan. The ELA will facilitate the process shortly by starting to keep a project-specific action follow-up in a way to ensure the use of findings and to capitalize learning towards continuous improvement.

Strengthening M&E to provide a solid basis for reflection is highlighted in the 24 evaluations under analysis. Associations have been found between effectiveness and impact performance. ACF's experience in evaluation in the past few years has proven the lack of consistent or complete monitoring data which can be illustrated by a literal reference to “impact of project activities”, which is an obvious misconception of the term. Nevertheless, questionnaires and further quantitative analyses have been recently used, hindering not only a further validation of data but also a deeper and wider understanding. The ELA will address this issue in two different ways: consistently ensuring that evaluation plans are in line with methodology and techniques for data collection are outlined and working towards a better integration of design criteria, data collection and analysis.

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Debate and Discussion

Introduction

This section of the Learning Review allows ACF staff from around the globe to provide critical reflection and analysis on burning issues in the Network. This year’s edition features five articles which can be divided in three categories.

The first category is about reflecting on the Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak and its impact on the treatment of severe acute malnutrition in Sierra Leone. It presents the current situation, ACF’s role and what’s next in Sierra Leone. It provides a basis for ACF to reflect on tackling new types of crisis.

The second category is about raising awareness, analysing ACF experience and generating synergies around the following cross-cutting issues: monitoring and community feedback mechanism, knowledge and information management, and gender equality. These issues need to be addressed in a systematic and coherent way across the ACF network and these articles are a stepping stone towards that end. The articles are directly grounded into ACF work on the ongoing development of ACF Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines, the ACF paper on Knowledge and Information Management (December 2014) and the ACF International Gender Policy.

The third category is about looking into other types of evaluations – Real Time Evaluations and Emergency Evaluation - both carried out during the past year. The article explains the additional value of such exercises, highlighting how these new evaluations complement the mid-term and final project evaluations and what can ACF learn from the experiences.

The intention of this section is to spur discussion, facilitate change and ultimately improve the quality of ACF’s work.
Confidence in the health system is also under threat at the community level. In order to understand the nutritional status of children under five in the communities, while protecting the community health workers (CHWs), the Ministry of health (MoH) has revised the procedures for the identification of malnourished children at community level. They have banned the use of the Middle Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) tape for the period of the emergency and limited the identification of SAM cases to visual screening and direct intervention. The interventions were discussed with the CHWs to visually identify SAM cases, as the avoidance of personal contact is a distinguishing feature of the approach. This has had a major impact on the perception of the health staff is impacting the perception of the communities and addressing the needs of the infected is crucial for reducing the risk of contamination. At the community level, to limit the negative effects of the “non-touch” policy, ACF is supporting the MoH in the implementation of an alternative strategy consisting in the provision of a MUAC tape for each child ever referred. community health workers (CHWs) have received extensive training in its correct use as monitoring tool for the nutritional status of their children. This strategy, as part of the measures adopted to protect the health staff working with malnourished children, the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) protocol was revised to be adapted to the Ebola context. In the DTH admission and follow-up criteria have been reviewed and the measurement should be limited to MUAC to limit body contacts.
What next?

A “no-touch” policy might seem to be the end of many activities implemented in a health system. Indeed, clinical procedures, even the simplest ones used in Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) protocols (MUAC, weighting etc.) require close contact between patients and health staff. The situation in Sierra Leone has proved challenging, but created the environment to develop innovative methods that should be considered in other settings. Adapting the protocols so ratios of RUTFs are based on age may not seem the best approach in the long term, but can indeed be helpful for many programmes that in a given point of time cannot access weight measures. Training mothers to use MUAC tapes can reinforce community activities in many countries. Therefore these challenges should not stop SAM treatment being delivered but can reinforce the current way to implement CMAM protocols.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon that in an emergency situation health centres are suddenly shut down and community activities seriously disrupted, but this is when the role of NGOs is more necessary than ever in procuring additional supplies and implementing creative solutions that can serve as a bridge until national health services are restored. This not only ensures that treatment is still being delivered at some degree during the epidemic, but ensures that the trust of the population in the health system does not disappear. The ultimate commitment of the health system is to the people themselves and the mutual relationship that has been built must be sustained. If this means a modification of established protocols, it should be done.

In Sierra Leone ACF is aiming to gain a prominent role in the districts of operations in supporting the MoH in the provision of RUTF to SAM children under treatment in the case of temporary closure of the OTP due to exposure of health staff to Ebola, and to work along with the MoH and UNICEF in providing nutritional support the individuals directly and indirectly affected by Ebola at community level, such as survivors, children whose mother has died or children whose mother has recovered but can’t breastfeed in the recovery phase.

Furthermore, ACF will continue to support the MoH in establishing a robust nutrition surveillance system paramount to monitor the evolution on the nutritional status of the population, particularly children under five.

