

M&E OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION



There are big differences between how monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is applied in the initial stages of a humanitarian crises, and how it works in standard social development projects and programmes. Many standards and guidelines have been developed to help staff know what kind of M&E is needed to support humanitarian action. M&E can look very different during different stages of a humanitarian response.

Increasing amounts of aid are being spent on humanitarian crises. These include sudden, natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes and hurricanes; collapses in communities' livelihoods caused by droughts, famine or climate change; and violent conflicts. Crises sometimes involve multiple elements, such as famine, conflict and forced migration all at once.

Humanitarian crises may happen very quickly, or may evolve slowly. They may last a long time, or be over swiftly. Often they are recurrent, with things getting better and then worse repeatedly. Sometimes, it is hard to know where an immediate crisis ends and longer-term recovery begins, especially in protracted crises involving conflict.

Humanitarian action can be defined as follows:

“Action taken with the objective of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity during and after human-induced crises and natural disasters, as well as action to prevent and prepare for them” (ALNAP 2016, p24).

Humanitarian action can involve emergency relief projects and programmes in the immediate aftermath of a sudden crisis. However, it can also involve long-term work on recovery. Frequently, aid agencies provide support throughout a humanitarian crisis; the support evolving as the needs of the affected communities evolves.

This has led to increased interest in the concept of the 'nexus'. The 'humanitarian-development' nexus (sometimes also called the 'humanitarian-development-peace' nexus) focuses on work needed to coherently address communities' needs and vulnerabilities before, during and after crises. It is partly designed to offset the tendency of the aid system to operate with little coordination between traditional development and humanitarian action (Reliefweb 2021).

Aid agencies' monitoring and evaluation (M&E) needs are very different at different stages of a humanitarian response. In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, M&E might focus mostly on checking that goods and services are delivered, getting feedback from communities, and monitoring what is happening in the external environment. Later on, the focus might shift towards monitoring medium- to long-term changes in the lives of communities. The table on the following page, for example, shows how

Catholic Relief Services views its monitoring needs at different stages from immediate responses to longer-term support.

This paper deals with M&E during and after crises, largely during immediate responses. This is because there are big differences between how M&E works in the emergency phase of a humanitarian crisis and how it operates in standard social development projects and programmes. Later on, during recovery work, M&E may be similar to that conducted in other complex contexts where aid agencies run programmes in difficult or uncertain environments. Complexity-oriented M&E is well covered in other papers within the M&E Universe (see further reading and resources section) and is only addressed fleetingly in this paper. The paper does not deal with how to monitor or evaluate action to prepare for crises or disasters, such as disaster risk reduction work.

M&E during immediate responses

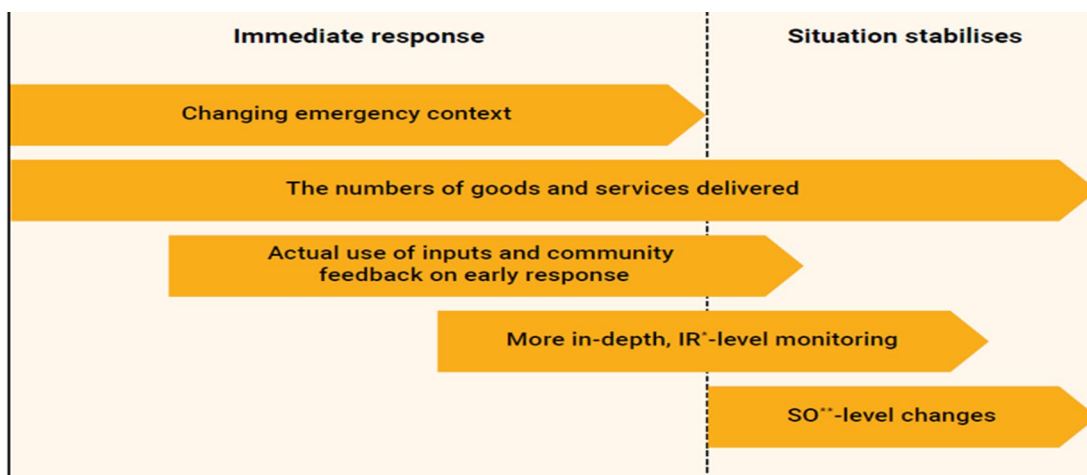
On the one hand, M&E in the emergency phase of a crisis may not appear to be the highest priority. There are often many other things to do, such as providing immediate support to affected communities. It may feel instinctively wrong to focus on M&E at this time. Unfortunately, aid agencies cannot just assume they are doing good because they are delivering help to people in need. There are many occasions when humanitarian action has failed to achieve its purpose, or has made the situation worse (see Bakewell et. al. 2013). This includes:

