



# CHAPTER 6

# EFFECTIVENESS

## DEFINITION

What has humanitarian action achieved? How well and for whom?

Effectiveness measures the results achieved by humanitarian action across different groups, and the quality of humanitarian assistance.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Go beyond listing which activities and outputs have been delivered. Evaluate results at outcome level and the quality of humanitarian action. Consider both intended and unintended results.
- Evaluate the results of humanitarian action and the factors behind success and failure. Explore whether learning and adaptation have been ongoing.
- Explore how people affected by crisis perceive and experience the results of humanitarian action. Be alert to differences in experience and perception across groups.

## EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

### EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION

Focus on what humanitarian action has resulted in, in practice, and relate those results to the lives, livelihoods and protection of people affected by crisis. Consider both intended and unintended results where the contribution of humanitarian action can be established.

As highlighted by the OECD, it is important to explore unintended effects to identify both negative and positive results (OECD, 2021). For example, use open-ended enquiry when evaluating protection programming. Protecting people affected by crisis means reducing a range of risk factors (physical, legal, economic) that are spread across a complex system. The complexity of protection issues means that it is difficult to predict the full range of possible consequences at the start of a response. Therefore, it is not enough to only consider intended results (ALNAP, 2018).

Refrain from simply listing which activities and outputs have been delivered.<sup>21</sup> Instead, focus your analysis on results at the outcome level. For example, don't just count the number of training courses on protection referral systems provided to frontline service providers. What were the results of those trainings in terms of referral ratings and quality of protection provided? Relate the results to the overall objectives of humanitarian action, i.e. to protect and save lives, to alleviate suffering and to maintain human dignity.

Critically, the effectiveness criterion is also about evaluating the quality of results. To determine an acceptable level of quality – what is 'good enough' – use global frameworks such as the Sphere standards (Sphere Project, 2018).<sup>22</sup> Also seek the perspectives of affected people, across different groups, on the quality of programming.

Identify key factors of success and failure when evaluating effectiveness. These factors can be internal (e.g. related to the design or implementation of humanitarian action) and external (e.g. factors related to the context). Consider if and how partnerships with other actors contributed to the effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

Explore the assumptions underpinning the logic of the humanitarian response. Do these assumptions accurately reflect the context of the crisis and potential results of humanitarian action? Unpack and interrogate the logic or theory of change of the response.

Where possible, evaluate intended or unintended results related to the environment and climate crisis, including both positive and negative results (i.e. environmental damage). Humanitarian actors can, for example, worsen deforestation if sustainable building practices are not adopted when providing shelter for people affected by crisis. See [section 11.3 Environment and climate crisis](#).

## WHEN TO SELECT EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluating effectiveness provides an opportunity to understand the outcomes of humanitarian action beyond a mere description of activities and outputs. This is critical to improving programme performance and it complements ongoing monitoring.

<sup>21</sup> In humanitarian evaluations, the evaluation of effectiveness often fails to analyse the effects of programme delivery on people affected by crisis. Consequently, evaluations do not provide enough information about the difference humanitarian action makes (Darcy and Dillon, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> There are different standards for different types of humanitarian action. Consider which standards are most appropriate in specific cases.

## HOW EFFECTIVENESS RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

An evaluation that combines effectiveness with relevance, and with coverage and inclusion, will provide an overview of what has been achieved and how well, and also if the humanitarian response is doing the right things for the right people. Humanitarian action might be highly effective in doing what an organisation set out to achieve, but it might have become irrelevant to the needs and priorities of affected people if the context has changed but programming has not adapted.

By combining effectiveness with efficiency, evaluations can capture valuable information on the timeliness of humanitarian action. Results need to be achieved at the right time, when humanitarian action is most needed. Note that some humanitarian actors may choose to evaluate timeliness under effectiveness, especially if efficiency is not included as a distinct criterion.

Effectiveness also links to the impact criterion, which explores results at a higher level. Evaluating impact means analysing intended and unintended results, but these are broader and usually longer-term in nature.

## SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

There are two key entry points here. First, trace how power dynamics have influenced which results have been prioritised – for instance, are the results most visible in reports aligned with those valued by the communities affected by crisis? Second, explore how positionality has shaped the assumptions built into programme design. Whose perspectives informed the theory of change? Were assumptions tested in practice – such as that community leaders would represent everyone fairly in targeting or planning? Shifting the lens is an opportunity to surface assumptions that may have limited the effectiveness of humanitarian action, particularly for specific groups.

## METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

See [Chapter 11](#) for further methodological implications, particularly key considerations for putting people affected by crisis at the centre.

### Key consideration A

Determine early on in the evaluation process the availability of baseline and monitoring data and planning documents (with the theory of change or objectives). This is especially important in the complex and fluid environments in which humanitarian actors commonly operate.

**Methodological implications for commissioners**

Consider potential lack of data when planning the evaluation. Engage early with the designers and implementers of the humanitarian response to identify the objectives (even if implicit). Support evaluators to create the theory of change retrospectively. Facilitate access to relevant information from early warning systems and other sources.

**Methodological implications for evaluators**

Recreate the theory of change and re-formulate the objectives of the humanitarian response, preferably during the evaluation's inception phase. Use a participatory process with relevant stakeholders to ensure accuracy and ownership. To address scarce data, use information from early warning systems and other sources.

**Key consideration B**

Evaluating effectiveness implies determining contribution and attribution. But humanitarian action can be chaotic and complex – wide-ranging factors and actors influence causal links. For example, if food security improves over six months for people previously affected by drought and conflict, it is hard to attribute this to higher rainfall, better access to markets due to reduced conflict or the humanitarian response.

**Methodological implications for commissioners**

Consider if it is more appropriate to focus on normative questions (standards for humanitarian action) or causal questions (how humanitarian action is meant to achieve the desired change) (ALNAP, 2016).

Facilitate data triangulation by helping evaluators identify multiple and relevant data sources.

**Methodological implications for evaluators**

Focus on contribution rather than attribution. In complex humanitarian interventions, it is rarely possible to attribute a result to one cause.

Use the inception phase to explore appropriate approaches and methods for your evaluation questions. Be transparent in your selection of method to determine contribution. For example, where qualitative methods are most appropriate for the context, triangulate perspectives on causal links from affected people, from traders and from agency staff.

## EVALUATION EXAMPLE

### Final evaluation of the earthquake recovery programme in Nepal (June 2018)

#### Background

On 25 April and 12 May 2015, earthquakes of 7.8 and 7.1 magnitudes, respectively, struck Nepal. Starting in November 2015, the British Red Cross partnered with the Nepal Red Cross Society to implement a response focused on recovery. The evaluation takes stock of the effects and outcomes of the recovery programme, and the value for money of its operational model.

#### How the evaluation addresses effectiveness

The evaluation analyses both intended and unintended results. Intended results are explored at output and outcome levels, but the report focuses on results at outcome level. Methodological challenges of evaluating these results are discussed transparently.

Importantly, the evaluators identify unintended results of the programme through key informant interviews with a broad range of stakeholders. Some unintended results relate to the wider operating environment in Nepal and the introduction of cash transfer programming at scale; other results directly impact people affected by the crisis, such as women's empowerment and increased financial inclusion.

- The evaluation presents several positive unintended results, showing the added value of the programme beyond its original aims.
- Negative unintended results are also identified around the initial targeting strategy and its effects on community tensions.
- Important lessons can be drawn from these unintended results for design and targeting.

*Source: Key Aid Consulting (2018).*

## HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND EFFECTIVENESS

Humanitarian actors commit to humanitarian principles to gain access to and within conflict zones, by providing assurances that humanitarian action is neutral and independent, and that the action will not interfere in the conflict. Neutrality and independence are sometimes described as 'instrumental' principles.

An important line of enquiry is the extent to which people affected by crisis, peer humanitarian actors and parties to a conflict perceive humanitarian action to be neutral and independent. A more in-depth line of enquiry is the difference this has made to access and to achieving results. In other words, has principled humanitarian action contributed to the effectiveness of a response? Have trade-offs been made in following a principled approach that have compromised results and effectiveness? EHA can build evidence of if and how principled humanitarian action influences overall effectiveness.

Example evaluation question:

*To what extent have humanitarian principles contributed to the overall effectiveness of the response, and have trade-offs been managed successfully?*