ACF in Sierra Leone

ACF works in Freetown–Western Area and Moyamba Districts implementing health and nutrition programmes that aim at supporting the Ministry of Health, at national level and in the two districts, in the prevention and treatment of severe acute malnutrition at health facility (more than 50 OTPs and three IPFs) and community levels.
Minimising risk through Monitoring and Feedback Mechanism

By Shahid Alam Parecha, Programme Quality Assurance Coordinator, ACF-Pakistan
Silke Pietzsch, ACF-Pakistan Regional Programme Advisor

In the humanitarian sector, Programme Quality and Accountability (PQ&A) or Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) units are set up to enable organisations to support programmes effectively, provide high quality services and address the needs of their beneficiaries. ACF’s PQA team was established in March 2011.

As part of ACF’s systems for quality deliverables, the PQA team was established to ensure that ACF’s interventions are aligned with its target areas. It provides guidance and support, to ensure that beneficiaries’ considerations are heard, and that projects and programmes are in line with international quality standards like HAP & SPHERE.

In 2011, during the remote implementation of an ECHO project in the North of Pakistan, a donor visit observed and reported sub-standard work in WaSH hardware deliverables in the intervention areas. The construction work was reviewed and the PQA team was established to ensure that ACF’s standards and quality requirements are met. Additionally, the PQA team was tasked to identify issues and where necessary reconstruct the hardware.

The PQA team’s involvement, it was possible to rectify any faulty hardware and infrastructure. Thanks to the PQA team, ACF was able to improve its commitments to quality, accountability and transparency. Being accountable for quality, being transparent and ensuring that beneficiaries are in line with international quality standards like HAP & SPHERE.

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Complaints received from different sources are added into the FCM database by the PQA team. As per complain category, the PQA team forward these complaints to the regional or national level committee for investigation and solution. Once response on complaints is received, the PQA team provides a response to the complainant and close the complaint. Usually a complaint is dealt within 15 working days.

The graphic (below) gives an overview of how beneficiaries’ feedback and provide information directly to ACF. Overall the PQA team received 236 feedbacks during the project life span, 50% of concerns are related to food security & livelihoods, 33% to WaSH, 7% to nutrition, 1% related to human resources, while 8% of concerns fall under an integrated programme category, which mean feedback addressed more than one sector.

10% of the feedback was resolved together with the programme team and feedback has been given to complainant. As expected, the proportion of women using the system shows a great unbalance with respect to men (18% vs 82% respectively). It is interesting to note how usual or written means are never utility women, probably related to literacy issues.

As for the type of complaints, it can be seen in the chart (bottom right) that complaints are focused on the “Other” category, which is intended for general feedback in the form of suggestions, inquiries, positive feedback on ACF work, etc. followed by non-selection related complaints and with a smaller amount of complaints related to abuse and discontent on services.

Despite showing a marginal comparative amount within the categories, examples of some abuse related complaints are illustrated in more detail below.

ACF Staff involvement in corruption/Fraud: In February 2014, a beneficiary provided feedback via mobile phone. The call was received from a village, the feedback that an ACF employee was collecting money from community members against low cost latrines and communicating to community members that ACF will provide latrines to those whom pay an attractive amount.
the case confidentially. First they interviewed those beneficiaries whom provided money to field engineer and gathered all of the evidence, and then later interviewed the field engineer and his supervisor. After investigation the PQA team communicated the findings to the country management along with the respective evidence. As a result some staff were reprimanded from their duties and beneficiaries reimbursed their payments. Additionally, a community awareness session about the programme and ACF was facilitated reiterating the programme details and conditions, and the importance of the feedback mechanism.

Fraud by Village committee chairman: A female beneficiary lodged a complaint through mobile number13 against a Village Committee (VC) chairman. “He took Rs. 5000/-PKR from every cash grant beneficiary, but the other beneficiaries do not complain about him but I inform you people to kindly provide support and give the money to the people”.

The PQA team visited the village and investigated the case. Initially interviews were conducted with all beneficiaries and further with complainant and committee chairman. The investigation proved the committee chairman was involved, it has been agreed with complainant and communicated to VC chairman to reimburse the stolen amounts.

Complaint against village committee chairman: A complaint regarding financial corruption of the village committee was received. A male community member recorded his complaint against the village committee (VC) chairman that “there are two female beneficiaries registered for cash grants. As on the day of distribution there was no male member available at home and due to cultural norms females are not allowed to go outside alone. In this connection the VC chairman received an amount of Rs. 33,600/-PKR from one female beneficiary but he only provided Rs.10,000/-PKR to both females and had stolen Rs. 23,600/-PKR”. The PQA team investigated the case first Food Security Livelihood programme and bank documentation/records were checked and verified that amount was provided to VC chairman. Later they investigated at field level with beneficiaries and found that the VC chairman hadn’t provided the actual amount to the beneficiaries. After meeting with the VC chairman, he accepted that he hadn’t provided the amount and agreed to pay the full amount, and finally paid the claimed amount of Rs. 23,600/-PKR to beneficiaries.

