

ADAPTING THE OECD CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION AN ALNAP GUIDE

ALNAP is the global network for advancing humanitarian learning. Our goal is for all humanitarians to benefit from our sector's collective experience.

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About the authors

Margie Buchanan-Smith is a Senior Research Associate at the Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI Global, with over 30 years of experience in humanitarian policy, practice, and evaluation. She is also a Visiting Fellow at the Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, and a Fellow of the Rift Valley Institute. Margie has led numerous complex evaluations for UN agencies, NGOs, and governments, and co-authored the 2016 ALNAP Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide and the 2024 UNEG Guidance on Integrating Humanitarian Principles into Evaluation.

Pamela Combinido-Elfa is a Leader at Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) with over a decade of experience in the humanitarian and academic sectors, focusing on locally led action, disaster risk reduction, and diversity and inclusion. At HAG, she leads research and evaluation to bridge evidence and practice, producing accessible insights and challenging inequalities in knowledge and evidence production.

Sarah Gharbi is a Research Fellow at ALNAP with nearly 20 years of experience in the humanitarian and development sectors. She has worked with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, several international INGOs, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as an evaluation advisor, researcher, and evaluator.

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Communications management

Molly Maple
Wairimu Wanjau

Editorial

Jo Fottrell

Design

Alice Hale

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FOREWORD

The humanitarian system is facing a period of significant uncertainty. Reductions in funding from traditional donors, alongside the increasing scale, complexity and duration of crises, are putting real pressure on how we work and the choices we make. At the same time, the sector is grappling with long-standing challenges around power, equity and sustainability.

In this environment, learning is more important than ever. We need to know what is working and what is not. We need to understand the difference that humanitarian action makes in the lives of people affected by crisis, and how it could make a greater difference in the future.

Evaluation has a crucial role to play in this. It enables us to look beyond activities delivered to the results achieved, to identify both intended and unintended outcomes, and to generate lessons that improve performance. At its best, evaluation provides the evidence that allows humanitarian actors to adapt in real time, to hold ourselves accountable, and to make better decisions in the face of uncertainty. Crucially, it can also help us to understand humanitarian action in its wider context – not only what happens within individual programmes, but also how it links with other systems: with development and peacebuilding efforts, with actors at different geographical levels, with global policies, and with the natural environment.

Building on extensive consultation across the sector, the guide provides clear definitions and practical advice to contribute to more relevant, useful and transformative evaluations. The guide is intended to help us ask better questions – questions that place people affected by crisis at the centre, that interrogate how power is exercised, and that open up space for new approaches.

We hope you will use this guide to generate insights that matter, to adapt your work to changing realities, and to contribute to a humanitarian system that is more effective, more accountable and better able to meet the needs of people affected by crisis.

Juliet Parker
Director, ALNAP

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ACRONYMS

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EHA	evaluation of humanitarian action
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
IDP	internally displaced persons
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TOR	terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

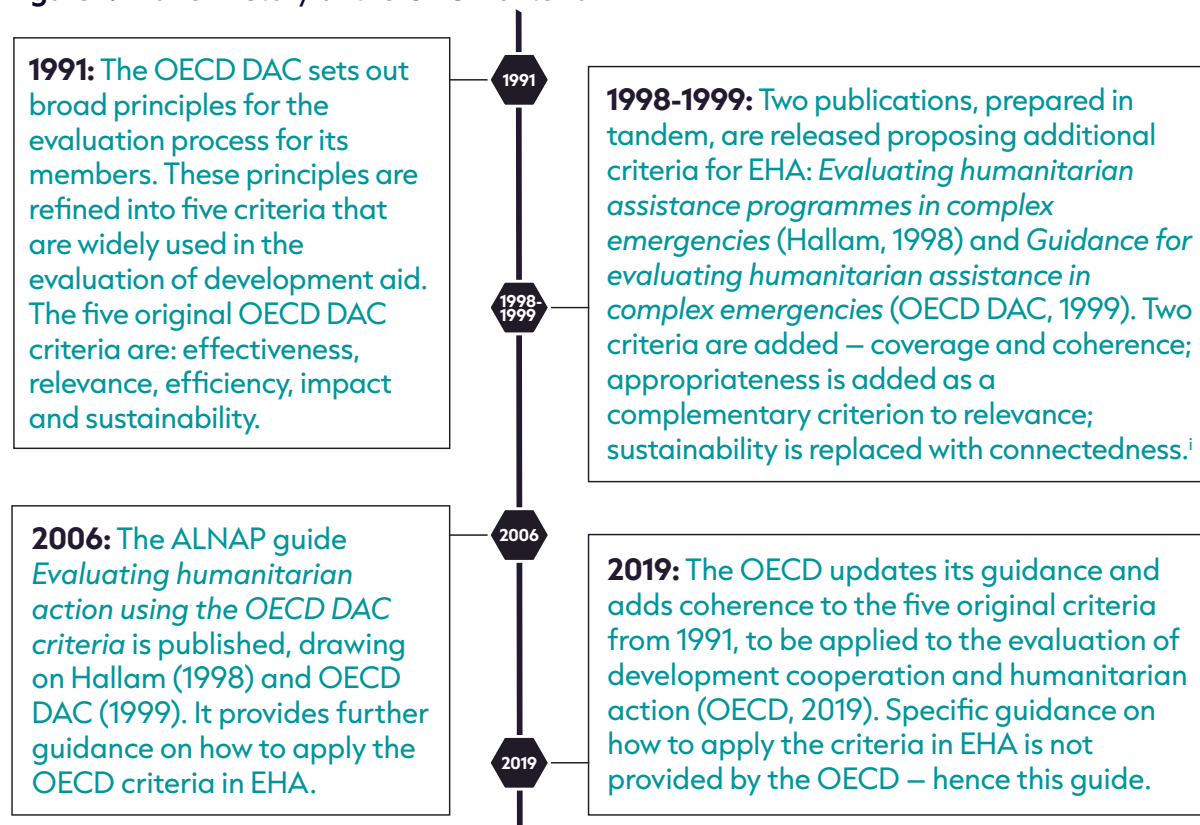
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHY THIS GUIDE?

This guide updates the ALNAP guide *Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD DAC criteria*, first published in 2006 to help evaluation professionals better understand and apply evaluation criteria in humanitarian settings (ALNAP, 2006). While this edition retains the same seven evaluation criteria, we have updated, expanded and clarified the definitions to reflect changes in evaluation practice, shifts in the humanitarian system and feedback from evaluation practitioners. The updates also incorporate revisions made by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC) in 2019 (OECD, 2019, 2021). See [Figure 1](#) for a brief timeline of the OECD criteria and how they have been adapted over time for the evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA).

Figure 1: A brief history of the OECD criteria in EHA



ⁱ Coherence was first used in the evaluation of the humanitarian response to the Rwanda crisis (RRN, 1996), while coverage, connectedness and appropriateness were originally proposed by Minear in 1994 (Minear, 1994).

As the humanitarian system and the world around it has changed, the need for high-quality evaluative material remains vital to the humanitarian community. To meet this need, now and in the future, it has been critical for us to understand the diverse ways that the criteria are interpreted and applied in EHA. Therefore, the revision has been informed by a participatory and evidence-based process.

Consultation events were held in different languages and multiple locations, and an online survey was available in English, Arabic, Spanish and French. Several events were held with voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs), including the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association (APEA), the Lebanese Evaluation Association (LebEval) and the Réseau Francophone de l'Évaluation (RFE). ALNAP reviewed how the criteria are used in EHA and some of the challenges in their application (ALNAP, 2023). An advisory group supported the entire process, and a reference group fed back on the draft guide. Members of both groups represented a wide array of organisations, including donors, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in the Global North and in Global Majority countries. Further details on the revision process are available on [ALNAP's website](#).

The consultation process confirmed the enduring relevance of the OECD evaluation criteria plus clear demand for definitions and guidance tailored to EHA. Stakeholders recognise that the criteria provide a valuable common language across diverse actors and contexts, but the criteria require thoughtful interpretation to remain useful, particularly in crises.

The revision process also drew attention to wider social and political shifts that are shaping the humanitarian system. These shifts lay bare the need for humanitarian action to respond to global challenges and deliver on long-standing reform commitments. As the number of complex and protracted crises grows, and the funding environment changes, we must re-examine the structures and assumptions underpinning humanitarian action – particularly those shaped by institutions in the Global North. Greater attention to racism, colonial legacies and unequal power relations in the humanitarian system also raises important questions for EHA (ALNAP, 2022). Whose knowledge counts? Who decides what gets evaluated and how? And who defines success?

Our stakeholders want EHA to give more explicit attention to these evolving issues. While evaluation is intended as a learning and accountability tool to improve performance, the utility of EHA can be enhanced by addressing areas of humanitarian action where profound changes are needed at a system level.

Accordingly, this guide introduces three priority themes – putting affected people at the centre, locally led humanitarian action, and environment and climate crisis. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is indicative of where clearer and more consistent focus in evaluations could support transformational change of the humanitarian system, in addition to fostering incremental change (Quinn Patton, 2020). Include these in

evaluations as standalone themes or embed them under the criteria – they are intended to inspire you to follow meaningful lines of enquiry. See [Chapter 2](#) for more on the link between evaluation criteria and priority themes, and see [Chapter 11](#) on each theme.

1.2 WHO THE GUIDE IS FOR AND HOW TO USE IT

This guide provides practical and accessible support on how to use and interpret the OECD evaluation criteria in EHA. It complements the OECD guidance on using evaluation criteria, in recognition of the multitude of ways of 'doing' evaluations. Primarily, it is intended for evaluators of humanitarian action and those involved in commissioning, designing and managing EHA. It is also a key resource for training courses on EHA. And it is a reference for humanitarian evaluation users, from practitioners to policy-makers.

Read the guide from start to finish for an overview of the criteria and how best to apply them in an evaluation. Or use it to understand the scope of individual criteria and whether they are applicable to the evaluation in hand. Alongside this long-form guide, a summary with key take-aways is available on [ALNAP's website](#).

The guide describes methodological considerations for each criterion. However, this is not a methods guide, and it does not detail wider issues such as evaluation management, types of evaluation approaches, and methodologies and tools for data collection. To ensure longevity, the guide mostly uses common language instead of terminology that may become outdated, e.g. accountability to affected people. Please see ALNAP's *EHA guide* for comprehensive guidance on EHA (ALNAP, 2016) and the companion guide on the *Evaluation of protection in humanitarian action* (ALNAP, 2018).

Figure 2: Organisation of the guide

Chapters 2 and 3: Framing the criteria

2. GETTING STARTED: DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS

3. ENSURING EVALUATION IS USEFUL: HOW TO APPLY THE CRITERIA

Chapters 4-10: Criteria for the evaluation of humanitarian action

4. RELEVANCE

5. COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

6. EFFECTIVENESS

7. EFFICIENCY

8. INTER-CONNECTION

9. COHERENCE

10. IMPACT

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CHAPTER 2

GETTING STARTED: DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS

2.1 HUMANITARIAN DEFINITIONS¹

HUMANITARIAN ACTION

*The objectives of humanitarian action are to protect and save lives, to alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of crises, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.*²

EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

*EHA is the systematic and objective examination of humanitarian action to determine the worth or significance of an activity, policy or programme, with the intention to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability.*³

2.2 WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT EHA?

This guide takes into account a number of challenges specific to EHA in how definitions are adapted from the OECD criteria and their methodological implications.⁴

Conflict, often a cause of humanitarian crises: In EHA, a robust context analysis is needed to understand the political economy of the conflict, which in turn informs an understanding and evaluation of:

- a. whether the humanitarian response has been sufficiently conflict-sensitive and has succeeded in 'doing no harm' in terms of negative consequences for the population affected by the crisis, for example by aggravating conflict dynamics (see CDA, n.d.)
- b. if and how access has been negotiated with conflict actors

1 See [Annex 1](#) for a glossary of other useful terms.

2 This definition of humanitarian action is adapted from that in ALNAP (2016), to add and reflect the centrality of protection. As well as having their basic needs met, those affected by crisis also need protection – from violence, abuse, coercion and deprivation – and respect for their rights in accordance with the letter and spirit of relevant bodies of law (IASC, 2016).

3 This definition is drawn from ALNAP (2016).

4 See ALNAP (2016) for further explanation of some of these challenges and how to address them.

- c. issues of security and whether a humanitarian actor has adequately addressed duty of care to its staff.

This analysis is also key to understanding and evaluating whether protection needs have been adequately assessed and met.

Accessing and consulting people affected by crisis: Insecurity due to conflict has many consequences. This includes limited or lack of access by evaluators to areas and communities affected by a crisis; people being traumatised, fearful and distrustful of evaluators and possibly of members of their own and other communities; and polarised perspectives. Evaluators need flexible ways to reach those affected, including remote methods and sensitive methods of data collection so all perspectives can be heard. Infrastructural damage from natural hazard may constrain access and cause trauma too.

Lack of documents and reference points: The dynamic, often fast-paced, and sometimes unplanned yet responsive nature of humanitarian action can pose challenges for evaluation. Creativity and adaptability may be needed to find appropriate reference points where there is an absence of planning documents and changing objectives, characterised by an iterative rather than linear approach (see [Annex 2](#) for pointers on adaptive management).

Attribution challenges and power dynamics: Some challenges are common but amplified in EHA. This includes attributing results to a specific action or actor where there may be many humanitarian actors involved, lack of clear responsibility between them, and an unclear relationship between international and national/local actors. Unequal power dynamics can play a part in the latter, which raises issues of who sets the agenda for an evaluation, what is valued and whose perspective counts. Some standards and ethical frameworks for humanitarian action are widely accepted across actors, but they are not universal, as shown in [section 2.5 Relating the criteria to humanitarian principles](#).

Defining the boundaries of humanitarian action: In many crises, those fulfilling a humanitarian role may have multiple mandates, particularly among national and local actors. And international development actors may also be present. This raises issues for defining what counts as 'humanitarian action' to be evaluated, and which population groups are affected directly or indirectly by a humanitarian crisis, as opposed to facing development needs. How could or should humanitarian action relate to engagement for development and peacebuilding, in the spirit of the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus? These issues are particularly acute in protracted humanitarian crises.