- providing wrong or inappropriate aid;
- undermining livelihoods;
- undermining institutions;
- allowing emergency aid to be diverted for political ends; and
- mismanaging emergency aid.

Some think that M&E is even more important during crises than in non-humanitarian projects and programmes because mistakes may have immediate and severe consequences, and support can be the difference between life and death for some.

However, many challenges need to be recognised. These fall into two categories. Firstly, there are challenges which are common to many kinds of social development

Table: Progression of Monitoring in an Emergency Response (Catholic Relief Services)



IR: Intermediate result. This is the expected change(s) in identifiable behaviours by participants in response to the delivery and reception of outputs.

SO: Strategic objective.

Source: CRS (2016) MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning) in Emergencies. [Online course].

programmes, but which may be made worse during crises. These include the challenges of how to monitor the changes brought about by an intervention, how to distinguish the contribution of individual agencies to change, and how to make M&E information more useful for decision-making. These challenges often arise later on in a humanitarian intervention, and are similar to the kind of challenges experienced in many non-humanitarian projects and programmes which operate in complex settings.

Secondly, there are challenges that are unique to monitoring and evaluating humanitarian action, especially during the initial stages. Some of these are described below (see Bakewell et. al. 2013, ALNAP 2016, Dillon and Sundberg 2019).

- In the middle of a crisis, aid agencies often need to focus on delivering as much aid as possible to affected communities. Interventions may have to start up very quickly, and there is often little time to make plans beyond considering what aid should be delivered and how. M&E may be very low down the list of priorities.
- Staff may be putting in long hours, and may find it hard to focus on anything not immediately concerned with providing emergency relief. The rapid turnover of staff, often caused by burn out, trauma or exhaustion, may also make it difficult to operate an M&E system.
- It is considered very important to engage affected communities in M&E as they are in the best position to know their own needs, and how well these are being addressed. Yet communities affected by a crisis may be displaced or traumatised, and there may be no effective institutions to work through. In some cases, communities may be involved directly in conflicts. Communities may therefore have little capacity or interest in participating in M&E.
- Even where affected communities are willing to engage, they may be unwilling to provide honest information. For example, communities may provide

answers they think are most likely to generate support. Or in conflict situations they may be suspicious of people from outside agencies asking questions.

- In emergency situations the context is likely to evolve rapidly, and early plans can quickly become outdated as the context changes or becomes better understood. Formal M&E methods can take time to deliver, and M&E findings may be of little use once they have been generated.
- Humanitarian interventions often operate in places where there is violence and conflict, and where security is poor. In addition, there may be damaged infrastructure, restricted access and poor communications. This can make it difficult to access communities and/or information.
- In a large crisis, many different aid agencies may all start working at the same time. In such cases, coordinating M&E work can be very difficult.
- Some emergency relief work is high profile, with significant media coverage, and pressure from donors to produce evidence of results. Aid agencies may need to justify the use of resources before it is possible.
- Setting up a good M&E system takes time. Systems and processes often need to be piloted and adapted to ensure they are effective. In an emergency situation there may be no time to do this.
- Ethical issues may be difficult to address during crises, yet at the same time may be more important. These include the need to 'do no harm', protect data, keep information confidential, seek prior consent, etc. This can be particularly important when dealing with issues such as protection and safeguarding.

These challenges may make it very difficult to develop and carry out effective M&E during a crisis. It is important that M&E staff recognise these challenges, and work within the limitations of what is possible.