Overall this mechanism has contributed to increase the ACF downward accountability towards beneficiaries & communities. Beneficiaries benefit, the quality of services is improved, and the risk of financial corruption is minimized at staff, community and individual levels. The system helps as well to empower the local communities to speak up and take charge of their programmes.

13 A dedicated mobile number for receiving complaints/feedback
Knowledge and Information Management: What is it? Why do we need to strengthen it? What is the way forward?

There is growing recognition in ACF that we need to improve the way we manage information, make it available in a timely manner and share the knowledge we generate. But what is knowledge and information management in the context of ACF, why do we need to strengthen it and what is the way forward? We have asked David Lamotte, Knowledge Management Officer in ACF France to shed some light on the subject.

What is Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) in the context of ACF?

Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) in the process of capturing, maintaining, developing, and effectively using organizational data and expertise. For ACF, this allows us to use the potential of our staff, achieve a solid and mature collaboration with our partners, and enabling it to remain fit to its environment.

To attain these three objectives, ACF will focus on:

1. Developing capacity to refine the data available at the field level to make it available and meaningful for the rest of the organization. That is how ACF will grow its capacity to collect and share robust evidence to develop and share insight through our approaches. Ensure the whole network is committed to our internal and external audiences; foster individual and collective intelligence; encourage debates and create room for innovation.

2. Developing capacity to manage and present relevant information in a timely manner and consistent with our partners’ expectations. This means: maximizing the potential of our staff, increasing their organizational and contextual knowledge assets, increase the organizational effectiveness and achieve a more effective flow of information, make it available in a timely manner and share the knowledge we generate.

3. Developing capacity to facilitate knowledge exchanges and constant questions, knowledge assets with both individual and collective intelligence, encourage debates and create room for innovation. Be proactive in disseminating, but also receiving and sharing knowledge.

Another challenge comes from the focus on collecting evidence to develop and share insight through our approaches, and ability to continuously improve, question, knowledge assets with both individual and collective intelligence, encourage debates and create room for innovation.

For more information on how ACF participates to the Transformative Agenda, refer to “ACF International and the transformative agenda”, May 2014. Available on ALNAP: http://www.alnap.org/resource/12553

Why KIM?

Why is KIM so important for ACF? It’s essential to identify the potential challenges. One challenge is allowing a good balance between top-down and bottom-up knowledge exchange, which we’re doing right thing” before asking if we do “things right” and ascertain that we’re relevant in a given situation. This requires seamless knowledge exchanges and constant connection between parties.

What makes ACF Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) so important for ACF?

The rise of our comfort zone and hesitating to bring in new perspectives. This compromises ACF’s capacity to challenge its model and devise new approaches. With that in mind, we need to create space for discussion and informed decision making.

The last challenge lies in our capacity to create synergies and enable effective cooperation. How will a position on KIM change our way of doing things? How will it improve our capacity to create space for discussion and informed decision making? Does it mean we have to stop doing what we’re doing or enable effective cooperation. How will it impact our capacity to challenge our model and devise new approaches.

Why does ACF need a policy?

Management: Why KIM is important for ACF?

To appreciate why KIM is important for ACF, we need to address what makes ACF Knowledge Exchange, if we do “things right” and ascertain that we’re relevant in a given situation. This requires seamless knowledge exchanges and constant connection between parties.

Managing the cost of our expertise and leveraging the interactions with our partners require a round communication matrix. That’s why KIM addresses organizational siloes.

Another challenge comes from the focus on collecting evidence to develop and share insight through our approaches, and ability to continuously improve, question, knowledge assets with both individual and collective intelligence, encourage debates and create room for innovation.

Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) in the context of ACF:

Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) in the context of ACF:

Adapted from Thomas H. Davenport and Laurence Prusak, 2000, “Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know”.
Paving the way towards Gender Equality Programming

The term “gender” is frequently misinterpreted to mean women, women’s rights or women’s empowerment. Gender refers to the social differences between men and women, and is influenced by a range of factors such as they may vary across cultures, age groups or marital status.

In an emergency context, organizations work at high speeds to set up a humanitarian response. The need to pay attention to gender issues can often go unrecognized or be prioritized as humanitarian needs take precedence over gender equality into their day-to-day activities and work.

A remarkable amount has been achieved with the developments of the ACF International Gender Policy and Toolkit. In 2014, nearly 1,000 ACF staff across the organization were trained through various regional and country level trainings as well as gender sensitization sessions during annual ACF workshops and meetings. At this point it is too early to determine how the trainings and sensitization sessions have contributed to changes in individual and organizational practices pertaining to gender equality programming. However, the fact that such large numbers of staff have been reached has led to the ACF International Gender Policy and Toolkit have been widely disseminated and are used in different aid forms, for example, posters, flyers, and a dedicated website.