2.3 CRITERIA AND PRIORITY THEMES: WHAT ARE THEY?

Evaluation criteria provide a normative framework to determine the merit or worth of humanitarian action.⁵ In other words, they describe a comprehensive list of the desired attributes of humanitarian action, namely that it should:

- be relevant to the context and appropriate to those affected by crisis – **relevance**⁶
- reach those most in need – **coverage and inclusion**
- achieve desired results and avoid harmful consequences – **effectiveness**
- deliver results in an efficient way – **efficiency**
- be connected to other forms of development and peacebuilding activity, with a medium- to long-term perspective – **inter-connection** (formerly *connectedness*)
- be complementary, coordinated and consistent across humanitarian actors, aligning with policies and standards – **coherence**
- make a positive difference – **impact**.

Note, as described in [Chapter 3](#), not all criteria will apply to every evaluation of humanitarian action. This is an exhaustive list from which those commissioning the evaluation should select.

The criteria are ordered deliberately. They put people affected by crisis centre-stage in evaluating relevance and coverage, then they consider the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes, then the more complex and systemic concepts of inter-connection and coherence, and they end with the wider and potentially transformative impact of humanitarian action.

Some of these criteria align directly with the OECD criteria. For others, we have adapted and nuanced the definition to specifically suit humanitarian action. Two additional criteria are particularly important for EHA, building on the ALNAP guide (2006): coverage and inclusion, and inter-connection.⁷ [Table 1](#) summarises alignment and divergence between ALNAP's EHA criteria and the OECD criteria.

⁵ This is adapted from the OECD DAC definition – 'A criterion is a standard or principle used in evaluation as the basis for evaluative judgement' (OECD, 2021: 18) – in order for us to make a clear distinction with the priority themes.

⁶ In the 2006 guide relevance is combined with appropriateness. In this updated guide the two levels of analysis are maintained, but appropriateness no longer features in the name of the criterion.

⁷ However, the OECD (2021) acknowledges that, in humanitarian contexts, the additional criteria of appropriateness (folded here into relevance), coverage and connectedness may be highly relevant to evaluation.

Table 1: OECD criteria and ALNAP's adapted criteria for EHA

OECD evaluation criteria (2019)	EHA criteria (2025)	Similarities and differences in ALNAP's EHA criteria
Relevance	 Relevance	Similar definition but further unpacked for EHA to consider the appropriateness of humanitarian action to needs and priorities of people affected by crisis, with less focus on policy alignment (which is addressed under coherence).
	 Coverage and inclusion	Specific to EHA to evaluate the extent to which humanitarian action is needs-based and therefore impartial (in turn relating to the widely accepted humanitarian principle of impartiality), and provided without discrimination.
Effectiveness	 Effectiveness	Same definition but further unpacked for EHA to emphasise outcomes.
Efficiency	 Efficiency	Similar, looking at three dimensions of efficiency: economic efficiency, operational efficiency and timeliness.
Sustainability	 Inter-connection	The OECD criterion considers how the net benefits of an intervention are likely to continue. But this is not always appropriate for humanitarian action, which is often of a short-term nature. Instead, inter-connection evaluates the extent to which (usually short-term) humanitarian action takes the medium and longer term into account, and thus how it also connects to development and peacebuilding actors, with a temporal perspective.
Coherence	 Coherence	<p>Similar elements in consistency and complementarity of action, avoiding duplication of effort and ensuring added value. The EHA definition specifically focuses on coordination of humanitarian action to achieve this; OECD refers to this as 'external coherence'.</p> <p>Both definitions refer to alignment with international norms and standards, and with wider policy frameworks. EHA further considers how tensions between policies and standards are managed in practice.</p> <p>OECD considers 'internal coherence' in terms of synergy and links between interventions within the same institution. This is where it places the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus. But for EHA, the nexus is placed under inter-connection, encouraging an external and temporal perspective of the relationship between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors.</p>
Impact	 Impact	Similar, looking at the higher-level and transformative effects in different domains.

The priority themes, as introduced in [Chapter 1](#), provide an additional lens to evaluate humanitarian action. They complement the OECD criteria and offer opportunities for evaluation to enhance performance and also support transformational change, often at system level. The priority themes are:

- **Putting people affected by crisis at the centre** (linked to efforts within the humanitarian system to improve how humanitarian actors engage with affected people)
- **Locally led humanitarian action** (also referred to as localisation within the humanitarian system)
- **Environment and climate crisis.**

To varying degrees, these priorities are reflected as sub-themes within the OECD criteria. Consider giving explicit attention to some of these issues to generate more specific and relevant evaluation questions that, if answered, can drive substantial change. This is where evaluation can support transformational change.

At the same time, you may prefer to explore these themes within the existing criteria framework. In such cases, use the guide to inform more targeted questions and lines of enquiry within those criteria.

Table 2: EHA priority themes

Priority theme	What is it and why is it important?
Putting people affected by crisis at the centre	<p>Evaluates the extent to which humanitarian action: a) meaningfully involves affected people in decision-making, b) recognises their agency, c) ensures their protection, and d) is grounded in their needs, priorities and aspirations.</p> <p>Despite commitments, deep-rooted power imbalances limit whether humanitarian actors are genuinely led by people affected by crisis. Evaluations can examine the extent to which humanitarian actors are being led by or are responding to the preferences and priorities of people affected by crisis in a timely manner; the quality of engagement, including cultural sensitivity and power and trust between humanitarian actors and communities; and if the perspectives of people affected by crisis have been listened to and acted upon.</p>

Priority theme	What is it and why is it important?
Locally led humanitarian action	<p>Evaluates the degree to which humanitarian action: a) supports local actors, b) shifts power and resources to frontline responders, and c) reinforces locally owned crisis response and recovery.</p> <p>Evaluations can examine local actors' leadership (or lack thereof) in humanitarian action and explore structural and operational barriers that limit their influence, recommending how these barriers can be overcome. Evaluations can also assess variations in local actors' values, priorities and power dynamics, and how this shapes local actors' leadership and relationships with communities affected by crisis (e.g. their role in the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups in receiving humanitarian assistance).</p>
Environment and climate crisis	<p>Evaluates the extent to which humanitarian action: a) contributes to or mitigates the climate crisis, and b) considers local and/or Indigenous knowledge, practices and solutions around the environment and climate crisis.</p> <p>The climate crisis can significantly increase humanitarian needs, contributing to displacement, instability and violence through climate-related events like droughts and floods. In line with the principle of 'Do No Harm', consider environmental factors in how humanitarian action is planned and implemented, and whether it minimises negative environmental impacts.</p>

Note, you may be asked to consider important **cross-cutting issues** throughout the evaluation process, and under a number (if not all) of the evaluation criteria. Different organisations may have their own cross-cutting issues to be considered in EHA. ALNAP's *EHA guide* (2006) identifies eight cross-cutting issues.⁸ We consider two in this guide:

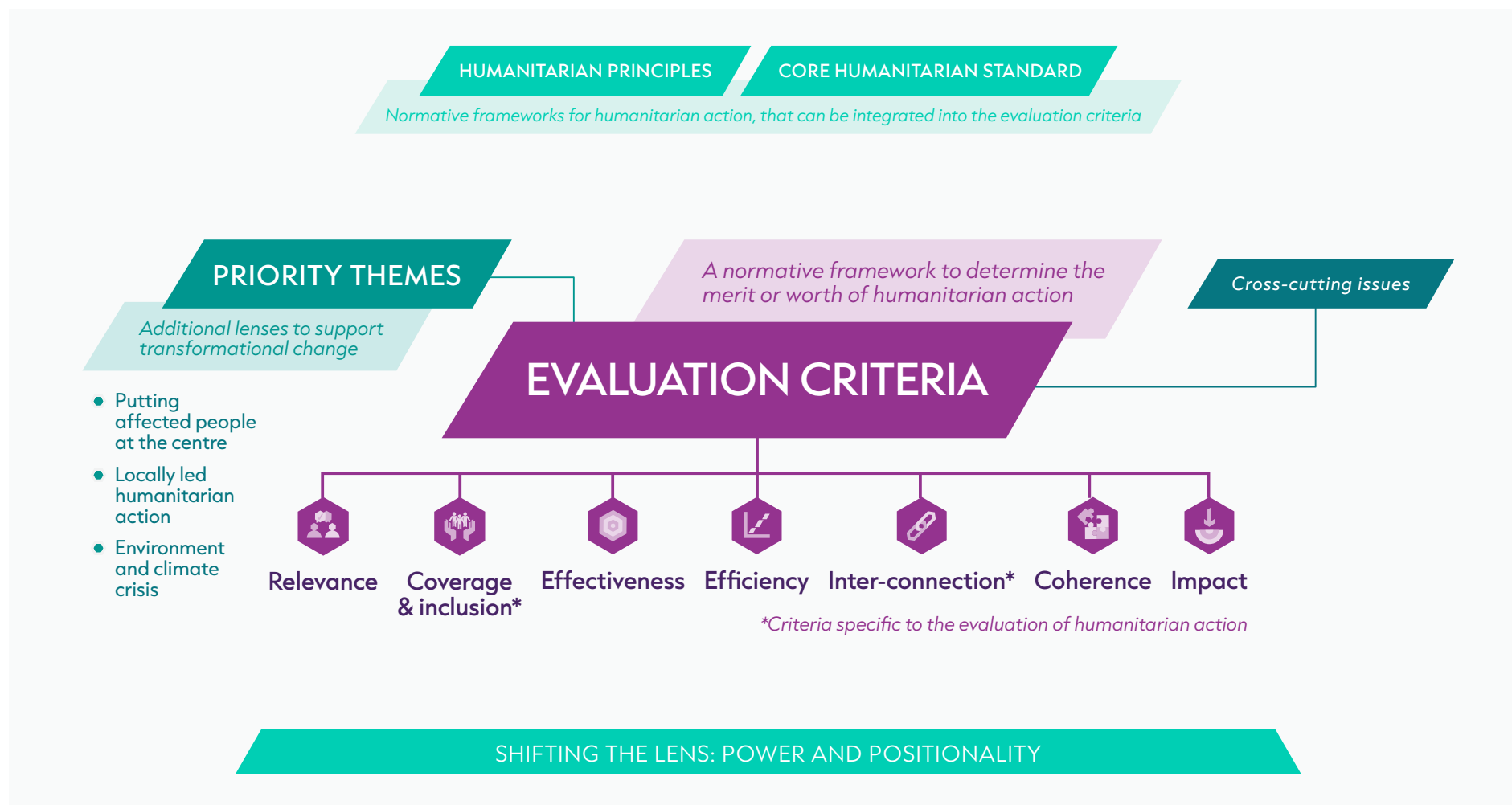
- **Inclusion:** although now elevated to being part of the coverage criterion, inclusion can also be considered for all other criteria. It includes and goes beyond gender equality to consider other patterns of marginalisation and discrimination as well, and, as far as possible, their underlying causes.
- **Adaptiveness/adaptive management:** this is key to effective and relevant humanitarian action, given the dynamic and unpredictable nature of crises and the fast-paced nature of humanitarian action.

These cross-cutting issues are described in [Annex 2](#), where they are applied to the criteria.

Figure 3 summarises the different elements of the guide.

⁸ The cross-cutting 'themes' in the EHA guide (ALNAP, 2006) are: local context; human resources; protection; participation of primary stakeholders; coping strategies and resilience; gender equality; HIV/AIDS; and the environment. Protection is now regarded as central to humanitarian action and is integrated throughout this guide. Some others now appear as priority themes or they are woven into this guide.

Figure 3: Different elements of this guide



2.4 SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

Chapters 4–10 discuss the seven EHA criteria in turn, and each includes a ‘Shifting the lens: power and positionality’ section. These sections explore how power dynamics and positionality shape evaluations and interpretations of criteria. They prompt reflection on what is evaluated, how and by whom – inviting shifts that enhance the fairness, accuracy and relevance of findings. Key examples are given, but there are many facets to addressing power and positionality that this guide does not cover. This requires ongoing reflection, adaptation and dialogue within each unique context.

Why is this important? Positionality shapes how you perceive the world and carry out evaluations, based on your social identities, experiences and affiliations – whether you are an evaluator, commissioner or programme staff. It affects which questions you ask, whose knowledge you prioritise, and how you frame and use findings. Crucially, positionality can introduce bias, often subtly – for example, by reinforcing dominant narratives or privileging certain voices over others. By recognising positionality and power, the guide invites you to shift your lens to uncover blind spots, challenge inherited assumptions and engage more equitably with diverse forms of knowledge in evaluation.

2.5 RELATING THE CRITERIA TO HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

If the humanitarian actor that is the focus of the evaluation is committed to humanitarian principles as the ethical or even legal framework for its humanitarian action, these principles should be integrated into all standard evaluations of its humanitarian action. However, there is a poor track record in doing this.⁹ Here, we explain how to integrate humanitarian principles within the framework of the EHA criteria.

BOX 1: WHAT ARE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES?

Humanitarian principles form a normative framework for humanitarian action. They are rooted in International Humanitarian Law, with particular relevance to conflict contexts. The principles are intended to: a) distinguish humanitarian response from other forms of assistance in terms of how it is provided; b) provide access to conflict zones, by assuring parties to armed conflict that humanitarian activities will not interfere in the conflict; c) provide an ethical compass for humanitarian agencies to navigate difficult choices and dilemmas in humanitarian action (UNEG, 2024).

⁹ See UNEG (2024) and also UNEG (2016a), which find few references to humanitarian principles in evaluations of humanitarian action.

Humanitarian principles

Humanity: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

Impartiality: Humanitarian action must be carried out based on need alone, prioritising the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

Neutrality: Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence: Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

Source: OCHA (2022).

To whom do the principles apply?

Many international humanitarian actors state their commitment to these humanitarian principles as their normative framework.¹⁰ But these principles are not followed universally by all humanitarian actors. They may not be relevant to some regional, national and local humanitarian actors – particularly the principles of neutrality and independence if they identify more closely with concepts of humanitarian solidarity and resistance,¹¹ and/or have their roots in other forms of civic action such as rights-based advocacy or peacebuilding.

HOW DO HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES RELATE TO ALNAP'S EVALUATION CRITERIA?












Humanitarian principles do not map directly onto the EHA criteria. However, evaluation questions about the role of humanitarian principles in guiding decision-making and humanitarian action can usually be linked to one or other of the criteria.

At the end of each chapter, this guide suggests how and where to integrate humanitarian principles within the framework of the evaluation criteria. [Table 3](#) provides a summary.

¹⁰ This includes the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, UN agencies engaged in humanitarian action, many international NGOs (INGOs) and some donor governments.