Standards for Humanitarian M&E

Many standards and guidelines have been developed to help staff know what is expected of them during humanitarian action, including M&E. The most widespread standard used currently is the *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability* (CHS). This was the result of an initiative that brought together a number of different actors in order to achieve greater coherence on humanitarian standards (CHS 2014).

The CHS describes essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action (ibid). Some aid agencies, including CSOs, use it as a voluntary code with which to align their own internal procedures. However, it can also be used as a basis for formally verifying performance in humanitarian action. In this case there is a more detailed framework and a set of associated key performance indicators (KPIs) for different contexts and types of organisation.

The CHS consists of nine commitments to communities and people affected by crises. These outline what they can expect from organisations delivering humanitarian assistance. Each commitment is supported by:

- a quality criterion (statement) that indicates how humanitarian agencies and staff should be working in order to meet the commitment;
- key actions that need to be taken to fulfil the commitments; and
- organisational responsibilities to support the implementation of the key actions.

The key actions and organisational responsibilities are wide ranging. However, around a third of them specifically mention M&E, or rely on M&E processes. This emphasises how essential M&E is to good humanitarian programming. A selection of relevant actions and responsibilities is shown in the table on the following page.

Other initiatives also exist to support humanitarian staff involved in M&E. Many of these used to be standalone resources, but have now been integrated with the CHS. An example is the Sphere Handbook (Sphere 2018). This includes detailed information outlining minimum standards and recommended indicators in core areas of humanitarian action, such as water, sanitation and hygiene; food security; shelter and health.

The Sphere indicators are designed to help staff and affected communities know whether standards are being achieved. They are backed up by detailed guidance notes, and provide a level of standardisation, thereby ensuring consistency across different agencies and programmes. Some example indicators and targets related to water supply are contained in the table opposite.

The availability of these different standards and guidelines means there is actually a lot of accessible support for M&E staff engaged in humanitarian action. Indeed, there is arguably more detailed and useful support for M&E staff engaged in humanitarian action than for those working in non-humanitarian projects and programmes.

Example Sphere indicators and targets for water supply

- 1) Average volume of water used for drinking and domestic hygiene per household:
 - Minimum of 15 litres per person per day.
- 2) Maximum number of people using water-based facility:
 - 250 people per tap (based on a flow rate of 7.5 litres/minute).
 - 500 people per hand pump (based on a flow rate of 17 litres/minute).
 - 400 people per open hand well (based on a flow rate of 12.5 litres/minute).
 - 100 people per laundry facility.
 - 50 people per bathing facility.
- 3) Percentage of household income used to buy water for drinking and domestic hygiene:
 - Target 5 per cent or less.
- 4) Percentage of targeted households who know where and when they will next get their water.
- 5) Distance from any household to the nearest waterpoint:
 - <500 metres.
- 6) Queuing time at water sources:
 - <30 minutes.
- 7) Percentage of communal water distribution points free of standing water.
- 8) Percentage of water systems/facilities that have functional and accountable management system in place

Source: Sphere (2018)

Key issues in M&E of humanitarian programmes

As stated previously, it may seem counter-intuitive to carry out a lot of M&E work in the emergency phase of a crisis situation, when the pressing need is to save lives and alleviate suffering. M&E processes such as developing theories of change or logical frameworks, formulating objectives, defining indicators, and carrying out baseline studies can seem far removed from the needs of communities affected by a crisis.

Fortunately, there are many ways in which M&E can be adapted to serve the needs of aid agencies and affected communities during and after crises. Most of these involve bringing M&E and decision-making processes closer together. These are well covered in the available literature on M&E of humanitarian action. Some of the themes are covered below.

The 'good enough approach': In the immediate response to a humanitarian crisis, aid agencies need simple, efficient systems that provide timely information to managers and staff, allowing them to determine priorities and make decisions on an ongoing basis. This often requires a phased approach where M&E is kept light-touch during early stages of a crisis, and is not prioritised over and above humanitarian action (Warner 2017). Later on, as the situation stabilises, more comprehensive M&E systems can be introduced, including more traditional elements of M&E such as identifying objectives and indicators, developing baselines, regular reporting, and more formal data collection, analysis and use.