Continued management commitment and ACF staff ownership of the policy and toolkit have been widely disseminated and are available in different aid forms, for example, posters, flyers, and a dedicated website. Despite these efforts made, it was found that during some of the gender events that took place in 2014 staff highlighted that they had not read the policy and toolkit or were not familiar with it at all. A communication plan is needed to ensure that management commitment to the policy is sustained and ACF staff ownership of the policy continues to be built through the systematic dissemination and socialization of the policy and toolkit.

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation - staff training and sensitization on the gender policy and toolkit are an important asset for its continuation. Without any specific activities or platforms to follow up on, the tendency is to continue with business as usual due to competing priorities. At the same time in the absence of a clear ACF accountability framework, efforts to implement the Gender Policy and toolkit may vary by country. Developing a set of core qualitative and quantitative indicators and tracking the gender matter coding at various levels in the organization will ensure pilots can be scaled up, results can be measured effectively and that no aspect of an organization is working in the same direction. The development of a five-year international strategic plan for 2014-2020 provides the organization with an opportunity to prioritize internal quality and accountability initiatives, including the monitoring and evaluation processes around this policy and subsequent phases of its implementation.

Information Management - The policy makes the case for the need to consider gender in all ACF interventions thus evidence needs to be continuously and systematically collected from the field and shared across the organization. Collecting common internal information and evidence through platforms which provides an effective structure for sharing our own experiences and lessons learnt from our existing partners – staff trained and sensitized on the gender policy and toolkit. Learning from other agencies - ACF staff are highly engaged within the humanitarian community of practice and sharing the lessons learnt from our existing partners and organizations who have successfully institutionalized gender. There is space for ACF to externally share our own experiences and draw from different organizations’ expertise and documentation on gender in each country. Gender Leadership - Institutionalizing the gender policy and toolkit goes beyond just a single entity within ACF as it requires many different pieces to be put in place and work together simultaneously. Establishing strong leadership around gender through the setting up of an organizational gender task force divided into different working groups according to different sections of the policy (Communications, Capacity Development, Gender Marker, M&E etc.) will help to promote continuous engagement and a multi-faceted approach.

It is important to note that there is not one size fits all approach when it comes to the implementation of the gender policy and toolkit. The following are elements of the Gender Policy and Toolkit that have contributed to shaping concrete and lasting changes in individual and organizational practices pertaining to gender equality programming.

- The policy is our commitment to develop both the policy and the systems and strategies, a strong organizational commitment and continuous efforts will be required for 2015 and beyond.
- Continued management commitment and ACF staff ownership of the policy and toolkit will enable us to prioritize the protection and survival of people caught in humanitarian crises.
- However, the fact that such large numbers of staff have been reached has led to the ACF International Gender Policy and Toolkit have been widely disseminated and are used in different aid forms, for example, posters, flyers, and a dedicated website. Despite these efforts made, it was found that during some of the gender events that took place in 2014 staff highlighted that they had not read the policy and toolkit or were not familiar with it at all. A communications plan is needed to ensure that management commitment to the policy is sustained and ACF staff ownership of the policy continues to be built through the systematic dissemination and socialization of the policy and toolkit.
- Monitoring, Implementation and Evaluation – staff training and sensitization on the gender policy and toolkit are an important asset for its continuation. Without any specific activities or platforms to follow up on, the tendency is to continue with business as usual due to competing priorities. At the same time in the absence of a clear ACF accountability framework, efforts to implement the Gender Policy and toolkit may vary by country. Developing a set of core qualitative and quantitative indicators and tracking the gender matter coding at various levels in the organization will ensure pilots can be scaled up, results can be measured effectively and that no aspect of an organization is working in the same direction. The development of a five-year international strategic plan for 2014-2020 provides the organization with an opportunity to prioritize internal quality and accountability initiatives, including the monitoring and evaluation processes around this policy and subsequent phases of its implementation.

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What are RTEs? Why do we do them? What can we learn from our experiences?

RTEs are formative, utilization-focused, process evaluations that provide immediate feedback. They are a form of evaluation designed to review and influence the performance of an intervention as it happens. Their main function is to improve the quality of the intervention by systematically extracting learning from one intervention to another. Their implementation has been challenging as emergency responses are very complex and adaptive, requiring fast and flexible decision-making. The objectives of RTEs tended to be similar and included assessing the deployment/response to the defined humanitarian needs, identifying lessons to help the project to set up an M&E system in the short-term, and providing practical and actionable recommendations to the team to improve performance.