¹¹ Humanitarian resistance has been described as the rescue, relief and protection of people suffering under an unjust enemy regime, by individuals and groups politically opposed to the regime. Thus, humanitarian resistance means taking sides. Solidarity is a commitment to unity and a common cause, which may mean 'resisting' enemy power. Once again, this means taking sides rather than remaining neutral (Slim, 2022).

Table 3: How the humanitarian principles relate to the criteria

Humanitarian principle	Closest related criteria	Explanation
Humanity	 Relevance	Evaluate the purpose of humanitarian action in terms of protecting life and health. Also, evaluate if humanitarian action respects the dignity of people affected by crisis.
	 Coverage and inclusion	Evaluate whether needs and suffering have been addressed wherever they have been found.
Impartiality	 Coverage and inclusion	Evaluate access to people affected by crisis, and whether the scale of humanitarian action is proportionate to need.
Neutrality	 Effectiveness	As an 'instrumental' principle to gain access, neutrality may be key to effectiveness.
	 Efficiency	Explore how the human resource composition of the respective organisation protects neutrality, and the perception of neutrality.
	 Inter-connection	Explore if the relationship between humanitarian and other actors respects humanitarian principles, and how that is perceived by the affected population.
Independence	 Effectiveness	See explanation for neutrality.
	 Efficiency	Explore if funding decisions have taken 'independence' into account.
	 Inter-connection	See explanation for neutrality.
All humanitarian principles	 Coherence	Explore overall alignment of humanitarian action with humanitarian principles, and how trade-offs between humanitarian principles have been managed.
	 Impact	Explore the overall impact of principled (or non-principled) humanitarian action across the whole response.

2.6 A NOTE ON THE CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD (CHS)

When evaluating an organisation that is committed to the CHS, these can also be mapped onto the evaluation criteria (CHS, 2024). See [Annex 3](#) on the CHS and the EHA criteria.

CHAPTER 3

ENSURING EVALUATION IS USEFUL: HOW TO APPLY THE CRITERIA

KEY MESSAGES

- Start with what the intended users of the evaluation want and need to know, and fit the evaluation questions to the criteria, not vice versa.
- Use the criteria flexibly and selectively to ensure they fit the purpose of the evaluation. The intention is not to rigidly apply a pre-defined approach to using the criteria, nor to use all the criteria for every evaluation. Reflect on how and which of the criteria provide an appropriate framework for the evaluation you are designing, within the budget available.

3.1 HOW THE PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION INFORMS THE CHOICE OF CRITERIA

An evaluation must be useful to, and used by, the intended primary users. These users may range from programme managers and frontline humanitarian responders to senior management, board members and funders.¹² The intended purpose is usually to improve policy and performance of humanitarian action. EHA can have a learning purpose, for example when oriented towards practitioners and managers who are designing and implementing the humanitarian response. And it may have an accountability purpose, for example when commissioned by governance bodies and funders to inform future resource allocation.

Evaluation is an important means to understand and analyse whether humanitarian action meets the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis, thus fulfilling some element of accountability to affected communities. Yet it is the nature of ongoing engagement and the relationship between humanitarian actors and affected communities that sits at the heart of this accountability relationship (see [Chapter 4: Relevance](#), and [section 11.1 Putting people affected by crisis at the centre](#)). Affected

¹² See section 3.3 of ALNAP's *EHA guide* (2016) for ways to identify the stakeholders of an evaluation and, among these stakeholders, the intended primary users.

people are stakeholders of the evaluation but they are unlikely to be users of the evaluation.

The purpose of the evaluation and the needs of evaluation users should drive the selection and use of the evaluation criteria (see [Table 4](#)). For example, if the purpose of the evaluation is to inform decision-making to improve the results of *humanitarian action for people affected by crisis*, the criteria of effectiveness, coverage and inclusion, and relevance are most pertinent. Another evaluation may aim to encourage reflection and learning, for example on *the nature of relationships between humanitarian actors* (e.g. *international and local*). In this case, the criterion of inter-connection is most pertinent, and a more facilitative approach to evaluation to support reflection may be appropriate.¹³ The evaluation can also contribute to transformational change, particularly by incorporating the priority themes.

3.2 SELECT AND APPLY THE CRITERIA THOUGHTFULLY AND FLEXIBLY

Follow three key steps to apply the criteria to EHA thoughtfully, and to plan the evaluation with a user focus.¹⁴

Step 1 – Identify the purpose and users of the evaluation

What is the overall purpose of the evaluation? Who are the intended primary users of the evaluation, and what do they need to know to better decide what to do and how in humanitarian action? (Note, there may be many intended users of the evaluation. Identifying the intended *primary users* helps avoid an unmanageable list of evaluation questions and promotes selective use of the criteria.)

Step 2 – Select the evaluation questions

To meet the needs of the intended users, what key high-level questions should the evaluation seek to answer?¹⁵ (If possible, consider how to promote genuine participation and leadership of people and communities affected by crisis throughout the evaluative process, starting from design and criteria setting.¹⁶ They are unlikely to use the evaluation, but they are key stakeholders. See [section 11.1 Putting people affected by crisis at the centre.](#))

¹³ See Darcy and Dillon (2020) for the distinction between ‘technical’ evaluation, providing evidence to inform decision-making, and ‘facilitative’ evaluation, to support reflection and learning.

¹⁴ See also OECD (2021) on applying the OECD DAC evaluation criteria thoughtfully.

¹⁵ See section 6.3 of ALNAP’s *EHA guide* (2016) for the rationale for selecting a small number of high-level evaluation questions: three to four.

¹⁶ Despite strong recognition of the humanitarian imperative and ethical responsibility to ensure that communities access, and benefit from, monitoring and evaluation knowledge, it is hard to make evaluation findings accessible to communities. Several barriers make this practice less common in the humanitarian sector, including resourcing constraints, lack of prioritisation and logistics (see HAG et al, 2024).

Step 3 – Apply the criteria

To which criteria do your evaluation questions relate? Apply only these criteria to the evaluation.

The full list of criteria *are not* obligatory for all evaluations of humanitarian action. Identify the criteria that are most relevant and useful to meet the information needs of the evaluation users. What do they need to know to make a difference? Where a certain criterion has two dimensions (e.g. inter-connection and coherence), clarify if either or both dimensions are relevant. Time spent consulting the intended users at the outset is key to ensuring that the evaluation reflects their perspectives and priorities, no matter where they are located, geographically and culturally. This helps ensure that inherent power dynamics within the humanitarian system are not automatically replicated in the planning and design of the evaluation. Also, be prepared to adapt the terminology of the criteria to suit the users of the evaluation. Where funding is a constraint, consider how to focus the evaluation on a few key issues that emerge from consultation with users. This, in turn, will inform your selective use of some rather than all criteria.

Table 4: Selecting criteria according to the information needs of evaluation users – some examples

Information needs of evaluation users	Relevant criteria
To understand what has worked and not in an ongoing humanitarian programme (whether in response to a new or a protracted humanitarian crisis), in order to inform learning, adaptation and improved performance of that response, with practitioners as the intended users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevance ● Effectiveness ● Coverage and inclusion ● Efficiency
To understand the synergy between humanitarian action and development programming and peacebuilding in a protracted conflict, with in-country senior management, policy staff at regional and headquarters levels, and governance bodies as the intended users. (This relates to the triple nexus – see OECD, 2025.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inter-connection

Information needs of evaluation users	Relevant criteria
To understand, for an inter-agency evaluation, how effective a country-wide humanitarian response has been, what difference it has made, and how well-coordinated the response has been, with senior management in-country and at regional and headquarters levels, and governance bodies and funders as the intended users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effectiveness ● Coherence ● Impact
To understand to what extent prioritisation and targeting of humanitarian assistance, and the criteria for inclusion versus exclusion amongst the population affected by the crisis, are considered to be clear and fair and to 'Do No Harm' from the community's perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevance ● Coverage and inclusion ● Impact

USING THE CRITERIA TO STRUCTURE YOUR EVALUATION

The criteria provide a framework to organise evaluation questions and to structure the evaluation process. For some evaluations, the criteria also provide a framework to structure findings in the final evaluation report. But this may not be most useful for evaluation users. For example, if users are interested in evaluation findings for different sectors – such as protection, health and food security, consider structuring the evaluation report by sector. This could be supplemented with a concluding chapter that summarises findings by criteria.



CHAPTER 4

RELEVANCE

DEFINITION

Is humanitarian action doing the right things?

Relevance¹⁷ refers to whether humanitarian action is in line with the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis in each specific context, and with the needs and priorities of institutions and partners, at macro and micro levels.¹⁸

KEY MESSAGES

- Centre your evaluation of relevance on understanding the needs and priorities of different groups and communities within the population affected by crisis, and how/if these needs and priorities have informed the design and implementation of humanitarian action.
- Your positionality as an evaluator influences how you understand, interpret and prioritise the needs and priorities of different stakeholders. Reflect on how different factors such as cultural background and organisational affiliation influence your judgement.

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF THE DEFINITION

The relevance of humanitarian action may be evaluated at macro and micro levels (where it is also referred to as appropriateness). The macro level refers to *what* –

¹⁷ In 2006, ALNAP combined relevance with appropriateness; in this updated guide the two levels of analysis are maintained but appropriateness no longer features in the criterion's name.

¹⁸ The OECD definition of relevance also includes policy alignment which, in this guide, is covered under coherence.

evaluation of the overall objectives or purpose of humanitarian action; the micro level refers to *how* – evaluation of the type and mode of assistance, including inputs and activities.

Unpack and interrogate the logic or theory of change of the humanitarian response. For example, decreasing morbidity and mortality may be a relevant overall objective for humanitarian action, but strengthening the quality of secondary health care in an area by staffing and rehabilitating a hospital might not be appropriate to achieve this objective. It might be more appropriate to strengthen primary health care structures, engaging with Indigenous health care providers, or to simply facilitate people's access to existing structures by providing transportation.

Analyse the context and explore the different needs and priorities of people affected by crisis. Review any needs assessments that have informed the design of the response. As highlighted in the OECD definition, consider that there might be potential tensions between the needs and priorities of affected people and those of other stakeholders, such as humanitarian responders and institutional partners. There may be some tensions between the short-term nature of humanitarian action and people's long-term needs for stability and to rebuild their lives. For example, a humanitarian actor might prioritise building latrines for a community affected by crisis to meet international standards, but community members put greater value on the building of schools. There might also be tensions between the needs and priorities of different groups and communities within the population affected by crisis, meaning that trade-offs have been made. What is of value for one stakeholder or group might not be of value to others. Explore these tensions and the implications of the choices made (OECD, 2019, 2021; Darcy and Dillon, 2020).

Explore if issues related to the environment and climate crisis have been considered in the design and implementation of humanitarian action. Were the environmental context and the environmental knowledge and practices of people affected by crisis considered to deliver relevant assistance? This is further explained in [section 11.3 Environment and climate crisis](#).

Also explore how conflict-related factors have affected the relevance of humanitarian action. For example, certain types of humanitarian assistance may be irrelevant at local level if they leave people more vulnerable to attack. In some contexts, a household may become a target if livestock is restocked where there is a high risk of looting by militia or if cash is distributed. This is conflict-insensitive programming and it fails to respect the principle of 'Do No Harm', with negative consequences for protection.

As an aspect of relevance, evaluate participation and ownership by key stakeholders – especially people affected by crisis – in the design and implementation of humanitarian action. What is the nature of the overall relationship between humanitarian actors and affected people and how has this relationship influenced the relevance of the response? How were needs assessments and other assessments conducted? Were key stakeholders, including affected people, involved in designing the humanitarian response? What

feedback channels were there to ensure continued relevance? Also evaluate the role of local actors in the design of the humanitarian response. How satisfied are local actors with their level of involvement and influence in shaping the purpose and activities of the response? These aspects can help explain why humanitarian action is or is not relevant. This is further explained in [section 11.1 Putting people affected by crisis at the centre](#).

WHEN TO SELECT RELEVANCE

Relevance should be widely used as an EHA criterion to understand if humanitarian action has been designed and implemented to do the right things to respond to need. Irrelevant assistance could have severe and harmful consequences for the well-being of people affected by crisis.

HOW RELEVANCE RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

When relevance is combined with coverage and inclusion, the evaluation explores whether humanitarian action is doing the right things for the right people, i.e. those in greatest need.

When relevance is combined with effectiveness, the evaluation provides an overview of what has been achieved and how well, and also if humanitarian action is doing the right things. Humanitarian action might be highly effective in achieving the desired results set out in a funding proposal, but irrelevant to the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis. For example, if protection risks and needs have been ignored in the design and implementation of humanitarian action, an evaluation focused on effectiveness might draw different conclusions to one focused on relevance and effectiveness (ALNAP, 2018).

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

Exploring relevance through the lens of power and positionality asks you to consider: How does your positionality as an evaluator shape your assumptions about whose needs matter? How might your line of evaluation questioning reproduce power imbalances or silence alternative viewpoints on what constitutes the 'right' needs, knowledge or solutions?

For example, when reporting whether humanitarian action is relevant, examine whether your conclusions reinforce paternalistic narratives – such as framing people affected by crisis solely as passive recipients of humanitarian assistance – and diminish local agency or leadership in shaping responses.

Shifting the lens could also mean that triangulation compares data sources and actively interrogates divergences in perspectives between local actors, community members and external stakeholders.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Key consideration A

Evaluating the relevance of humanitarian action requires local expertise. This is to gain sufficient understanding of context and local needs, particularly in quickly changing and/or highly volatile environments.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure that local experts are included on the evaluation team. Ensure these experts have knowledge and experience from the specific geographical area covered by the evaluation, and of the population groups covered. Gain up-to-date information on the local context to ensure that the composition of the evaluation team is conflict-sensitive.

Methodological implications for evaluators

If your evaluation team comprises members from multiple countries and/or communities, make sure that local expert(s) are given a key role and that they contribute to the overall analysis of the evaluation, not just data collection.

Pay attention to your positionality as an evaluator, and how you may be perceived in conflict contexts to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach. For example, ethnic or national identities may impact the evaluation team's interaction with people affected by crisis and other key stakeholders.

