

Voices from the Field

Effective Management of Evaluations of Humanitarian Action: Some Key Considerations *by Ricardo Polastro, UNICEF EAPRO*



During conflicts or following disasters, managers need to finely manage evaluation of humanitarian action. In fast changing environments results tend to be unclear, staff turnover, political and operational pressures are great, data is missing, and budgets are constrained. The manager needs to quickly define whether the context is conducive, data is sufficient and how key stakeholders will use the evaluation. Otherwise, one should ask UNICEF's senior management, particularly if the solutions to strategic or programmatic challenges are well known, "whether the evaluation is needed?" To overcome this risk, senior management needs to be engaged recognizing that the evaluation is a supportive measure to adjust planning and performance, and allocating proper resources.

To effectively manage humanitarian action evaluations, the first step is proper planning- deciding why and when to carry them out. Whether it's for learning and / or for accountability, the decision to do evaluations can come from internal or external stakeholders such as bilateral donors'. Overall, as humanitarian programmatic objectives tend to be high institutional priorities, political and technical demands for evaluations are steadily increasing. Once the evaluation purpose is identified, the following decision is when to do them. When done in a timely fashion, evaluations properly feed into [humanitarian response decision making](#). At a later stage, they can feed into [country programme components](#), or draw lessons for application in future emergencies.

At times, conflict flashpoints and disaster hotspots, can also feed into risk informed programming and potentially increase communities' resilience to future shocks. The following step is to define the evaluation criteria, questions and methods, budget and its use. Once the evaluation is scoped and the terms of reference are finalized, evaluation managers have to deploy experienced teams that understand humanitarian principles, the specific context and how UNICEF works; they should be gender and geographically balanced. Considering that poor datasets prevail, teams should be well versed in utilization focused approaches and mixed data collection and analysis. Under severe access and security constraints, the team must know how to ethically engage with populations at risk, actively triangulate emerging evidence and provide regular feedback loops at different levels. Balancing evidence use and methodological rigor without cracking the hornets' nest is critical.

Finally to bolster independence, quality and use; managers have to clearly define roles, timelines and responsibilities of the evaluation team, peer review group as well as to agree when findings and recommendations are validated with key stakeholders. Once owned, recommendations can immediately feed into humanitarian response programming to better respond to communities evolving needs or start drawing exit strategies. Then following up on them in the management response becomes a "kids game". Hence colleagues are starting to consider that evaluations can contribute to results for children even in the most complex situations, an evaluation learning culture in volatile settings is emerging. When providing evidence for adaptive management, managers will hear CO colleagues, and not just donors say, "We want to do evaluations". At that point in time, the quality, timelines and sheer number of UNICEFs' humanitarian action evaluations will exponentially grow.

For more details, please contact [Riccardo Polastro](#), Regional Advisor Evaluation, UNICEF EAPRO.

Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Child Survival in North Darfur, Sudan 2010-2015 by Robert Ndamobissi and Aala Mahmoud, UNICEF Sudan



For the first time in 13 years, UNICEF Sudan and the Government of Sudan conducted an [independent evaluation of UNICEF's Humanitarian Action in the protracted emergency crisis in North Darfur focusing on Child Survival for the period 2010-2015](#). The evaluation assessed the relevance, coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the humanitarian response.

The evaluation sought to learn more about the key stakeholders, what was working and the reasons for the successes and/or failures of the response. To answer the evaluation questions, mixed methods were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data in 12 localities. Some of the methods used to collect data included household surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), observations and trend analysis of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and routine statistical data. Comparison groups from North Darfur (where there was an increase in the mortality rate of children under 5 years (U5MR)) and South Darfur were also used to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the multi sectoral humanitarian response.

Evidence from the evaluation revealed that UNICEF and its partners achieved at least 75% of the expected target on the timely delivery of supplies and commodities and the protection of deprived children. However, the evaluation also revealed that due to limited coverage of health services in rural areas there was an increase in the outbreak of vaccine preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, measles, malaria and pneumonia. This led to an increase in under 5 mortality in North Darfur. The evaluation findings from the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action informed the new Country Programme Document for the period 2018-2021 (doing business differently) and also influenced the strategic thinking around the long term perspectives of continuum of humanitarian to peace and development (grand bargain).



For more details on the evaluation please contact [Robert Ndamobissi](#), Chief of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation and [Aala Mahmoud](#) Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist in UNICEF Sudan.