RTEs are utilized in situations where a funder, whether public, private, or non-governmental, requests for financial and institutional risk sharing protocols to be followed or to identify lessons before deciding on future investments. For other funder, it can take the form of formal document review. The introduction of RTEs in ACF reflect the greater interest in learning from the field and for them to be able to feed back to the HQs and Country Offices. Sometimes RTEs are carried out by organisations working in the same area, for example ACF and Oxfam, to further strengthen the learning among all ACF emergency projects. Their implementation has been challenging as emergency responses are very complex and adaptive, requiring fast and flexible decision-making.

RTEs are a form of evaluation designed to review and influence the performance of the intervention as it happens. The introduction of RTEs in ACF reflect the greater need to be able to take stock of emergency responses as they happen, rather than waiting until the end to identify lessons for the future.

For more information:

Assurance Advisor and Senior Programme Quality

ACF’s Emergency Management System (EMS) recommends that RTEs should start as early as possible within six weeks of the start of emergency operations, looking at both logistical and knowledge management, and therefore it is the most practical recommendations that are achievable in the short-term. If possible, in an emergency for which the EMS has been activated it should be consistent with the RTE requests. For other emergency responses, the initiative to launch RTEs is expected to come from the Country Offices involved in the response. The greater the presence in the ACF’s BASE level, the more likely the evaluation findings will be taken on board. The evaluation findings are expected to be planned, budgeted and reported. In 2014, ACF conducted three RTEs in Syria, South Sudan and Iraq that led to immediate changes. The RTEs in Syria and South Sudan were funded by ACF-International and ACF-France respectively. Sometimes RTEs are carried out by organisations working in the same area, for example ACF and Oxfam. The RTE in Iraq was funded by ACF-USA. Finally, the Philippines and Syria responses RTEs were led for their ability to provide a platform to review the lessons learned for situations different between different fields. Since emergency responses are very complex and adaptive, it is important to consider interventions to work together not just in terms of logistical and knowledge management, but also in terms of its ability to reflect the needs of the affected population, identifying good practices, and sharing lessons. The feedback from the process, and providing practical and actionable recommendations is also expected to improve the performance of the intervention over a longer period of time, and as a means of reviewing how the organization is operating and taking into account strategic and tactical changes in the future.

This year saw an increase in the number of RTEs, three instances instead of one last year to three this year. As a result of this increase, the number of RTEs conducted is expected to increase. For the year which was funded by ACF-France and ACF-USA, there were a total of 17 RTEs, including 3 ACF-International’s Response to the Syria Crisis this year which was funded by ACF-France and ACF-International.

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Introduction
Highlighting what works and what has the potential to be replicated or up-scaled in other contexts

Throughout the ACF Network, the GLA promotes self-reflection and continuous learning and adaptation to remain relevant and efficient. As we try to practice what we preach, we have taken a closer look at the way we label these ‘Best Practices’. Based on numerous internal discussions, a review of articles and an analysis of how our peers define ‘Best Practices vs. Good Practices’, we have decided to rename this section ‘Good Practices’. This does not indicate that these practices are lacking quality or significance, but rather that the practices should be thought-provoking. Good practices are not something rigid and we do not believe that one-good-practice identified in a certain context may be applicable in any other context.

No single path leads to a good practice as various factors contribute to its success, such as the project location, environment and associated risks, stakeholders’ participation and capabilities of the implementing staff. Moreover, what makes a good practice is subjective and depends on the perspectives of the observer and evaluator of the practice.

These practices should instead be seen as positive incentives, and encourage users to make them their own, adapt them to their context and help them evolve. Lastly, renewing good practices frequently and integrating new research or advanced technologies is vital for future improvements. As in previous years, the valuable contribution of many people across the ACF Network helped to identify the following good practices that have the greatest potential to be replicated and scaled-up in other projects or programmes.

In future, ACF will develop a database to track emerging good practices, share them and facilitate their incorporation into new project designs. ACF will also establish greater connections between good practice from year to year and show how these are being adapted to other contexts, which then will be communicated through the Learning Reviews.
Have you met...

Referral system for vulnerable beneficiaries in Abkhazia

Overview

The referral system for vulnerable beneficiaries in Abkhazia was developed by ACF International and local partners with the aim of identifying and providing support to individuals and families in need of assistance. The system was designed to enhance the delivery of humanitarian aid, particularly to women and children affected by violence and gender-based violence (SGBV). ACF collaborated with Avangard, a local NGO, to establish a formal referral system that complements their ongoing interventions.

Key Elements

1. **Collaboration with Local Partners**: ACF worked closely with Avangard and other local organizations to ensure that the referral system is accepted by the Abkhaz authorities. This collaboration involved regular exchanges and a commitment to jointly support individuals at risk that otherwise might remain without adequate assistance.

2. **Referral Criteria**: The referral system is based on a set of criteria developed jointly with UNHCR, which selects beneficiaries set to be women. ACF works closely with local communities and community representatives to identify vulnerable families, with a focus on women-headed households and those affected by SGBV.