Key consideration B

There may be many different perspectives and a lack of consensus on what constitutes relevant humanitarian action. This makes an evaluative judgement difficult.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Encourage and facilitate data triangulation by helping evaluators identify multiple and relevant data sources. Facilitate access to different stakeholders and to different groups and communities within the affected population.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Take account of the inherent power dynamics in the humanitarian system when evaluating relevance – between people affected by crisis and humanitarian actors, but also among different affected groups, communities and humanitarian actors. Ensure the perspectives of different groups and communities, including the marginalised, are heard and given weight in reaching an evaluative judgement. Be transparent in how the evaluative judgement has been made.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of BHA RESTORE II in northwest Syria (September 2022)

Background

The RESTORE II programme was implemented in northwest Syria in 2021 and 2022 by the international humanitarian agency GOAL and several Syrian organisations, including the Big Heart Foundation and Ihsan. It distributed food kits and cash vouchers, delivered water supply services and raised awareness around malnutrition and residential building rehabilitation. The evaluation explores the extent to which synergies between programmes/sectors were appropriate for the most vulnerable members of the population.

How the evaluation addresses relevance at the micro level

The evaluators surveyed people affected by the crisis to understand whether the different services offered by the programme were appropriate to their needs.

The evaluation indicates how programme participants rated the appropriateness of each service, showing differences between participants who benefited from one or more service. Survey results are disaggregated by types of service and gender. The evaluators draw conclusions on the appropriateness of different services and also a combination of services. They dig into why these differences occurred, drawing on interviews and focus group discussions with affected people. Links are made with needs assessments conducted at the beginning of the programme.

- The evaluation illustrates the value of investigating how different activities are perceived by different groups of people affected by crisis. Some activities can be appropriate to the needs of affected people and other activities less so.
- Important learning for programme design can emerge from an in-depth understanding of differences in relevancy within one programme.

Source: Jouri (2022).

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of UNHCR's response to the L3 emergency in Afghanistan 2021–2022 (March 2023)

Background

A rapid onset humanitarian crisis occurred in Afghanistan when the Taliban forces took power in August 2021. Around 18 million of the country's 38 million people needed assistance, facing worsening conditions and mounting food insecurity. The evaluation focuses on operations during the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) internally displaced persons (IDP) response from August 2021 to May 2022, with the dual purpose of learning and accountability.

How the evaluation addresses relevance at the macro level

The evaluators first explore which needs assessments were undertaken, if data from protection monitoring tools was considered, and if those assessments allowed satisfactory understanding of the needs of people affected by the crisis, including people with 'specific needs'. The evaluation also explores the use of feedback mechanisms and if additional needs assessments were conducted to respond to changes in the context. The evaluation team conducted focus group discussions with affected people to capture their perspectives on the relevance of the response. Alignment between programme documents and needs is evaluated to explore linkages between response design and needs assessments. The evaluation highlights the tension between the priority needs of people affected by crisis and UNHCR's ability to meet those needs, considering UNHCR's mandate and responsibility.

- The evaluation shows the logical link between needs assessments, feedback mechanisms and the relevance of a response, also showing how primary data collection with affected people can corroborate findings from a desk review.
- The evaluation also illustrates the tensions between humanitarian actors' mandates and priorities, and the needs of people affected by crisis.

Source: UNHCR (2023a).

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND RELEVANCE

This is an opportunity to evaluate the principle of humanity, which is the purpose of humanitarian action: to protect life and health. How well do humanitarian actors understand the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis in order to achieve this purpose? Relevance relates closely to the principle of impartiality too, prioritising assistance according to need.

Humanity is also about ensuring respect for human beings. In evaluating relevance, look for evidence that humanitarian action and the modalities of assistance do indeed respect and promote the dignity of those affected by a crisis. Pay attention to the nature of the relationship between the respective agency(ies) and affected people. For all lines of enquiry, it is essential that you listen to the perspectives and experience of affected people.

Example evaluation question:

To what extent was assistance provided according to the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis, in ways that respected their dignity, according to the principles of humanity and impartiality?



CHAPTER 5

COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

DEFINITION

Who does humanitarian action reach and how does this relate to humanitarian need, including protection?

Coverage means exploring which members and groups within the affected population have been reached through humanitarian action, and how this relates to humanitarian need, including protection, in terms of focusing on those most affected by crisis. Inclusion means humanitarian action without discrimination (e.g. on the basis of nationality, race or ethnicity, gender, religious belief, class, disability, sexual identity and orientation), while also addressing the specific and diverse needs of different groups/individuals.¹⁹

KEY MESSAGES

- Evaluate breadth of coverage by identifying which groups and individuals have and have not been reached through humanitarian action, and why. Evaluate if and how access has been negotiated, and whether the scale of humanitarian action is proportionate to need.
- Evaluating depth of coverage – or inclusion – means assessing if humanitarian action has reached people affected by crisis without discrimination, if barriers faced by marginalised groups have been removed and if their specific needs have been met.
- Coverage and inclusion is a key criterion for evaluating if humanitarian action is needs-based and therefore impartial.

¹⁹ This simplifies ALNAP's 2006 definition, clearly specifying protection as well as other humanitarian needs. Inclusion is added and we elaborate on what this means.

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF THE DEFINITION

Evaluate coverage by determining who has and has not been supported by humanitarian action, and why. On what basis were decisions made? And how does this relate to humanitarian need, taking into account protection as well as other needs such as shelter, food, water and health services? This is sometimes referred to as proportionality – is the scale of humanitarian action or assistance proportionate to need? This evaluates breadth of coverage.

Coverage can be assessed at different levels:

- a. At *global and regional levels*, have international resources for humanitarian assistance been allocated according to need and proportionate to the scale of humanitarian crises across countries/regions? This may be an important question in evaluations commissioned by donor organisations, and in regional or multi-country evaluations. The availability and allocation of funding is likely to be a key determinant of coverage.
- b. At *national level*, have both international and national resources been allocated based on needs within a country, and at an appropriate scale? This may be an important question when evaluating a humanitarian actor working nationwide.
- c. At *local level*, who has and has not been supported by humanitarian action, and how does this relate to need? This may be an important evaluation question for all humanitarian actors, including those working only with certain communities or in particular parts of a country, such as local civil society actors do.

Inclusion considers whether marginalised and vulnerable groups have been reached. Were efforts made to identify and remove barriers to humanitarian assistance faced by such groups (Barbelet and Wake, 2020)? Were certain groups overlooked (e.g. older people or those living in remote locations) and/or discriminated against (e.g. women; particular ethnic groups; those of a certain sexual orientation, religious belief or class; or those living with disability)? This evaluates depth of coverage.

Early in the evaluation process, identify key factors that drive discrimination and inequality within the population affected by crisis and the context. This shows which marginalised groups to focus on when evaluating inclusion and exclusion, and it avoids a more mechanistic and often superficial approach whereby evaluators aim to cover every potential marginalised group.

Pay attention to how factors of marginalisation intersect to create inequality and discrimination. This intersectional lens helps you avoid seeing marginalised groups in

discrete silos.²⁰ Be alert to how drivers of marginalisation intersect with the dynamics of the crisis. For example, displaced men of a certain age from ethnic groups associated with one party to a conflict may be automatically denied refuge in IDP camps by the authorities associated with another party to the conflict.

Also evaluate if humanitarian action has been adapted to the diverse and specific needs of different groups and individuals. This might require tailored programmes or activities, for example for people living with disability. And it means evaluating whether all groups and individuals, including those most marginalised, have been able to influence the design and direction of the humanitarian response. Engage with power dynamics and underlying barriers to inclusion for the most marginalised to evaluate if access to assistance and protection has been equitable (Lough et al, 2022). For example, has humanitarian action been informed by an understanding of underlying inequality, such as gender inequality? To what extent has humanitarian action addressed the outcomes or underlying causes of inequality, especially in protracted crises (Pinnington, 2023)?

WHEN TO SELECT COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

This criterion is important for many (most) evaluations of humanitarian action because it explores the extent to which action has been needs-based and implemented on an adequate scale. Paying attention to the needs of different groups, ask who has been prioritised and why, and who has been excluded and why. This criterion is particularly important when resources for humanitarian action are constrained. It is an opportunity to investigate how severity of needs has been understood, to guide targeting according to the most urgent cases of distress.

It may be useful, too, to evaluate organisational duty of care to staff. Explore not only if duty of care has been addressed adequately, but also what this means for coverage in practice. Has a trade-off been made between managing staff security and reaching populations affected by crisis in highly insecure areas? How was that trade-off managed and were creative solutions found?

HOW COVERAGE AND INCLUSION RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Coverage and inclusion relates closely to effectiveness in understanding outcomes and achievements across different groups with diverse needs. Although sometimes absorbed under the effectiveness criterion, separating out coverage and inclusion encourages greater attention to decision-making on programme design and targeting, and the extent to which marginalised groups have been included or overlooked. This criterion also relates to relevance, informing how evaluation methods and data analysis should be disaggregated by groups that have been affected in different ways by the humanitarian crisis.

²⁰ See UN Women (2022) on how to put this concept into practice.

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

Consider how power dynamics, identities and histories influence who is reached by humanitarian action, who is excluded, and why. In areas affected by conflict, examine if assistance has primarily flowed through government or majority-group networks, leaving ethnic or religious minorities underserved due to historical marginalisation. These dynamics can affect whose exclusion is rendered invisible.

Biases and assumptions can also shape the way coverage and inclusion is evaluated. For instance, if you rely solely on official lists of recipients of humanitarian support, your evaluation may miss entire populations who are undocumented or unable to access formal registration systems.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Evaluating geographic coverage between countries affected by crisis (to analyse if the scale of humanitarian action was proportionate to need in each case) requires understanding political and geostrategic interests that may influence resource allocation.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Find ways to encourage demand for such evaluation, as this can be sensitive territory.
Ensure the evaluation team has the appropriate skills in political economy analysis, plus diplomatic communication skills.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Ensure analysis is evidence-based, as far as possible, paying attention to comparative levels of humanitarian assistance in relation to need.
Review how humanitarian needs assessments and response plans were conducted, evaluating if they were truly needs-based, or if there was appropriation or adjustment to meet political needs and interests.

Key consideration B

It is important to evaluate key aspects of decision-making early in the response, to understand if humanitarian action was designed to be needs-oriented and inclusive from the outset, recognising systemic barriers to inclusion for certain groups.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Specify in the terms of reference (TOR) which policies and/or frameworks the organisation follows on needs-based humanitarian action and inclusion; use these as reference points for the evaluation.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Pay attention to the quality of needs assessments, whether marginalised groups were adequately identified, and the extent to which needs assessments informed the design of humanitarian action.

Evaluate targeting approaches, especially where resources are limited in relation to overall need.

Key consideration C

Evaluating inclusion means addressing inclusion bias (supporting those who don't need it) and exclusion bias (excluding those in need) in access to humanitarian services and overall participation in the response.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure the evaluation team has the skills and knowledge to understand the root causes of marginalisation and underlying power dynamics, and that they can apply an intersectional lens.

Ensure the evaluation team reviews how humanitarian needs have been assessed, and whether geographical areas and particular groups have been excluded, and why.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Consider the barriers different groups face when trying to access humanitarian action, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of non-humanitarians who understand power dynamics and patterns of social exclusion and discrimination.

Evaluate if humanitarian action addresses outcomes of marginalisation and inequality and/or engages with underlying causes. To what extent has exclusion been tracked during the response and acted upon?

Key consideration D

Humanitarian space and operational access (including how access has been negotiated) affect coverage, especially geographical coverage in conflict-related emergencies.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Consider how access and humanitarian space can be evaluated best given the sensitivity of these issues (e.g. part of an internal lesson-learning exercise versus an evaluation in the public domain).

Methodological implications for evaluators

Consider access, how it has been negotiated, and other factors affecting humanitarian space from the perspective of humanitarian actors on the ground and at a higher level, e.g. UN level.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of the coverage and quality of UNICEF's humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies

Background

This corporate evaluation assesses the coverage and quality of UNICEF's humanitarian response in complex emergencies, based on a sample of countries. It identifies internal and external enabling factors and challenges, including UNICEF fulfilling its child protection mandate and role. The evaluation captures good practice and innovation to improve humanitarian action.

How the evaluation addresses coverage and inclusion

The evaluation explores UNICEF's own programme approaches to gain principled access and improve coverage, its partnership strategies, and how it has influenced others, e.g. duty bearers. It explores access negotiations and humanitarian principles.

Inclusion is approached from the perspective of 'achieving coverage with equity'. The evaluation examines if and how data has been disaggregated, including and beyond age and sex, and the extent to which vulnerability analyses have been carried out. It also explores trade-offs between achieving coverage at scale and equity, and the contributory factors to this, usually funding. The evaluation notes that, almost by definition, it is most expensive to deliver humanitarian assistance to those furthest behind and hardest to reach.

- Due to sensitivities about access negotiations and to mitigate risk, published material is decontextualised and country case study reports remain internal.
- Because of the focus on data collection from vulnerable groups, data collection tools were reviewed and approved by an external board to ensure protocols were in place, e.g. safeguards to protect the rights of vulnerable subjects.
- As well as exploring how UNICEF understands exclusion factors, the evaluation explores whether this has been integrated into its humanitarian response, for example focusing on vulnerable groups. The evaluation highlights community feedback on this topic.
- The evaluation explores whether UNICEF's data collection, disaggregation and reporting have been adequate to track coverage over time.

Source: UNICEF (2019).

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

This criterion maps directly onto the humanitarian principle of impartiality. It is impossible to make an evaluative judgement about the impartiality of humanitarian action without looking at coverage and inclusion. This criterion also relates to the humanitarian principle of humanity – addressing suffering wherever it is found. This speaks to the scale of humanitarian action and whether it is proportionate to need.

Example evaluation question:

What approaches and partnership strategies has the organisation employed to gain principled access (i.e. access guided by humanitarian principles) to people affected by crisis in order to improve coverage and inclusion, and with what success?ⁱ

ⁱ This draws on an evaluation question from UNICEF (2019). 'Principled access' means access that has been negotiated by the respective humanitarian actor(s), guided by humanitarian principles.



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.²¹ 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).²² 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.

²¹ 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).

²² 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).

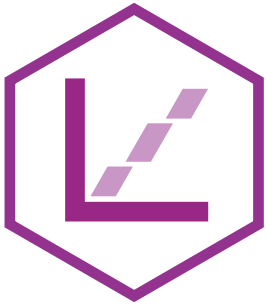
HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND EFFECTIVENESS

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?



CHAPTER 7

EFFICIENCY

DEFINITION

How well are resources being used for humanitarian action?

Efficiency measures the extent to which humanitarian action delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic²³ and timely way. It explores the use of financial resources, plus human, technical, time, environmental, social or other material resources, relating this to results at all levels of the results chain. It may also mean exploring operational aspects of humanitarian action, i.e. how well action has been managed.