Table: CHS commitments, key actions and organisational responsibilities relevant for M&E

Selected Commitments	Selected Key Actions	Selected Organisational Responsibilities
1. Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs	Adapt programmes to changing needs, capacities and context	Processes are in place to ensure an appropriate ongoing analysis of the context
2. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time	Monitor the activities, outputs and outcomes of humanitarian responses in order to adapt programmes and address poor performance	Policies exist to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systematic, objective and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of activities and their effects • evidence from monitoring and evaluations is used to adapt and improve programmes • timely decision-making with resources allocated accordingly
3. Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action	Use the results of any existing community hazard and risk assessments and preparedness plans to guide activities Identify and act upon potential or actual unintended negative effects in a timely and systematic manner, including in the areas of people's safety, security, dignity and rights; sexual exploitation and abuse by staff; culture, gender, and social and political relationships; livelihoods; the local economy; and the environment.	Systems are in place to safeguard any personal information collected from communities and people affected by crisis that could put them at risk
4. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them	Ensure representation is inclusive, involving the participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of the work [including M&E] Encourage and facilitate communities and people affected by crisis to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the assistance received, paying particular attention to the gender, age and diversity of those giving feedback	Policies for information-sharing are in place, and promote a culture of open communication. Policies are in place for engaging communities and people affected by crisis, reflecting the priorities and risks they identify in all stages of the work [including M&E]
5. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints	Consult with communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes	The complaints-handling process for communities and people affected by crisis is documented and in place
7. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection	Draw on lessons learnt and prior experience when designing programmes Learn, innovate and implement changes on the basis of monitoring and evaluation, and feedback and complaints Share learning and innovation internally, with communities and people affected by crisis, and with other stakeholders	Evaluation and learning policies are in place, and means are available to learn from experiences and improve practices Mechanisms exist to record knowledge and experience, and make it accessible throughout the organisation The organisation contributes to learning and innovation in humanitarian response amongst peers and within the sector
9. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically	Monitor and report expenditure against budget	Policies and processes governing the use and management of resources are in place, including how the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducts audits, verifies compliance and reports transparently; and • assesses, manages and mitigates risk on an ongoing basis

Some aid agencies refer to this as the 'good enough' approach, reflecting an early resource on M&E in humanitarian situations called the '*Good enough guide: Impact measurement and accountability in emergencies*' (ECB 2007). The Good Enough Guide contains a large number of simple and straightforward tools and processes designed to guide M&E, and was used for a long time as a benchmark for good practice during early responses to crises.

It is important to emphasise that 'good enough' does not mean second best (Sundberg 2019). Instead, it means

acknowledging that adopting a quick and simple approach might be the best, or only, practical option in the early stages of a crisis. In reality this means adopting compromises such as not designing qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis to academic standards, relying on quick and convenient ways of accessing information, taking action based on limited but timely information, and basing M&E on what is practical and possible in the context, rather than comparing it to the higher standards that might be expected in a less difficult situation.

Informal monitoring: In the early stages of humanitarian responses to crises, a lot of decisions are made on the basis of informal monitoring. Throughout the M&E Universe, informal monitoring has been used as a term to refer to unstructured information collection carried out by CSO staff, especially when operating in the field. This includes observing what is happening, listening to different stakeholders, and talking to different people or groups. It is often as important, if not more so, than formal monitoring exercises, especially early on in humanitarian action.

Information generated through informal monitoring may be accumulated by field workers, but is not usually captured or processed systematically by organisations. It is not always considered as genuine M&E information, because it does not arise through the systematic definition and capture of objectives and indicators, or the use of formal tools for data collection and analysis. This means it is often overlooked when designing M&E approaches (Abbott et. al. 2019).

Nonetheless, aid agency staff's knowledge about local communities – either through working with them on a regular basis or belonging to the community – is often a key source of information that can be used for decision-making. For example, local staff may know about key programme successes, failures or issues a long time before the same information would be unearthed by M&E staff through formal data collection and analysis.

Research by ALNAP (see Sundberg 2019) suggests that senior management of humanitarian agencies almost never make decisions based on M&E reports, but instead accumulate knowledge over time through observations and conversations. This is partly why informal monitoring is so important, especially in the early response to crises where vital decisions may have to be made on a day-to-day basis.