3. **Coordination and Monitoring**: Critical to the system’s effectiveness is the coordination and monitoring of referrals between humanitarian actors, ensuring that assistance is timely and appropriate.

4. **Legal Protection**: To protect the privacy of survivors, a confidentiality agreement is signed between ACF and Avangard, ensuring that the identities of beneficiaries are not revealed to other partners.

5. **Economic Independence**: The referral system is designed to support beneficiaries in gaining some level of economic independence and prospects, which increases their resilience and reduces vulnerability.

6. **Gender-Sensitive Approach**: Recognizing the unique needs of women, the system is particularly sensitive to the gender ratio, with 80% of beneficiaries being women.

7. **Sustainability**: The referral system aims to help beneficiaries gain some level of economic independence, providing them with an opportunity to reach self-sufficiency and avoid being forced to remain in abusive households.

8. **Monitoring and Evaluation**: ACF and Avangard regularly monitor and evaluate the system’s effectiveness, ensuring that assistance is targeted and effective.

9. **Backward Linkage**: The system also enables ACF to refer potential beneficiaries to other partners, ensuring that assistance is provided throughout society.

Implementation

The referral system operates primarily through local NGOs and community representatives, ensuring that assistance is provided to those most in need. The system is designed to be gender-sensitive and inclusive, ensuring that women and children are prioritized.

Impact

- Improved access to assistance for vulnerable populations, particularly women and children affected by violence.
- Enhanced economic independence for beneficiaries, enabling them to support themselves and their families.
- Greater awareness and understanding of gender-based violence and its consequences.
- Improved coordination and collaboration among humanitarian organizations.

Lessons Learned

- The system’s effectiveness is highly dependent on good collaboration and coordination between partners and local authorities.
- Long-term support is crucial for sustainable change.
- The system must be adaptable to different contexts, taking into account cultural and social factors.

Moving forward

The referral system can be adapted to other contexts and sectors, providing a framework for effective coordination and response to vulnerable populations. More information on this practice is available through the contacts provided.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Erin Blue: erblue@sc.acfspain.org or Anika Krstic: akrstic@gn.acfspain.org
Action against distance
Remote project management in Syria

Intro
Due to several factors such as the security situation and the lack of permission from governments and controlling parties, one of the main challenges to the implementation of humanitarian activities in Syria and other contexts, is limited access to the field.

In an increasing number of contexts, agencies face the need to operate in areas where they face travel restrictions. This may include situations where no staff members are able to travel regularly and freely to field sites or in less extreme cases where there are only limited fields of staff present. In some cases field staff can travel, but must be accompanied by authority representatives. Nevertheless, the precarious situation of vulnerable people dictates that agencies must continue to deliver services.

Therefore, delivering services due to the humanitarian imperative has to go hand in hand with other humanitarian principles such as neutrality and ensuring that services are not diverted to others and agencies have to come up with innovative management practices to balance these competing demands.

ACF’s Learning Review 2011 edition featured an article on remote management with an example from Somalia. Back then, the following aspects were highlighted as important: (i) Staff Profile; (ii) Clear Roles and Responsibilities; (iii) Adequate Communication and Feedback; (iv) Reporting, Monitoring & Evaluation; and (v) Training; making these staff members are prepared to take numerous day-to-day decisions regarding project activities, as well as undertaking a wide range of trainings on different implementation methodologies and gain significant amounts of time in building trust and rapport with local authorities, which ultimately implement the restrictions imposed by central authorities. This has helped increase the space available to local staff to carry out project activities at the field level.

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Moving forward
Agencies dealing with similar situations are advised to review the feasibility of the strategies in their own contexts. Furthermore, they are advised to design more thorough and proactive plans for remote management of emergency operations globally as part of their emergency contingency planning exercise and develop specific strategies for how to deal with similar situations.

A number of different ways to implement remote management programmes exist, including using different methods of monitoring, and levels of direct oversight, which all share the common, important objective of maintaining some level of humanitarian assistance that would otherwise stop if an agency withdraws.

Four remote partnering modalities have been identified: (i) Remote control; (ii) Remote management; (iii) Remote support and (iv) Remote partnering.

Remote control programming involves the combination of all decision-making authority among expatriate personnel based in a safe location and the delegation of on-the-ground implementation to host-nation staff in a conflict-affected location.

Remote management is similar, but generally involves increased delegation of decision-making authority to personnel in the field.

Remote support enables the local staff members on the ground to manage day-to-day activities; the remote manager primarily oversees financial management, donor reporting and capacity building.

Remote partnering allows the international institution to serve as a financial intermediary, raising funds for activities which are completely managed by an experienced, accountable in-country partner.