KEY MESSAGES

- Because of the complexity of evaluating efficiency, prioritise which aspect(s) to evaluate and consider what is feasible within the scope of the evaluation.
- Timeliness is a key dimension. Humanitarian action is not efficient if results have not been achieved at the right time, when needed most.
- Explore how people affected by crisis perceive results in relation to costs, and different perceptions across groups. This is especially important when assessing social and environmental costs.

²³ Economic refers to the conversion of inputs into results in the most cost-effective way possible, compared to feasible alternatives in the context (OECD, 2019).

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION

There are three dimensions to evaluating efficiency, also highlighted by the OECD as key areas to explore.

1. *Economic efficiency* assesses the resources used to achieve results at different levels (not just outputs), in order to understand if resources have been used cost-effectively. In line with the OECD definition, resources should be understood in the broadest sense – this includes financial resources plus human, technical, time, environmental, social and other material resources. Economic efficiency can be evaluated to understand at what cost(s) (in a broad sense) results were achieved (OECD, 2021). This could mean exploring the advantages of using local versus international procurement, accounting for time spent on customs clearance for humanitarian goods procured internationally. It could also mean analysing the value for money of procured goods – have low costs affected quality and therefore use by affected people?
2. *Operational efficiency* assesses how humanitarian action has been managed, including decision-making processes and risk management. Given scarce resources for humanitarian action, decisions on prioritisation and use can have far reaching consequences. Think of this in terms of the ‘bottlenecks’ in the systems and processes that might have hampered efficient implementation. How were resources prioritised? Were resources used as planned? Were logistics and procurement decisions optimal? How were decisions made as the context of the humanitarian response evolved and did these decisions enhance efficiency in changing circumstances? Were resources redirected as needs changed (OECD, 2021)? Consider organisational duty of care to staff. For example, are staff sufficiently supported so they do not burn out or leave? This is an important aspect of operational efficiency.
3. *Timeliness* explores whether humanitarian action has adequately supported people affected by crisis at the right time, during different phases of the crisis. This is critical for humanitarian action. Was there adequate early warning, and were warnings acted upon in time? Were procurement activities launched and managed in a timely fashion? Were response staff deployed at the right time? The sequencing of humanitarian activities is often crucial to success. Humanitarian assistance might start with widespread cash transfers at the height of a crisis, then shift to livelihoods support in a protracted crisis.

Capture the views of people affected by crisis on these three aspects, including people who are most marginalised and vulnerable. This is especially important when assessing social and environmental costs, as these costs might vary substantially between groups and communities, and between geographical areas. This is further explained in [Chapter 11](#).

Analyse how and why the level of efficiency was reached. Look at both internal and external factors, for example political priorities of government and agencies. A host government may not want piped water provided to refugees as this could encourage them to remain, even if it is more efficient than providing water via tanker. Understanding 'how' and 'why' is important for learning and for improving the performance of humanitarian action.

Consider the urgency and scale of the needs of people affected by crisis. Responding with adequate resources in the early stage of a crisis, e.g. through anticipatory action, may be more efficient in the medium term if it reduces the need for subsequent widespread life-saving assistance. For instance, support for managed destocking of pastoralists at the onset of drought can reduce distress sales of livestock and destitution later. On the other hand, humanitarian agencies may spend too quickly where an international response is over-funded initially, exhausting their resources before the expensive reconstruction phase begins (Buchanan-Smith and Wiles, 2022).

BOX 2: COST-EFFICIENCY VERSUS COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Cost-efficiency refers to the cost per output of a programme or an activity. This analysis provides an understanding of the costs to deliver an output, but it does not consider whether those outputs result in desired outcomes.

Cost-effectiveness goes beyond the output level, assessing costs associated with achieving results across various stages of the results chain, including outcomes and impact. This enables a deeper understanding of how efficiently resources are used to achieve meaningful and lasting change, rather than simply delivering outputs (IRC and USAID, 2019).

For example, evaluating the cost-effectiveness of a cash assistance programme means exploring the cost of transferring cash to affected households (output level) and the cost relative to households improving their ability to cover basic needs (outcome level). See the evaluation example that follows (Mercy Corps, 2022).

WHEN TO SELECT EFFICIENCY

Evaluate efficiency to understand the costs (in a broad sense) of the results achieved. Efficiency contributes to holding humanitarian actors accountable for their use of resources, and it also generates valuable learning on how decisions about resource allocation have affected results as well as on the timing of the response. However, an evaluation that covers many other issues may not be the best means of doing this. An audit done by dedicated accountants may be better here, particularly to analyse cost-efficiency.

HOW EFFICIENCY RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Efficiency relates primarily to the relevance, effectiveness, and coverage and inclusion criteria. The relevance of humanitarian action has a direct effect on its efficiency. Designing humanitarian action that aligns with the specific needs of people affected by crisis can minimise resource waste, which is especially important when resources are scarce for humanitarian action. Operational efficiency links closely with coverage and inclusion, as targeting decisions directly relate to costs and resources. Operational efficiency also links to effectiveness and impact, as evident in cases where streamlined processes have led to quicker delivery of humanitarian support instead of being hampered by internal processes (OECD, 2021).

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

When evaluating efficiency, it is key to recognise the presence of bias in the types of data that are prioritised. Quantitative financial indicators – such as cost-per-beneficiary or administrative ratios – tend to dominate assessments, while qualitative insights that highlight trade-offs, ethical concerns or community experiences may be dismissed as anecdotal or less credible. This reflects a bias towards the type of evidence deemed legitimate in humanitarian evaluation, and it skews analysis towards what is cheapest rather than what is most dignified or appropriate.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Key consideration A

Efficiency is complex – it is unlikely that one evaluation can cover all aspects of this criterion. Some aspects are particularly intricate, such as measuring social and environmental costs, especially in highly insecure or rapidly evolving contexts.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Prioritise which aspects of efficiency are most useful to evaluate. Some aspects might be too complex to evaluate given the setting and time. Consider during which phase of a humanitarian response to evaluate efficiency. It can be beneficial to start with an evaluability assessment, and/or consider whether an audit is more appropriate.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Use the inception phase to explore what is feasible to evaluate in the time and resources available, and what approach is most appropriate. Engage in early dialogue with the commissioner to align expectations on areas of enquiry, taking into consideration the potential volatility and insecurity of humanitarian crises.

Key consideration B

Use comparable cases as benchmarks when evaluating cost-effectiveness. However, recognise that suitable comparisons may be hard to find, especially in complex and rapidly evolving contexts.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Consider data access and potential difficulties in finding comparable cases when planning the evaluation and developing the evaluation questions. Facilitate access to relevant data.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Use the inception phase to explore what data is available. When comparing cases, apply a 'sensitivity analysis' to ensure suitability.²⁴

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Value-for-money study of VenEsperanza's response to the Venezuelan migrant crisis in Colombia (August 2022)

Background

The VenEsperanza Emergency Response Consortium operated from 2019 to 2022 to provide a joint response to the Venezuelan migrant crisis in Colombia. The consortium was led by Mercy Corps and also comprised the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children and World Vision. The programme provided emergency multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) to Venezuelan migrant families to cover their basic needs. This value-for-money study evaluates cost-efficiency, the cost structure and drivers of the programme (economy and efficiency), the effectiveness of the intervention (effectiveness), and the extent to which the programme objectives were met equitably (equity).

How the evaluation addresses efficiency

The study explores both cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness, i.e. cost per output and cost per outcome. It applies the Value for Money framework for an in-depth analysis that includes efficiency as one of several criteria.

To evaluate cost per output, the evaluation considers the cost-transfer ratio at consortium level, meaning the cost to deliver \$1 of MPCA to a household. The study breaks down the cost-transfer ratio per programme phase, e.g. targeting, distribution,

²⁴ For example, efficiency in contexts that are fragile and affected by conflict should only be compared with similarly challenging environments (OECD, 2021).

and monitoring. To evaluate the cost per outcome, the study considers two outcome indicators: the share of households that improved their capacity to meet their basic needs between baseline and endline; and the share of households that improved their food consumption. Data was collected through post-distribution monitoring tools. Outcome data is analysed relative to programme costs.

The study considers equity by analysing additional costs incurred to reach the highly vulnerable group of *caminantes* (migrants travelling by foot who lack economic resources and are exposed to protection risks). This illustrates the additional costs required per household to cover the needs of groups with additional vulnerabilities.

- By analysing costs at outcome level, the study draws nuanced conclusions on the quality of the response, specifically the degree to which the transfer value was sufficient to cover the basic needs of programme participants (an expected result of the response at outcome level).
- Integrating equity into the study provides valuable data and learning on the additional costs relative to reaching marginalised groups.

Source: Mercy Corps (2022).

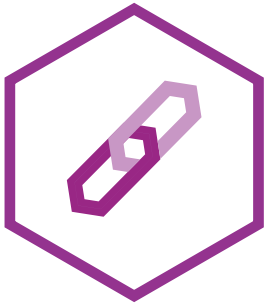
HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND EFFICIENCY

When considering how efficiently resources have been used, also consider the source of resources in relation to humanitarian principles. This may be a particular issue for financial resources (UNEG, 2024). For example, there are implications for independence and the potential instrumentalisation of assistance if humanitarian funding is provided by the government of a belligerent state, a state that supports one side in a conflict, or a state that has commercial interests or seeks influence in the area (ACF, 2013).

This is a sensitive issue. Explore whether the humanitarian actor's funding strategies take humanitarian principles into account. Are criteria applied to guide funding decisions and protect independence? In a deeply polarised conflict environment, pay attention to human resources and how staff composition is perceived by the population affected by the crisis and by other actors in terms of neutrality and independence.

Example evaluation question:

To what extent have humanitarian principles guided the deployment of resources, particularly funding?



CHAPTER 8

INTER-CONNECTION

DEFINITION

How does humanitarian action take account of the medium and longer term, and how does it connect with development and peacebuilding?

Inter-connection refers to the need to ensure that: a) short-term humanitarian action is designed, planned and implemented to take into account medium- and longer-term considerations; and b) humanitarian action connects appropriately to development and peacebuilding.²⁵

Note, ALNAP's 2006 *EHA guide* refers to connectedness. This is now replaced with the more commonly used term 'inter-connection', which can be more easily translated.

KEY MESSAGES

- Humanitarian programming is largely short-term in nature, but evaluations should consider how programming takes account of the medium and longer term. This temporal dimension is particularly important in protracted crises.
- The connection between humanitarian action and development and peacebuilding is the relational dimension. Forming an evaluative judgement on the nature and appropriateness of this connection depends on the context, issue and mandate of the humanitarian actors being evaluated.
- Both dimensions are important when evaluating partnerships between international and national humanitarian actors.

²⁵ Inter-connection is an additional criterion for EHA; it is not an OECD criterion. The temporal aspect draws on the definition in ALNAP's *EHA guide* (2006), with the relational dimension added to reflect the expectation that humanitarian actors engage with other actors to avoid a siloed approach, in the spirit of the triple nexus. Whereas the OECD considers the nexus in terms of internal coherence, inter-connection considers the external dimension.

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION

This criterion is specific to EHA, and it has two dimensions.

First, there is a *temporal dimension*. Humanitarian programmes are often short-term in their planning, funding and implementation. Use this criterion to evaluate if the medium and longer term are considered too.

For example, where humanitarian actors provide free relief services, do they also consider the impact on the medium- and longer-term provision of such services? This is especially important if medium- and longer-term provision are based on a cost-recovery model. This could affect services ranging from education and health to veterinary services and the provision of livestock drugs. Another example is how humanitarian actors engage with existing community institutions and processes. Where local committees are established to oversee targeting of humanitarian assistance, do they consider the medium-term implications of these new local structures replacing, duplicating or even ignoring existing structures? What are the medium- and longer-term implications of international humanitarian actors paying the salaries of public-sector health workers? To what extent is humanitarian action maintaining and strengthening the resilience of households, communities and institutions or undermining it?

Second, there is a *relational dimension*. Humanitarian action is rarely implemented alone, but instead alongside other development, human rights and peacebuilding work. What is the connection between different actors and their programming?

This dimension is particularly important when evaluating international humanitarian actors who make the strongest distinction between different types of action. Evaluate inter-connection to analyse environmental issues too. Has humanitarian action been informed by, and has it connected with, development actors engaged in environmental policy and programming – for example in the siting and management of IDP or refugee camps? Are environmental considerations of forest and water resources and potential degradation considered alongside factors such as security? How do international humanitarian actors engage with local stakeholders, who tend to be multi-dimensional and less likely to distinguish between humanitarian, development and other types of action, instead pivoting between modes of action according to changes in context and needs (McCommon et al, 2021; Buchanan-Smith, 2024).

WHEN TO SELECT INTER-CONNECTION

Inter-connection is particularly relevant when looking at the bigger picture, beyond meeting immediate needs. As so many humanitarian crises are protracted, the temporal dimension is key. This is especially true if little or no international development programming is in place, and if international humanitarian action fills gaps. Evaluate

inter-connection to explore if humanitarian actors consider medium-term implications and the wider context.

Apply this criterion to evaluate the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus. Consider if humanitarian programming reflects nexus ways of working, and whether action is underpinned by robust contextual analysis to guide what is appropriate.

The extent to which international humanitarian actors invest in knowledge exchange and support national actors fits under inter-connection. This is key to promoting locally led humanitarian action (see [Chapter 11](#)). Are international and national humanitarian actors supporting and developing civil society capacity with a longer-term perspective? Is the partnership simply contractual, focused on delivery in the short term? Do international actors recognise the multi-dimensional and multi-mandate nature of national NGOs?

HOW INTER-CONNECTION RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Inter-connection relates closely to effectiveness and impact, both of which may be enhanced or compromised by temporal and relational aspects. Effectiveness may be improved by humanitarian actors drawing on the knowledge and experience of development actors, and by connecting to existing structures and systems. For example, in new and large IDP settlements, engagement between humanitarian actors and those with long-term knowledge of and responsibility for water and sanitation management can ensure effective and sustainable service provision (see [Box 3: Sustainability and inter-connection](#)). On the other hand, failing to plan for an exit strategy to transition from free water services in a crisis to a cost-recovery model could compromise the medium- to longer-term impact of water provision.

BOX 3: SUSTAINABILITY AND INTER-CONNECTION

The OECD defines sustainability as ‘the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue’ (OECD, 2019: 12). In short, will the benefits last?