Alternative methods of data analysis and use: Information can also be analysed and used via informal methods, as well as being collected. For example, many humanitarian agencies seek to promote learning and reflection events where knowledge gained through informal M&E processes (sometimes known in development literature as 'tacit knowledge') can be jointly discussed and analysed. These events include learning workshops, debriefings, handovers and real-time reviews (Abbott et. al. 2019).

One such process is the After Action Review (AAR) (Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2004). An AAR is basically a structured meeting, and is typically designed to focus on a few key questions after an event or a series of actions. The purpose is to obtain a quick picture of the process and outcome of an intervention. AARs can be based on both informal monitoring and more formal M&E processes.

Many other mechanisms can be used to discuss and jointly analyse issues, not just with aid agency staff but with communities affected by crises as well. Sometimes, these can be applied at the same time as information is disseminated. For example, rather than writing a monitoring report, information can be disseminated to communities (and/or other staff) via verbal briefings,

presentations, participatory workshops, posters, photographs, question and answer sessions, or panel discussions. Many of these enable communities to become involved not just as the passive recipients of information, but instead actively involved in its collection, analysis and use.

Beneficiary feedback mechanism: A complaints mechanism is not always considered an integral part of M&E in social development programmes. However, in humanitarian programmes it may be one of the first and most important ways of getting information back on how well things are working. The 'Good Enough Guide' mentioned previously provides some basic advice on how to set up a mechanism to receive and respond to complaints. It emphasises that this is central to accountability, impact and learning, and also to identify corruption, abuse or exploitation (see case study below).

Case study: A complaints and response mechanism in action

Medair responded to the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005 with emergency shelter and non-food items. The team soon realised it needed a mechanism to address constant queries and complaints. One hour a day was dedicated to dealing with complaints at the main project base. A complainant could speak to the Administrator or Office Manager. If possible, complaints were resolved informally. Otherwise, office staff completed a complaints form and passed this to an Assessment Team in the field. Complaints about staff members were investigated by the Project Manager at each base.

Most complaints came from earthquake survivors who had not received a shelter. They also came from people outside Medair's own project area. In those cases Medair lobbied the responsible agency. If a complaint investigated by an Assessment Team was upheld, the beneficiary received assistance, depending on Medair's resources. A spreadsheet recorded the numbers of complaints from each village, and how many complaints had been dealt with. This enabled project staff to assess progress and integrate complaints into project planning. Complaints about staff led to dismissal for three who had given preferential treatment to their tribal or family members.

The complaints mechanism saved Medair teams significant time in identifying gaps in coverage. By using this mechanism, Medair helped 290 families whose needs would otherwise have been overlooked. Medair was new to Pakistan, and the complaints and response mechanism helped compensate for limited local knowledge. By the end of the project, communities would contact Medair about any discrepancy they saw in its distributions, confident that the agency would take appropriate action.

Source: ECB 2007

Wider mechanisms for getting responses from beneficiaries are increasingly becoming important in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian programmes. These are known collectively as Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms (BFMs). BFMs are tools designed to enable a continuous cycle of interaction between those delivering and receiving support. A BFM is a context-appropriate process which:

- solicits and listens to, collates and analyses feedback, often through a range of context-specific tools or methods;
- triggers a response or action at the required level in the organisation, and/or refers feedback to relevant stakeholders; and
- communicates the response/action taken where relevant back to the original feedback provider, and – if appropriate – the wider beneficiary community.

BFMs go wider than standard complaints mechanisms as they can also be used to suggest improvements or provide ongoing analysis of humanitarian action. Many tools can be used by beneficiaries to provide feedback, including suggestion boxes, surveys, mobile phone calls, text messaging (SMS), focus group discussions, one-to-one interviews, community meetings, notice boards, or in some situations radio call-ins and hotlines.

A well-designed BFM is usually linked to internal M&E and learning processes. As with complaints mechanisms, BFMs can be used to improve or monitor humanitarian action, or as a means for the people affected by development interventions to hold implementing agencies to account.