Partnerships and Advocacy
Expanding its network of partners with different initiatives which allowed ACF to follow various implementation methodologies and gain better access through local authorities, investing significant amounts of time in building trust and rapport with local authorities, which ultimately implement the restrictions imposed by central authorities. This has helped increase the space available to local staff to carry out project activities at the field level.

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Remote partnering allows the international institution to serve as a financial intermediary, raising funds for activities which are completely managed by an experienced, accountable in-country partner.
The International Rescue Committee (IRC) – in partnership with ACF and the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development (IWSD) has implemented a comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction programme in Zimbabwe since the end of 2012. This is all aimed at addressing vulnerabilities and mitigating risks through targeted Risk Management (DRM) Education and Practices, WaSH, and Food Security interventions in Manicaland and Masvingo provinces in Zimbabwe.

ACF’s part in this programme was the promotion of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) education and of national integrated food and nutrition policy and frameworks across ten priority provinces, spread evenly over the two provinces. DRM committees were set up in ten of these districts, in all ten districts. Food Security and Nutrition Security Committees (DFNSCs) were set up or revived, and strengthened through training and coaching. The overall aim was to strengthen the capacity of the government and of the communities to mitigate their vulnerability to disasters and to build long-term resilience.

The Practice

ACF made USD 500 available per district for the ten supported DFNSCs in Manicaland and Masvingo provinces. This allowed the committees to set up or revive, and strengthen through training and coaching. One of the prerequisites of these activities was that they were supposed to ensure that they promote positive Behaviour Change to the target group. For this, they received a budget of USD 500, to be spent on food issues to the households in the nutrition gardens, drama sessions in the villages by the local chief, and community events. The following recommendations can be taken from this project:

- The value of Behaviour Change Communication events increases when it is part of a more coherent campaign. Other elements could therefore be added to the Behaviour Change Communication event in a captivating and convincing way, to encourage people to change some of their habits on some specific issues in the field of nutrition.
- Moving forward it is necessary for the DFNSC or people implementing the practice to be highly motivated and pro-active. Funds may be available, but if the key people fail to buy into the idea then it will not be a success. The idea needs to be built into projects early on, so that the key people are aware and prepare appropriately. It is also necessary for continual coaching between DFNSC and ACF about the plans for the event allowed ACF to provide guidelines and advice on expected results; without removing ownership from the DFNSC.
- The practice needs to be tackled in a way of fostering independence and ownership. Only a reasonable budget is required and as practices around the world show, it will not be a success. The idea needs to be built into projects early on, so that the key people are aware and prepare appropriately. It is also necessary for continual coaching and/or reminders of events during routine meetings so that it will not come as a surprise when it is implemented.
- This practice can be replicated, especially for missions that have signed on to the UNH movement (Linking Up Nutrition Movements) and have activities going on around building capacity of stakeholders. Only a reasonable budget is required and as practices around the world show, it will not be a success. The idea needs to be built into projects early on, so that the key people are aware and prepare appropriately. It is also necessary for continual coaching and/or reminders of events during routine meetings so that it will not come as a surprise when it is implemented.

The exercise was communicated as: “organise a local event, for as many people as possible, in a captivating and convincing way, to encourage people to change some of their habits on some specific issues in the field of nutrition.”

Half of the districts used the money for events that informed the local public about nutrition issues that are locally relevant. Most of these events were public gatherings of a festive nature, with music and a meal for the attendants, at a central place in the ward, often at the home of the local chief.

One public event was organised with songs, drama and poetry to promote the cultivation and use of small grain crops in dry areas, rather than the commonly used maize, which is drought intolerant. At that occasion, about a month before the expected onset of the rains, seed packs of sorghum and/or finger millet (rapoko) were distributed for free among interested farmers.

In two other cases the central activity was the preparation – and joint tasting – of dishes prepared in alternative ways to constitute “complete meals”, with all four categories of daily required nutrients clearly labelled a “four star meal” (starch, proteins, vegetables, fruit).

In two other cases the central activity was the preparation – and joint tasting – of dishes of cheap and local food. These plates were designed for the wider public, responding to the initiative of a Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) event of their choice in the Production Modules (PMs) of the DRM committees.

In two of the central activities the preparation was done jointly with all visitors to encourage them to try to prepare “complete meals” with all four categories of daily required nutrients clearly labelled a “four star meal” (starch, proteins, vegetables, fruit).

In this project in Zimbabwe, only a few of the DFNSCs have used the money for an event that really promotes healthy and sustainable nutritional habits. The other half used the money for events that informed the local public about nutrition issues that are locally relevant. Most of these events were public gatherings of a festive nature, with music and a meal for the attendants, at a central place in the ward, often at the home of the local chief.