There are economic, financial, social and environmental dimensions to sustainability (OECD, 2019). You may consider sustainability under the inter-connection criterion or substitute inter-connection for sustainability.

Note that sustainability is not a relevant question, or criterion, for all humanitarian action. If evaluating the protection and provision of services to refugees fleeing conflict across a border, for example, it may not be appropriate to ask if the benefits will last. Instead, ask to what extent longer-term and durable solutions are being considered. For the sustainability of emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions provided by international actors in response to a cholera outbreak, ask what will happen when they withdraw. Has sufficient local capacity been built and is there an appropriate exit plan?

For example, in UNHCR's Country Strategy Evaluation in South Sudan in 2022/23, there is an evaluation question on sustainability that covers both government capacity and environmental considerations: *To what extent has handover to the Government of refugee management and care been effectively considered including in relation to capacity development, and deployment of climate-friendly sustainable structures?*²⁶

The World Food Programme's (WFP) (2023a) evaluation of its Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) in Algeria embeds the concept of sustainability within an evaluation question on the triple nexus. It asks: *To what extent has the ICSP facilitated and capitalised on strategic linkages on the humanitarian, development and peace nexus?* The evaluation focuses on support to the Sahrawi refugee population in Algeria, one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world that dates back to the 1970s. In the evaluation, the concept of sustainability is implicit rather than explicit. It is explored through support for sustainable resilience activities for refugees, which mainly focuses on livelihoods. It notes tensions in pursuing sustainable resilience activities, ranging from political aspects that relate to refugee caseloads, to technical, funding and environmental aspects. The evaluation recommends how to promote the sustainability of (mostly livelihood-oriented) 'complementary activities' (WFP, 2023a).

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

A narrow view of crises as discrete emergencies – rather than recurring cycles of seasonal shocks or repeated displacement – can overlook historical memory and long-term local knowledge. By relying solely on project reports or data collected during a narrow window, your analysis may bias institutional timelines and erase valuable insights from those with lived experience across generations.

Be attentive to the ways communities affected by crisis situate humanitarian assistance within historical narratives. Do these narratives account for how trust, fatigue or hope have accumulated over time? Explore how humanitarian assistance has affected the community's ability to imagine and shape their own futures – not just whether they have 'transitioned' effectively from relief to recovery.

26 See UNHCR 'Terms of Reference Country Strategy Evaluation South Sudan 2018-22' (UNHCR, 2023b).

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Consult a diverse range of stakeholders, including development, human rights and peacebuilding representatives, plus those involved in long-term public services alongside emergency providers.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Plan for wide consultation so adequate time and resources are allocated. Reflect this in the TOR.

Consider the team composition, and whether to broaden skills and experience beyond humanitarian.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Map stakeholders during the evaluation's inception phase, so actors across different spheres are consulted.

Select the most appropriate ways to consult different stakeholders – from online surveys to focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

Key consideration B

You may have to reach an evaluative judgement of whether the relationship between humanitarian and other actors, and their respective programming, is appropriate. This will likely be determined by the context, nature and mandate of the actors being evaluated.²⁷

Methodological implications for commissioners

Clarify organisational policies and frameworks to be used as the reference point to determine if the relationship between humanitarian action and other development action is appropriate and aligns (see section on Humanitarian principles and inter-connection).

Methodological implications for evaluators

Obtain wide-ranging perspectives on the nature and appropriateness of the relationship between humanitarian and other actors.

Ensure familiarity with the reference points to use.

Use evidence from other contexts to draw conclusions on what constitutes an appropriate relationship between humanitarian and other actors.

²⁷ In some highly politicised contexts, humanitarian actors may maintain a distance to respect the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality. In other protracted crises, they may work closely with development actors to ensure the short-term provision of emergency and protection services links to medium- and longer-term systems and services.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the humanitarian response in Somalia (March 2025)

Background

The IAHE of the humanitarian response in Somalia was launched in November 2023. It evaluates the collective response of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members throughout 2022–2024 to drought response and famine prevention in the protracted humanitarian crisis in Somalia, and provides feedback on the implementation of the Humanitarian Country Team's ongoing reforms. The IAHE was undertaken as a learning exercise and to strengthen accountability.

How the evaluation addresses inter-connection and the nexus

The evaluation analyses both temporal and relational aspects. It asks: How well did the humanitarian response link to development efforts and invest in resilience? And it asks an overarching question: How well coordinated and led was the response and what other factors influenced the quality and scale of the response?

The evaluation explores if the stated longer-term objective of sustaining lives and building resilience was upheld in practice. It pays attention to funding allocations, feedback from interviewees, and the prioritisation of short-term life-saving humanitarian activities over future structural vulnerabilities.

The evaluation finds evidence that short-term assistance had both positive and negative effects on resilience. It enabled people affected by the crisis to repay debt, but targeting approaches created incentives for those displaced and living in more durable sites to move to newly established sites. This undermined longer-term efforts to build resilience. Community members shared the view that humanitarian assistance should focus on sustainable solutions rather than short-term relief.

The evaluation recommends how short-term life-saving assistance can contribute to longer-term goals.

Source: IAHE (2025).

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND INTER-CONNECTION

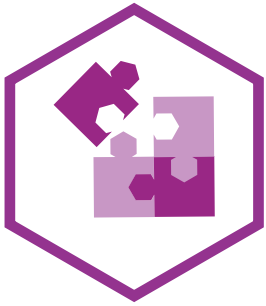
Independence and neutrality are particularly pertinent to inter-connection and to the relational dimension of this criterion.

Ask to what extent and how is the relationship between humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors guided by humanitarian principles, and how and why have compromises and trade-offs been made? Consider the relationship between humanitarian actors and the respective authority (including government), where that authority is party to the conflict. For example, have development priorities taken precedence over the independence of humanitarian action? What are the implications for negotiating and securing operational access to those in need, and thus for the principles of humanity and impartiality?

Explore how operational humanitarian actors are perceived by the population affected by crisis in terms of their independence. This may include the independence of humanitarian actors from donor governments and foreign policy objectives. It relates to the principle of neutrality and being perceived as not taking sides. See UNEG (2024) for examples.

Example evaluation question (adapted from UN Women, 2019):

How has the organisation managed its partnerships and relationships to ensure its humanitarian action is (and is perceived as) independent and neutral?



CHAPTER 9

COHERENCE

DEFINITION

How complementary, coordinated and consistent is humanitarian action across different actors?

Coherence refers to: a) complementarity and coordination of humanitarian action between actors engaged in humanitarian work; and b) alignment with and consistency between policies and standards, both at organisational and system-wide levels.²⁸

KEY MESSAGES

- Coordination is key to the operational dimension of coherence, to ensure humanitarian actors add value and avoid duplication so that the whole of the humanitarian response is 'greater than the sum of its parts'.
- Complementarity between internationally led and locally led humanitarian action pays attention to power imbalances in the humanitarian system, and how this can constrain or disadvantage local leadership and agency.
- To evaluate the policy dimension of coherence, explore if humanitarian action aligns with international and national policies, if policies and standards are consistent, and how tensions between them have been managed in practice.

²⁸ This definition differs significantly from that in ALNAP's 2006 *EHA guide*, which is rooted in the response to the Rwanda crisis in 1996 where the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR) concluded that international humanitarian action was a substitute for international political inaction (Borton et al, 1996). In that edition, coherence focuses on consistency between security, developmental, trade and military policies with humanitarian policy. This is outdated and inconsistent with principled humanitarian action. Stakeholders consulted for this 2025 edition requested an updated definition and guidance, unpacking what the criterion means. OECD first used the coherence criterion for development and humanitarian evaluation in 2019.

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION

The coherence criterion encourages a systemic approach to evaluation, rather than a limited programmatic or institution-centric perspective.²⁹ This means understanding how humanitarian action by one actor relates to the wider system – sectorally, by country and globally.

Evaluate complementarity (see [Box 4: Complementarity](#)) at the operational or programmatic level between humanitarian action *by different actors* and *for different groups* affected by crisis. Have different actors added value and avoided duplication? This may include humanitarian advocacy. Coordination is key to achieving this (see [Box 5: Coordination](#)). Explore how internationally led and nationally or locally led humanitarian action complement each other (see [Chapter 11](#)).

BOX 4: COMPLEMENTARITY

Complementarity, usually between international and national or local humanitarian actors, means understanding and leveraging the different strengths and capabilities of each to create a more effective humanitarian response overall.

For example, in advocacy for protection, national actors usually have better access to national interlocutors, and a deeper understanding of the context and dynamics. They will remain after international actors have withdrawn. International actors may have better access to regional and international platforms and interlocutors, and greater access to funding. It is important that international protection advocacy efforts neither overlook nor undermine national and local advocacy efforts (Davies and Spencer, 2022).

BOX 5: COORDINATION

Coordination is sometimes promoted as a criterion in its own right (ALNAP, 2016), or it is evaluated under effectiveness (ALNAP, 2006). However, we include it here, because evaluating coordination is critical to understanding coherence with a systemic lens.

Evaluate coordination to understand if humanitarian action implemented by different actors promotes synergy, and avoids gaps and duplication (ALNAP, 2016).

²⁹ This is also reflected in the OECD definition of coherence.

Also evaluate coordination of humanitarian advocacy. Coordination may be evaluated at different levels – sectorally, inter-sectorally, within a particular group of actors (e.g. UN agencies or a confederation of NGOs), or across an entire humanitarian response. Coordination is a key issue in inter-agency evaluations.

You can also evaluate coherence at a policy level. How do organisations (individually or collectively) align their humanitarian action with their own policies and standards, or with those of the humanitarian system? Look at consistency between policies and standards and explore synergies or tensions between policy areas. For example, an international humanitarian actor may commit to humanitarian principles, and also have a policy on working across and linking its humanitarian, development and peacebuilding pillars. In some contexts, however, following the principle of neutrality requires maintaining distance from peacebuilding actors and from actors who are party to the conflict. Evaluate how the respective humanitarian actor(s) recognises and manages this tension. Your findings could inform and influence policy revision.

Evaluate how humanitarian actors engage with relevant policies of the government of the country affected by the crisis. Your line of enquiry may vary from one context to another. For example, where the crisis is triggered by a natural hazard such as flooding or drought, or where a government's refugee policy follows the International Refugee Convention, evaluate the extent to which the humanitarian actor aligns with government policy. In other contexts, where a government is party to the conflict and/or obstructing operational access by humanitarian actors to those affected by the crisis, an appropriate line of enquiry might relate to advocacy with government about its obligations under International Humanitarian Law.

WHEN TO SELECT COHERENCE

Coherence is particularly relevant for multi-agency/inter-agency evaluations. Here, explore the extent to which different actors coordinate and complement one another's work rather than duplicate and/or compete.

Coherence is also important when evaluating international support to locally led humanitarian action. Explore if and how humanitarian action by these different actors is complementary, and how the respective comparative advantage of each is taken into account, including knowledge and capacity (see [section 11.2 Locally led humanitarian action](#)).

You can also use the coherence criterion for a single-agency evaluation. If that organisation has multiple mandates, evaluate coherence between its internal policies and system-wide standards. Also analyse if the organisation coordinates with other agencies to add value and avoid duplication.

HOW COHERENCE RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Coherence relates most closely to inter-connection. Note, the two criteria can be confused, especially if these concepts do not translate easily into different languages. The key distinction is that inter-connection evaluates the nature of the relationship *between different types of actors* (humanitarian, human rights, development, peacebuilding etc), and coherence focuses on coordination *between humanitarian actors*. Coherence also evaluates consistency and how tensions are managed at policy level.

Coherence relates to effectiveness and impact too. If an overall humanitarian response is coordinated well within a functioning system, an individual humanitarian actor can take more effective humanitarian action, with the prospect for greater positive impact. To evaluate transformational change, take a systemic approach focusing on relationships and interactions within a system rather than individual components. This is also important for evaluating environmental issues – for example, has the design and coordination of an entire humanitarian response minimised or avoided potential negative environmental effects and promoted resilience? Evaluate the contribution of individual humanitarian actors within that overall analysis.

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

In evaluating coherence, assess not just alignment with international frameworks, but also how well humanitarian action respects and reinforces local capacities and knowledge. Do the policies that humanitarian actors align with make sense to partners and communities affected by crisis?

Reflect on how your positionality might reinforce dominant narratives or overlook local knowledge. Bias towards formal institutions, for example, can marginalise informal, community-led efforts that are coherent within their context.

Question assumptions that international actors naturally take the lead, especially when their policies override national ones. In some crises, international agencies establish parallel coordination systems, sidelining local authorities and weakening long-term capacity. Or they may influence national systems – such as advocating for the integration of humanitarian cash transfers into social protection frameworks.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Coherence is a complex concept that may not translate easily across languages and cultures.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Identify which of the two dimensions of coherence are key to the evaluation. If evaluating operational coherence, clarify at which level (sectorally, inter-sectorally,

across organisations) and if this includes coherence of advocacy too. For policy coherence, identify the policies and standards against which humanitarian action will be evaluated. To what extent, and how, should the evaluation focus on engagement with government policy, and at what level – national or local?

Explore how best to translate 'coherence' into other languages, using different terminology if necessary.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Unpack coherence during the inception phase. For example, for policy coherence, identify potential contradictions and tensions between policies and standards. Assess if it is possible in a time-limited evaluation to analyse how tensions have been managed in practice and the consequences. If evaluating engagement with government policy, clarify the appropriate line of enquiry, e.g. alignment with government policy and/or advocacy on government policy.

Key consideration B

There are many different perspectives on what constitutes complementarity between international and locally led humanitarian action. This can make it difficult to reach an evaluative judgement.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Identify policies and standards on supporting locally led humanitarian action that provide a reference point. Such frameworks may help the evaluation team conduct its analysis and reach an evaluative judgement.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Recognise the power dynamics within the humanitarian system when evaluating complementarity. For example, if international actors have greater access to financial resources, they are likely to set the relationship between international and locally led humanitarian action. How do local actors experience this? Ensure their perspectives are heard and considered in reaching an evaluative judgement.

Key consideration C

Evaluating the nature and quality of coordination is about outcome as well as process.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Formulate questions that address both process (how effectively coordination mechanisms have worked) and outcome (how coordination has contributed to collaboration and avoided duplication).