M&E for adaptive management: The approaches discussed above can be used during the early stages of a crisis to help aid agencies adapt to constantly changing situations. Later on, as situations evolve and stabilise, aid agencies may need to engage in more sophisticated M&E that enables them to navigate their way through recovery programmes, or programmes working on the nexus between humanitarian, development and peace.

At this stage, M&E almost certainly will still need to be designed and implemented to support adaptive management. Adaptive management is a broad approach designed to support programmes in complex or uncertain environments. It can include many different processes and initiatives which are commonly used within development interventions. These include organisational learning, research, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, participatory approaches to planning and design, and a variety of M&E tools and methodologies designed to deal with complexity.

Adaptative approaches to M&E are almost always needed to support humanitarian action because of the complex nature of the work. However, they are also needed in many other kinds of programmes. Adaptive approaches are fully covered in another M&E Universe paper, which can be accessed through the links at the end of this paper.

Evaluation

Although a lot of emphasis in humanitarian action is placed on ongoing and continuous data collection, analysis and use, a large number of evaluations in humanitarian settings are also conducted each year. These range from one-off evaluations carried out after a humanitarian intervention to ongoing exercises that can effectively bridge the gap between monitoring and evaluation.

Humanitarian evaluations may be conducted for many reasons, and many aid agencies have their own evaluation policies. For example, Danish Refugee Council's evaluation policy (DRC 2015, p10) states that it is *"particularly appropriate to conduct an evaluation:*

- *where the organisation has a strategic interest and it's likely that an evaluation will provide valuable learning;*
- *where a change in context has occurred, (e.g. scenarios, access, donor policies);*
- *for a programme or project with unknown or disputed outcomes;*
- *for sizeable, long-running, and expensive interventions; and*
- *for pilot initiatives that need evidence to prove success and scalability."*

In the past, humanitarian evaluations tended to focus more on process rather than change. However, the focus is increasingly shifting towards analysing the changes brought about by humanitarian action. This involves trying to understand – in an evidence-based way – how humanitarian action is affecting the lives and livelihoods of communities affected by crises.

As with ongoing monitoring in the early stages of a humanitarian programme, there are many challenges that affect how evaluations are conducted. Some of these are described below (see ALNAP 2016, Chaplowe et. al. 2021).

- Humanitarian action is often planned quickly in response to a crisis. There may be few planning or monitoring documents in the early stages. Initial objectives are often unclear and may be overtaken by changes in the context. This makes it hard to know what to use as a starting point for an evaluation.
- There may be little or no baseline data (although many agencies do carry out rapid assessments in the early stages of a crisis, and these can often be used to draw comparisons at a later stage). Even where it exists, if a population has been displaced because of a crisis any baseline information may not be of much use. It is also possible that records existing before a crisis have been lost or destroyed.
- Security issues may make it difficult or impossible for evaluators to access sites. This might mean it is impossible to access affected communities. Locations may be remote, and infrastructure may have been damaged, which can also reduce access.
- Crises and conflicts can result in polarised opinions. Different people affected by a crisis may interpret events in very different ways. This means evaluations need to take note of many different perspectives, making it harder to reach a judgement. Communities may have been subject to trauma and abuse, and may be unwilling to be honest with outside evaluators. This is especially true when evaluating important humanitarian issues such as protection or abuse.
- Affected communities may have little time or inclination to participate in an evaluation. This is

because they are focusing on their own survival and livelihoods, and the benefits of an evaluation may not be immediately obvious.

- Sometimes it is not clear which agencies are responsible for which particular aspects of a humanitarian programme, particularly in large crises or emergencies where there may be multiple actors. Communities may not know which aid agencies are responsible for which particular means of support. This can make it difficult to assess contribution to change.
- Aid agency staff are often working in stressful environments. They may be reluctant to spend time with evaluators. Equally, there is often high staff turnover in humanitarian programmes, which can mean it is difficult to find staff who were around at the early stages of a response, later on.

Again, it is important to recognise these challenges if they are to be overcome. Many solutions exist, and some of these are covered in the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide (ALNAP 2016) referenced in the further reading section of this paper.

Different types of evaluation

Traditional evaluations tend to take place at the mid-point of a programme, at the end, or (occasionally) some time afterward. The weakness of this approach is that they are not particularly useful for ongoing decision-making. In response, there is an increasing tendency for evaluations of humanitarian action to be carried out on an ongoing basis. Two types of evaluation which are becoming increasingly popular are described below.