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The following recommendations can be taken from this project:

- The opportunity was given to DFNSCs only once. One of the prerequisites of these activities was that they were supposed to ensure that they promote positive Behaviour Change to the target group. These events took place at all times of the year and were supposed to ensure that while well prepared the DFNSCs were also seen as a way of fostering independence and ownership to the households.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Mpho Chiringa: foodsec-manic@zw.missions-acf.org or Julie Bordes: jbordes@actioncontrelafaim.org

Moving forward

In this project in Zimbabwe, only a few of the DFNSCs have used the money for an event that really promotes healthy and sustainable nutritional habits. The other half used the money for events that informed the local public about nutrition issues that are locally relevant. Most of these events were public gatherings of a festive nature, with music and a meal for the attendants, at a central place in the ward, often at the home of the local chief.

One public event was organised with songs, drama and poetry to promote the cultivation and use of small grain crops in dry areas, rather than the commonly used maize, which is drought intolerant. At that occasion, about a month before the expected onset of the rains, seed packs of sorghum and/or finger millet (rapoko) were distributed for free among interested farmers.

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Over the last decade, Pakistan has experienced large-scale internal displacement caused by a range of natural and man-made disasters, structural poverty, rapid urbanisation, food price increases, increased drought of the environment - deterioration, more human settlements in hazard prone areas, all amplified their vulnerability to disasters.

Early warning is a major element of disaster risk reduction in all zones and reduces economic and material losses. It is effective, community-based Early Warning Systems need active involvement of the community itself, strong public education on the risks of disasters they potentially face and an effective communication system ensuring a constant state of preparedness.

The Practice

The Community Early Warning Systems (EWS) objective was to build the capacities of communities and to strengthen Community-based Early Warning Systems in order to respond before disasters occurred.

ACF has taken several measures to institute an Early Warning System at the village level in Pakistan. Firstly, village committees have an Early Warning System at the village level. Secondly, it has provided village committees with trained on early warning concepts and systems. Specifically for early warning work, who are then assigned two people from within the committees in Pakistan. Finally, ACF has given village committees loudspeakers to make announcements once they receive an early warning.

Through these activities, ACF aims to encourage communities to:

- Take steps to protect their own and their family’s safety;
- Develop a proper vulnerability and capacity map in their own village and use the information for the development of proper Early Warning Systems and Community Disaster Preparedness Plan (CDPP).
- It is an innovative and useful exercise for the community Early Warning Systems. The involvement of other stakeholders is important for the sustainability and effectiveness of the practice.

Moving forward

The people-centred approach to early warning, promoted by the Hyogo Framework for Action, focuses on how communities must understand threats in order to avoid them. Disasters are partly caused by external hazards, but they also stem from vulnerability: people being in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or without adequate protection or resources to respond to a warning.

Obviously, the success of this village-level Early Warning System is linked with how effective the provincial and national level Early Warning Systems are. Unfortunately, currently they are still very weak in Pakistan. While ACF cannot directly influence this issue, it should use the Disaster Risk Reduction Forum to jointly advocate with other agencies with the government to fill the gap in the early warning capacity at the provincial level.

This good practice can be developed further, by inclusive specialised training for the communities on the community EWS, and the development of community linkages with district-level departments and the national meteorological department, as well as with Provincial Disaster Management Authorities, and National Disaster Management Authorities.

It would be beneficial if this practice could be replicated in other ACF programmes and ACF missions, which is possible because in this approach the communities are actively involved. It is sustainable as community ownership is encouraged and the activity is designed, planned and led by the community, as well as monitored. The biggest challenges are the community and district-level departments’ motivation and sensitisation. To make this practice more sustainable it would require proper mobilisation and advocacy in order to convince and encourage the community and district-level departments on the importance of the Community Early Warning Systems. The involvement of other stakeholders is important for the sustainability and effectiveness of the practice.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Rangaiya Kanaganathan: washco.pk@acf-international.org
Looking at the effect of this practice in the Bahr-el-Gazal region, it can be noted (in 2014) that the beneficiaries of the Cereal Banks pay 19% less than the market price for a 100kg bag of millet and 23.5% less for a 100kg bag of corn. Moreover, it is possible for them to purchase cereals on credit, which is a great advantage for those populations who usually cannot access this type of facility, which is an encouraging result.

New buildings were built, containing up to 21 tons and providing a better coverage.

Moving forward

Even though a positive change is visible thanks to the cereal banking system, some aspects need to be kept in mind and improved:

The main challenge for this practice is to make sure that the management committee is able, in the long-term, to become fully autonomous from the supply to the management of stocks. The local communities must be in direct contact with the producers and carriers, as well as able to oversee the whole supply chain. It is also necessary that they have been trained in the use of monitoring tools (stock sheet, sell documents, bank book, etc.).

In order to extend the coverage of this practice or reproduce it in other parts of the globe, an efficient strategy needs to be developed during the planning phase, including a detailed study of the number of villages concerned, their respective needs in terms of cereal and the actual or potential source of supply. During the implementation phase, special attention needs to be paid to the management committee, so as to have a long-term effect in the target region.
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