Methodological implications for evaluators

Talk to humanitarian actors and ensure meaningful consultation with different groups amongst the population affected by crisis. This will provide key perspectives on whether humanitarian action by different actors has been harmonised, and the consequences.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Review of regional coordination mechanisms in response to mixed movements in the LAC region (July 2024)

Background

This inter-agency study applies OECD criteria to examine interagency coordination mechanisms used to respond to mixed movements in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and how coordination can be improved.

How the study addresses coordination

The study maps and analyses regional inter-institutional coordination mechanisms against a number of criteria (e.g. mandate, target population, leadership etc), using a consultative and participatory approach. It analyses strategic planning, advocacy, fundraising strategies, information management, and response monitoring and outcomes across the coordination mechanisms, and it explores awareness of the different coordination mechanisms.

- The study examines complementarity between regional and national coordination mechanisms.
- It also analyses how coordination mechanisms have taken into account the inclusivity of different actors, highlighting good practice and neglected groups. It explores the participation of local actors, including their adoption of coordination mechanisms.
- While the TOR does not mention governance specifically, the study finds that the governance of different coordination mechanisms affects complementarity between mechanisms and inclusivity.

Source: IECAH (2024).

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement (2019 to 2023) (February 2024)

Background

This global thematic evaluation addresses relevance, effectiveness, connectedness, coherence and strategic positioning to inform UNHCR's policies and operational approach to internal displacement. Primarily a formative evaluation, it has elements of a summative evaluation and normative enquiry.

How the study addresses policy coherence

The evaluation asks: *To what extent is UNHCR working in line with its 2019 UNHCR IDP policy?* It draws on four in-depth country case studies and five light-touch country reviews.

- The evaluation assesses the role of policies and guidance in clarifying UNHCR's responsibilities and commitments on internal displacement.
- It identifies inconsistencies in the application of the 2019 IDP policy and the reasons behind this, including resource constraints and context.
- It highlights that policy provisions require clearer guidance for effective implementation, and efforts are needed to strengthen staff support (e.g. training) and to enhance senior management accountability – such as through performance appraisals.

Source: UNHCR (2024).

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND COHERENCE

The coherence criterion fits well with humanitarian principles. The policy dimension provides a space to explore consistency and/or trade-offs between policies, including in how humanitarian principles have been applied.

A strong understanding of context is key, particularly the political economy of the humanitarian crisis and response, to appreciate challenges to principled humanitarian action and different trade-offs required.

WFP's evaluation of its Level 3 response in north-east Nigeria demonstrates this well (WFP, 2019).

Example overarching evaluation question (drawing on WFP, 2019):

How were the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence applied in the response?

Sub-questions:

To what extent were humanitarian principles applied in all phases of the programme cycle?

How were trade-offs between humanitarian principles managed?



CHAPTER 10

IMPACT

DEFINITION

What are the higher-level and transformative effects of humanitarian action?

Impact examines the effects of humanitarian action from individual and household levels, through to macro and systemic changes to societies. Beyond immediate effects, impact captures the unintended, varied and collective effects of humanitarian action – positive or negative, in the short, medium or long term.

KEY MESSAGES

- Impact means different things to different people. Consider the diverse perspectives of people affected by crisis and the goals of humanitarian actors, ensuring impact captures what truly matters to those affected most by crises.
- Effectiveness evaluates the achievement of the immediate results of humanitarian action; impact evaluates what these achievements (or non-achievements) mean over time at individual, household, community and societal levels.

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF CRITERION

Impact examines the high-level and transformative effects of humanitarian action. This includes social, economic and environmental consequences that unfold over time and

that affect individuals, communities and institutions differently. This aligns with the OECD definition of impact as the 'transformative effect of an intervention' or the extent to which it brings 'holistic and enduring changes' (OECD, 2019: 64).

In essence, the immediate objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives, alleviate suffering and protect people's dignity. Use the impact criterion to explore the extent to which humanitarian actors' efforts reduce the needs, risks and vulnerabilities of people affected by crisis, or the reverse. For example, in humanitarian response to severe flooding, cash assistance or psychosocial support can lower stress, improve food security, reduce negative coping strategies and, potentially, enhance household resilience to withstand future disasters. These are measurable and important outcomes that could lead to sustainable change – impact.

First consider the context, informed by analysis of the needs and priorities of affected people. Second, consider the overall objectives of humanitarian action. What constitutes impact can emerge from discussions with people affected by crisis and other stakeholders, and/or your review of context. Impacts can be:

- **unintended:** Pay close attention to unintended impacts, both positive and negative. Focus especially on negative impacts that could be significant. This includes, but is not limited to, environmental impacts (see [section 11.3 Environment and climate crisis](#)) and unintended effects on vulnerable or marginalised groups. Assess any potential to fuel grievances or tensions between groups and other behavioural effects of humanitarian assistance.
- **varied:** Consider the extent to which outcomes and impacts have varied between different people, groups and communities. Prioritise the voices of communities affected by crisis in your evaluation (see [section 11.1 Putting people affected by crisis at the centre](#)).
- **collective:** Consider the collective (and sometimes cumulative) impact of multiple humanitarian actors within a context (see also [Chapter 8: Inter-connection](#)). It is very difficult to isolate the impact of one actor. For example, explore the synergy between different humanitarian programmes and policies, and whether they contribute to overarching goals to improve the well-being of people affected by crisis or strengthen local institutions (see [section 11.2 Locally led humanitarian action](#)).

Note, however, that indirect, varied and collective impacts such as changes in socioeconomic and political processes may take many months or even years to become apparent. Other impacts can be detected and measured in a shorter timeframe at the individual, household and even community level. Determine the timeframe to be evaluated.

WHEN TO SELECT IMPACT

Impact is key to understanding if humanitarian action is truly making a meaningful difference, especially from the perspective of those affected by crisis. Use it to uncover

indirect positive or negative transformative effects, especially on vulnerable and marginalised people, groups and communities, or on the environment. Evaluate impact to ensure that humanitarian actors adhere to the principle to 'Do No Harm' by identifying and mitigating potential harm or the exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities.

BOX 6: IMPACT EVALUATION

Impact provides a conceptual lens to evaluate high-level and transformative effects of humanitarian action. Impact evaluation attributes observed changes (usually at the individual or community level) to specific humanitarian programmes or projects, using a counterfactual. Thus, it establishes that humanitarian action has directly caused these outcomes.

Impact evaluation and the impact criterion can serve complementary purposes – it is the level of analysis and methods that usually differ. Manage expectations among all stakeholders of what is technically feasible for the depth of outcome and impact analysis. This guides your evaluation approach and cost implications.

HOW IMPACT RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Use the effectiveness criterion to evaluate what immediate effects have been achieved and for whom. Use the impact criterion to explore the consequences of those achievements – or the lack thereof. In other words, effectiveness tells us what has been accomplished; impact asks so what?

For example, in a cash assistance programme, use effectiveness to assess how populations affected by crisis have used the money – e.g. if families have been able to afford nutritious meals. Use impact to examine if this has led to broader changes – improved nutrition among the targeted population, enhanced well-being or stronger local economies.

Importantly, examining impact also opens up questions about the sustainability of humanitarian outcomes (see [Box 3](#)). It prompts us to consider if positive changes – improved well-being or local economic recovery – have been short-lived or have contributed to longer-term benefits for populations affected by crisis. Understanding these dynamics can help identify the types of support that are more likely to lead to lasting change, even beyond the immediate crisis response.

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

Reflect on how your own identities, assumptions and institutional mandates shape what you consider to be 'impactful'. Is the presentation of impact primarily shaped by a desire to demonstrate organisational success – potentially at the expense of acknowledging complex or uncomfortable outcomes? This ties to the bias of adopting deficit-based

framings when reporting broader or transformative effects. Be alert to when you unintentionally reinforce stereotypes, such as portraying communities affected by crisis primarily as vulnerable, passive or dependent.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Consider the inherent limitations of assessing attribution or even contribution, given the chaotic, complex and interconnected nature of humanitarian action. Multiple actors and external factors influence impact.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Consider commissioning a multi-agency evaluation to look at outcomes and impact.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Explore how you can map pathways of contribution or attribution. Be transparent around methodological limitations.

Assess stakeholder perspectives on the primary objectives of the action and higher-level impacts. Are these reflected in the theory of change/programme model? This will become a roadmap to examine either programme contribution or attribution to results from a short-, medium- or long-term perspective.

Key consideration B

Scarce data (e.g. lack of baseline data or high-quality monitoring data) often limits assessments of the impact of humanitarian action.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Specify data requirements for evaluations in the inception phase, ensuring necessary data is collected and available. Consider alternative sources of data (e.g. administrative data, geospatial data, household surveys with GIS referencing).

Methodological implications for evaluators

Complement secondary data analysis with context-sensitive and trauma-informed methods (e.g. life histories, life journals) where people affected by crisis can recall their previous situation and how it has changed. This is important in all evaluation methods, and particularly when discussing impact. People may need to reflect on difficult past events to illustrate change.

Triangulate data with other sources for a comprehensive picture and address potential biases (e.g. memory distortions).

Unintended impacts on an affected population may not be obvious to an external evaluator, hence engage with local people, including those from affected populations, to identify and understand such impacts.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Final evaluation of emergency health care services provision for Syrian refugees in Jordan (2021)

Background

Islamic Relief Worldwide commissioned an evaluation of its Healthcare Aid for Syrian Refugees in Jordan project. This provided Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians with access to primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare, including haemodialysis services for end-stage renal disease patients. The project also sought to raise health awareness in the community to reduce mortality and improve overall health outcomes.

How the evaluation addresses varied and unintended impacts

The evaluation analyses multiple dimensions of impact: long-term impacts, impacts across sub-groups (varied) and unintended impacts.

- Using data from surveys and focus group discussions, it assesses if the project created long-lasting and transformational effects for participants. Many patients experienced notable improvements in health following surgical support.
- Statistical significance tests at the 90% confidence level identify differences in outcomes across sub-groups (e.g. nationality, age, gender).
- The evaluation shows unintended impacts, particularly increased awareness about COVID-19. Participants were initially hesitant about vaccines or sceptical of the virus, but many felt reassured and more informed having attended healthcare and awareness sessions. Trust in medical staff shifted perceptions and increased vaccine uptake during the pandemic.

Source: *Phoenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies (2022)*.

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND IMPACT

This criterion provides an opportunity to evaluate the wider impact of humanitarian actors adopting (or failing to adopt) a principled approach. Just as it is easier to evaluate the collective impact of multiple humanitarian actors versus single actors, so it is easier to evaluate the impact of principled humanitarian action across the whole response, for example in an inter-agency humanitarian evaluation. However, it is difficult to build sufficient evidence to identify conclusively the wider impact of principled humanitarian action, or of trade-offs made. In-depth research may be more appropriate in some contexts.

At a minimum, explore if and how humanitarian principles have been built into the theory of change. How was principled humanitarian action expected to have an impact? Or has this been overlooked?

Example evaluation question for a joint inter-agency humanitarian evaluation:

To what extent has there been collective effort to follow humanitarian principles, and what has been the overall impact?

CHAPTER 11

PRIORITY THEMES

This chapter presents three priority themes and how to intentionally include them in evaluation of humanitarian action. The priority themes provide additional lenses through which to evaluate humanitarian action, and they complement the criteria (see [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) for the rationale and definition of priority themes).

11.1 PUTTING PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS AT THE CENTRE

KEY MESSAGES

- Humanitarian actors have committed to put people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action, but deep-rooted power imbalances hinder how actors apply this in practice. Consequently, humanitarian action often fails to align with the needs and priorities of those who actors seek to assist.
- Pay particular attention to the quality of engagement, including cultural sensitivity and dynamics of power and trust between humanitarian actors and communities. Explore whether the perspectives of people affected by crisis have been listened to and acted upon.
- Put affected people at the centre in evaluation. Consider carefully who should be involved and for what purpose, how they will participate at each step of the evaluation process, and what benefits they reap.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Humanitarian actors have long committed to put people affected by crisis at the centre, as emphasised in different standards and frameworks. Humanitarian actors should seek out and value the diverse knowledge and experiences of people affected by crisis. They

should actively listen to understand what matters most to affected people and ensure that decisions are based on their needs and perspectives. It is especially important that humanitarian action recognises the inherent agency of affected people and that humanitarian actors understand, respect and build upon what people are already doing positively for themselves in a crisis context.

Many humanitarian organisations and evaluators continue to face challenges in ensuring they are led by the priorities of people affected by crisis. And this reflects fundamental and deep-rooted power imbalances within the humanitarian system (ALNAP, 2022; Doherty, 2023). Opportunities are missed for genuine community engagement; there is a lack of accountability to affected people; and humanitarian programmes, policies and measures of success do not fully align with the needs and priorities of those they aim to assist.

INTENTIONAL USE OF THE PRIORITY THEME IN EVALUATION

KEY AREAS OF ENQUIRY

Follow key areas of enquiry to evaluate the extent to which humanitarian action is driven by the priorities of people affected by crisis.

- **Agency and decision-making:** Evaluate the extent to which people affected by crisis have been able to influence decisions made by humanitarian actors throughout the response. Look for concrete ways that humanitarian actors have been led by or have responded to affected peoples' preferences and priorities in a timely manner.
- **Quality engagement and communication:** Evaluate the nature of the relationship between humanitarian actors and affected people, and especially the different ways humanitarian actors have sought to listen to, and address, their concerns. This includes efforts to engage with diverse groups, such as youth, older people, women, children, persons living with disability and ethnic groups. Assess cultural sensitivity and dynamics of power and trust between humanitarian actors and communities, and the ways humanitarian actors have observed the principle to 'Do No Harm'.
- **Results and resources:** Evaluate the extent to which the success of humanitarian action is judged by its effectiveness in involving affected people in decision-making and in responding to their concerns and feedback. Look for evidence that indicators of effectiveness have been identified by affected people as well as by humanitarian actors. Has community engagement been included as a specific outcome indicator, or prioritised by leadership? Have sufficient resources – funding, personnel and time – been allocated to facilitate meaningful participation of affected populations in decision-making processes?
- **Coordination and collaboration:** Review systems and partnerships between humanitarian actors put in place to better meet the needs of affected people and reduce the burden of data collection. Assess the extent to which humanitarian actors have shared data, coordinated communication efforts and engaged with communities.

Have assessments been harmonised to minimise disruption and provide more coherent and accessible support to affected populations?

Source: This draws on several frameworks and guidelines, such as the CHS (2024). See also [Annex 3](#).