Real-time evaluations (RTEs) are designed to provide immediate (real-time) feedback to those planning and/or implementing humanitarian action. The intention is to improve an intervention through generating learning and recommendations, which are fed back during the field work rather than afterwards. RTEs may – to some extent – make up for a lack of ongoing monitoring in a project or programme because they enable adjustments to be made in a timely manner. RTEs may therefore bridge the gap between monitoring and evaluation by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of an intervention on an ongoing basis (Polastro 2012).

RTEs are most effective when used during the early stages of a humanitarian response. This is because they can have the maximum influence at this stage. Sometimes RTEs are discrete evaluations carried out at a specific point in time. Sometimes, however, they are carried out at regular intervals throughout an intervention, particularly if an aid agency is involved in humanitarian action over a long period. RTEs may be carried out by individual agencies, or by groups of agencies involved in humanitarian support.

Developmental evaluations involve long-term relationships between evaluators and project or programme staff (Patton 2010). In developmental evaluation, the job of the evaluator is to facilitate discussions around evaluative questions, and encourage managers and staff to

continuously collect, analyse and use information in order to support ongoing decision-making. Because evaluation is ongoing, rather than carried out at specific points, feedback can be provided on a continuous basis. This in turn means that adjustments can be made on an ongoing basis. Developmental evaluation is particularly appropriate for work in complex or uncertain environments – including much humanitarian work – where evidence-based decision-making is required throughout a project or programme.

There are no fixed steps or templates for carrying out developmental evaluation. At different times and in different contexts developmental evaluations might involve or utilise systematic monitoring, formal or informal reviews, traditional evaluations, formal research, action-oriented research, sensemaking, or any other process or method designed to assess performance or generate lessons. In developmental evaluation the evaluator is embedded within the programme team. Sometimes developmental evaluators are external consultants and sometimes they are hired by the project or programme being evaluated. Or there may be a mixture.

A different category of evaluation is the **joint evaluation**. In social development work, many agencies are set up to address specific issues, such as health, protection or education. But in humanitarian work – especially early on – peoples' entire lives are affected by a crisis. Even if an aid agency concentrates on one facet of support, it is still important to look at the overall changes in peoples' lives (or livelihoods) as a whole. Sometimes this requires joint evaluations across agencies, which are capable of looking at support and change holistically.

Joint evaluations are not as common as many people would like. Too often, humanitarian aid agencies conduct independent evaluations which result in duplication and competition, as well as irritating staff and affected communities (Chaplowe et. al. 2021). Joint evaluations, on the other hand, can help agencies assess their collective impact, and can help share lessons across agencies. Their biggest advantage is that they focus on the big picture – looking at the whole humanitarian response rather than focusing on just a few elements of support (ALNAP 2016).

Evaluations may be designed to include the characteristics of more than one of the types of evaluation described above. For example, a joint evaluation could be conducted as a real-time evaluation or a developmental evaluation. And humanitarian programmes may support evaluations that combine the characteristics of both real-time and developmental evaluations. The key is to design evaluations that are capable of providing genuine support to humanitarian programmes which helps them improve the support they provide to communities affected by crises.

Evaluation guidelines and frameworks

Evaluations are covered within the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. Many other frameworks and guidelines also exist that can be used to guide humanitarian evaluations. Perhaps the most common

evaluation framework is the OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria (see opposite) (OECD 2010). This is regularly used in many evaluations, but the criteria have been adapted for humanitarian evaluations to reflect their slightly different nature.

The criteria are basically a list of different aspects of a project or programme that an evaluation ought to cover. They are designed to be a checklist to ensure that key issues are considered in each evaluation, although not all criteria are designed to be applied in every evaluation. The criteria do not replace the need to develop individual evaluation questions.

The first five criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – apply to all work, whether carried out in humanitarian settings or not. The next four are specifically designed to address evaluations of humanitarian action. They are designed to ensure that humanitarian evaluations also look at who is or is not covered by humanitarian support; how well aid agencies are connecting with other agencies; the coherence of humanitarian support; and whether short-term emergency support is properly joined up with longer-term issues.

Localisation and the Grand Bargain

A “*Grand Bargain*” was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. This was an agreement between some of the world’s largest donors and humanitarian agencies. The Grand Bargain is designed to get more resources into the hands of people in need, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. Currently 63 Signatories (25 Member States, 22 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations) are working across nine workstreams to implement the commitments (IASC 2021).

Part of the Grand Bargain involves greater **localisation**. Localisation is a process where international humanitarian actors shift power and responsibilities of development and humanitarian aid efforts towards local and national actors. These influential processes are likely to involve big changes in the way humanitarian action is planned and implemented in the future. This will obviously affect how M&E is conducted. Two key implications are likely to be an increased focus on local capacity to conduct M&E, and a greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluating capacity strengthening.

As far as capacity for evaluation is concerned, recent research by ALNAP (see Chaplowe et. al. 2021) suggests there is likely to be an increased reliance on remote methodologies for evaluating humanitarian action in the future, together with a decentralisation of the evaluation function. Evaluations will be designed to make better use of local staff, volunteers and consultants who understand the local context, and are better able to reach communities, particularly those which are difficult to access. It is hoped this will also support “*more timely and relevant real-time*

OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria	
Relevance	<i>Relevance means the extent to which a development intervention was suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor.</i>
Effectiveness	<i>Effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which a development intervention has attained its objectives.</i>
Efficiency	<i>Efficiency is an economic term which signifies that the development intervention used the least costly resources possible to achieve the desired results.</i>
Impact	<i>Impact includes the positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.</i>
Sustainability	<i>Sustainability is concerned with assessing whether the benefits of an intervention are likely to continue (or have continued) after donor funding has been withdrawn.</i>
Additional Criteria for Humanitarian Evaluations	
Coverage	<i>Coverage means the extent to which major population groups facing life-threatening suffering were reached by the humanitarian action.</i>
Coherence	<i>Coherence is the extent to which humanitarian action is consistent with relevant policies (e.g. humanitarian, security, trade, military and development), and takes account of humanitarian and human-rights considerations.</i>
Coordination	<i>Coordination means the extent to which the interventions of different actors were harmonised with each other, promoted synergy, and avoided gaps, duplication and resource conflicts.</i>
Connectedness	<i>Connectedness assesses the extent to which activities of a short-term emergency nature were carried out in a context that took longer-term and interconnected problems into account.</i>

evaluation that is responsive to local changes before and during humanitarian crisis” (ibid, p20).

The second major implication for M&E is an increased focus on the M&E of capacity strengthening of local and national organisations involved in humanitarian action. This is needed because the professionalisation of the humanitarian sector – as seen through the different standards such as the CHS – can sometimes act as entry-barriers for new organisations wishing to become involved. This focus on the organisational side has often been ignored in both evaluations and ongoing monitoring systems in the past (Hailey and Sorgrenfrei 2004).

Further reading and resources

The M&E Universe paper 'Overview of complex M&E systems' provides advice on how to develop a M&E system for a complex programme. It is relevant to many humanitarian programmes dealing with recovery from crises, or working within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The paper on 'Adaptive management' may be useful for those wishing to understand better how to use M&E information to plan and implement adaptive programmes, or how to apply M&E in complex humanitarian programmes. Further papers in the M&E Universe cover evaluation, real-time evaluation, developmental evaluation and beneficiary feedback mechanisms. These can be accessed by clicking on the links below.



- ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics, networks and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises. The ALNAP website (www.alnap.org) contains a vast number of materials relating to monitoring, evaluation and learning within humanitarian contexts. Many of these are referenced in this paper, and it should be the first port of call for humanitarian-related M&E work.
- In particular, the Guide Referenced below (ALNAP 2016) provides potential solutions to many of the challenges raised within this paper. It is available from the ALNAP website.
- The Sphere Handbook mentioned in the paper can be accessed from www.spherestandards.org/handbook.
- The Good Enough Guide (ECB 2007) referenced in this paper and below can be accessed at <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/good-enough-guide-impact-measurement-and-accountability-in-emergencies>

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