BOX 7: PUTTING PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS AT THE CENTRE OF THE EHA PROCESS

It is a well-established principle and standard of practice to engage affected people as integral partners in the EHA process. Many resources, including evaluation standards and guidelines, emphasise the ethical and practical imperative of engaging with communities in a meaningful way (see ALNAP, 2016; UNEG, 2016b; De Mel et al, 2023). Such engagement can span from co-design through to analysis and ensuring that affected communities benefit from the evaluation outcomes.

Central to this approach is the careful consideration of who should be involved, for what purpose, how they will participate at each stage, and the benefits they will reap. Yet achieving this in practice – especially when resources are constrained – remains a challenge. See [Further reading](#) for additional resources on this theme.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Logistical and sociocultural barriers in humanitarian contexts can make it difficult to ensure that evaluations include voices from all segments of the population affected by crisis, including marginalised and vulnerable people, groups or communities.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Set clear expectations in the TOR for inclusive engagement and allocate sufficient time and resources in the evaluation plan to reach diverse groups.

Support evaluators to navigate sociocultural barriers and provide flexibility for adaptive methods.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Identify and implement inclusive data collection methods tailored to different groups. Consider power dynamics among community members (i.e. only the most powerful voices may be heard in group meetings; one-to-one interviews with a carefully chosen interviewer in a private setting may enable openness and honesty).

To facilitate participation, collaborate with local actors from diverse segments of the affected population who have established trust within the community. Define the criteria and process for selecting these local representatives, to ensure transparency and inclusivity. Report on barriers encountered and how they have been addressed.

Key consideration B

Power dynamics between evaluators, humanitarian agencies and people affected by crisis can influence openness and honesty of feedback provided.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure that the TOR emphasises ethical considerations and includes protocols to protect the rights and dignity of participants.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Create a safe environment for people affected by crisis to share openly. Be explicit about who has access to the data, how results and/or recommendations will be validated or shared with affected people (if feasible), and how sensitive information will be protected.

Key consideration C

The dissemination of evaluation findings – and, ideally, management responses – to communities affected by crisis is a key component of accountability and feedback in EHA. This component needs to be covered in both the budget and the TOR.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Include dissemination of evaluation findings to affected communities as a mandatory requirement in the TOR and allocate a budget. Monitor and support the implementation of these activities to ensure affected communities receive and understand the evaluation outcomes.

Plan dissemination strategies at the inception phase and ensure that communities have a say on the best way to ensure the evaluation process and outcomes are accessible and culturally sensitive.

Develop tailored communication strategies to share findings, for example visual summaries, community meetings or local radio broadcasts.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Lobby the commissioner of the evaluation to include this component in the EHA process, discussing benefits and trade-offs if not done.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of UNHCR's Mauritania country strategy 2020–2022 (October 2023)

Background

While national in scope, UNHCR's country strategy evaluation focuses on key intervention areas in Mauritania, including Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and the Mbera camp and its surroundings in the Bassikounou municipality. The evaluation assesses strategic relevance, coherence and effectiveness, exploring how and for whom interventions have contributed to improved outcomes. It examines if UNHCR's structures and capacities are fit for purpose, with recommendations for improvements.

How the evaluation puts people affected by crisis at the centre

The evaluation pilots an adapted version of the International Association for Public Participation's 'spectrum of public participation' tool. This supports a shift away from traditional consultation methods towards more meaningful involvement and collaboration with affected populations – particularly refugees.

From the outset, the evaluation team mapped refugee-led organisations (RLOs) and camp governance structures in Mbera camp, and they included local evaluators in the team. In the inception phase, the refugee camp coordinator was interviewed to ensure early input into the evaluation design. In the data collection phase, RLOs and other refugee representatives were consulted directly. The analysis phase was particularly participatory – RLO representatives in Mbera camp co-validated the findings and co-created recommendations in a workshop. Refugees were also engaged in the reporting phase as co-recipients of final recommendations on camp governance, shelter and camp service provision. Young refugees contributed to a video summarising the evaluation's key messages.

Despite these gains, the evaluation process faced limitations. Urban refugees had less structured representation and were less involved, partly due to budget constraints. Similarly, host communities had limited engagement. Efforts to include a refugee representative in the formal Evaluation Reference Group faced barriers related to cultural expectations, power imbalances and resource constraints. Lack of participation in the post-report management response process highlights an ongoing challenge in closing the accountability loop to people affected by crisis.

- The evaluation uses a structured participation tool, enabling a more predictable, inclusive evaluation process. This enhanced the quality of engagement and accountability to affected populations.
- More participatory approaches require additional time and resources, but they help rebalance power dynamics. They position affected people not just as data sources but as partners in shaping humanitarian decision-making that affects their lives.

Source: UNHCR (2023c).

11.2 LOCALLY LED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

KEY MESSAGES

- Evaluation is important to explore local actors' leadership (or lack thereof) in humanitarian action. Analyse the structural and operational barriers that limit the influence of local actors and recommend how these can be overcome. Actively engage local actors in the EHA process to comprehensively understand humanitarian action.
- Local actors are not a homogeneous group; they operate with different priorities and relationships within their communities. Consider how these variations influence their ability to lead humanitarian efforts, how they relate to the population affected by crisis, and whether certain groups face barriers to participation or resources.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Locally led humanitarian action ensures that crisis response is shaped by those closest to the affected population and their needs, and that action leverages local capacities and leadership. It strengthens existing community structures rather than bypasses them. For both local and international actors, this means aligning efforts with, and reinforcing, local systems. This means working with community structures on protection issues, partnering with local health clinics for medical support, and supporting disability-led organisations to ensure inclusive and accessible livelihoods.

It is crucial to recognise the diverse roles of local actors. Many are deeply embedded in their communities and well-positioned to respond to local needs, but their approaches and priorities can vary. It is especially important in conflict-related crises to understand how their positionality can influence who receives humanitarian assistance – and who is excluded. In some cases, local actors may exclude certain groups based on factors like ethnicity and/or they may have motivations other than humanitarian ones.

Understanding how affected people perceive different actors is also critical. Integrate these perspectives in your evaluation (see [Methodological implications](#)) to gain a more nuanced view of locally led humanitarian action and its impact on communities.

BOX 8: IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN DEFINING LOCAL ACTORS

The term 'local actor' often overlooks the diversity of organisations and individuals who originate from and actively contribute to humanitarian action and development within a given country (noting that many local actors do not differentiate between humanitarian and development in the way that international actors do).

In this guide, we use 'local actor' to mean institutions originating from, based and operating within the local context of reference, comprising citizens subject to local laws, and whose work centres on local communities. They include those working at national, regional and local levels, and they encompass government institutions, local authorities, the private sector, civil society organisations, and formal and informal community-led groups.

INTENTIONAL USE OF THE PRIORITY THEME IN EVALUATION

KEY AREAS OF ENQUIRY

Follow key areas of enquiry to evaluate locally led humanitarian action. Assess which areas of enquiry are most appropriate according to the nature of humanitarian action, key issues and challenges arising, and the scope and scale of your evaluation.

- **Ownership, leadership and influence:** Explore the extent to which humanitarian action is locally owned and influenced at all stages of the humanitarian response. If international support was available, examine if international humanitarian actors have supported local leadership. Consider variations in local actors' values, priorities and power dynamics, and how this shapes their leadership and relationships with affected communities (e.g. their role in the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups in receiving assistance).
- **Knowledge and capacity exchange:** Evaluate how all humanitarian actors promote knowledge and capacity exchange with each other, whether international or local. Assess whether knowledge-sharing is reciprocal or one-directional, the extent to which capacity support is demand-driven, and how well it aligns with local priorities.
- **Funding:** Investigate the quantity and quality of humanitarian funding directed towards local and national actors from different sources – international and national. Analyse the flexibility, adequacy and duration of funding, and whether it adequately supports overhead costs and risks faced by local actors.

- **Partnerships:** Evaluate the quality of partnerships between local actors (e.g. local organisations often forge partnerships with other local actors such as community-based organisations), and between international and local actors. Assess how these partnerships are formed, negotiated and maintained, and the extent to which they foster equitable collaboration, risk-sharing and mutual respect.
- **Visibility and recognition:** Examine how humanitarian action contributes to increasing the visibility and recognition of local actors' work in the response. Evaluate if local actors are acknowledged publicly in ways they deem appropriate and that do no harm, and how their role is represented in reports, media and policy discussions.
- **Coordination and complementarity:** Examine the extent to which humanitarian coordination mechanisms promote and reinforce local leadership, including organisations and groups representing the marginalised and vulnerable. Analyse whether humanitarian action builds on existing coordination mechanisms between local actors.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

A clear definition of what constitutes 'local' ensures consistency among stakeholders. It also acknowledges the diversity of local actors, avoiding oversimplification.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure that local actors are involved in defining locally led humanitarian action and how it can be evaluated.

Allocate sufficient financial and logistical resources for meaningful local actor participation at each stage of the evaluation, from design to interpretation of findings.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Work with commissioners and local stakeholders to refine the definition of 'local' in practice. Adapt the definition to different settings within a single evaluation to capture varied forms of local leadership.

Resist homogenising local actors and instead capture their diverse roles, capacities and relationships with national, regional and international actors.

Key consideration B

Assessing local leadership – whether local actors have accessed sufficient resources and if the partnership has allowed equitable collaboration – requires careful attention. Shifts in influence and power dynamics manifest subtly and may not be discussed openly.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure the evaluation process is designed to create safe, confidential spaces for local actors to share their experiences and perspectives on leadership, collaboration and resource distribution, without fear of repercussion or judgement.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Look for implicit signs of power shifts – changes in who sets the agenda in meetings, who has access to critical information, shifts in decision-making authority or increased recognition of local actors' contributions in key processes, even when these shifts are not acknowledged formally or discussed openly.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of Hunga Tonga – Hunga Ha'apai Disaster Response Programme (December 2023)

Background

The Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai Disaster Response Programme was implemented in partnership by CARE Australia, Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation Tonga Trust (MORDI TT) and Talitha Project in Tonga. This end-of-programme evaluation assesses effectiveness, the strengths of its partnership model, and key lessons to improve future humanitarian responses following the January 2022 volcano eruption and tsunami.

How the evaluation addresses locally led humanitarian action

The evaluation assesses the ways that local partners were involved throughout the project management cycle, demonstrating best practice to promote effective collaboration, contextual relevance and sustainable investments. The evaluation specifically assesses the partnership between CARE Australia, MORDI TT and Talitha Project, and how the partnership model supported locally led humanitarian action. It provides evidence and recommendations on how to strengthen features of the partnership model, and the use of resources – primarily flexible funding – to achieve quality and impactful programming.

The evaluation also grounds the approach in a key local Tongan framework (the *Kakala* research framework), plus other existing frameworks to assess local leadership. It uses multi-stakeholder interviews and document review to inform findings and recommendations. The interviews proved valuable for communities, allowing them space to reflect on the disaster. The use of *Talanoa* respected cultural values and created a welcoming environment for sharing, which is crucial post-disaster.

- The focus on locally led response and partnership evidences the critical role of local organisations. These organisations coordinated and worked with existing national processes and systems in Tonga, and they continued to engage with communities post-disaster to support recovery.
- Grounding the evaluation in local expertise, frameworks and values is invaluable. The evaluation has contextual relevance and cultural alignment with those affected by the disaster. This approach fostered a supportive space for individuals to share their experiences, facilitating a space for healing and recovery post-disaster.

Source: Low et al (2023).

¹ Talanoa is 'a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations'. This approach 'allows more mo'oni (pure, real, authentic) information to be available for Pacific research than data derived from other research methods'. See Vaoleti (2006).

11.3 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CRISIS

KEY MESSAGES

- EHA can capture the consequences of the climate crisis on the humanitarian system, and also show how humanitarian action contributes to or mitigates this crisis.
- When evaluating how humanitarian action takes account of the environment and climate crisis, explore how local and/or Indigenous knowledge, practices and solutions have been considered.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Man-made environmental degradation is driving interlinked crises, including the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and the spread of infectious diseases (Chaplowe and Uitto, 2022; Hauer and Wahlström, 2023). Droughts and floods brought about by the climate crisis can significantly increase humanitarian needs by contributing to displacement, instability and violence.

In line with the principle to 'Do No Harm', it is increasingly important to consider environmental factors in humanitarian action and efforts to minimise negative environmental impacts. EHA can provide evidence on the consequences of the climate crisis on the humanitarian system, and support learning on mitigation measures. EHA can also hold the humanitarian system to account if/when actions contribute to the climate crisis.

Consider including the environment and climate crisis in evaluations, even when these aspects are not addressed explicitly in humanitarian action.

INTENTIONAL USE OF THE PRIORITY THEME IN EVALUATION

KEY AREAS OF ENQUIRY

Follow key lines of enquiry at different levels. Since progress still needs to be made in regularly integrating the environment and climate crisis into humanitarian action, a first step is to evaluate if any environmental mitigation measures have been planned and implemented.

- **Organisational level:** Explore if an organisation-wide policy or strategy is in place on the environment and climate crisis, if there is an environmental management system and associated action plan, and the extent to which these are applied in practice (Hauer and Wahlström, 2023).
- **Humanitarian response level:** Depending on context, explore water use management, waste management, reduction of carbon emissions, choices of energy solutions, and/or whether the humanitarian response has taken measures to protect habitats and their inhabitants. Consider if the humanitarian response minimised environmental damage to areas affected by crisis, in terms of deforestation, biodiversity loss and the degradation of natural resources (Haruhiru et al, 2023). Have day-to-day operational management decisions protected the environment – such as in the supply chain, fleet management, travel, and information and communication technology? The environment and climate crisis is particularly important in WASH, shelter and food security, and livelihood programmes, and in logistics and human resources. Remember environmental effects and actions taken to reduce them are often context-specific.
- **Local and/or Indigenous knowledge and practice:** Evaluate if the design and implementation of the humanitarian response have considered local and/or Indigenous knowledge and practice. Has humanitarian action adapted to the local context, and has it valued and integrated local and Indigenous solutions? Local actors have in-depth knowledge of their environments and may deliver more environmentally sustainable assistance (Haruhiru et al, 2023).

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Some aspects of the environment and climate crisis may be difficult to analyse, especially in rapidly evolving contexts.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure appropriate expertise on the evaluation team. Include those with knowledge on local issues and practices related to the environment and climate crisis, as team members or as advisers.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Use the inception phase to explore alternative information sources within and outside the humanitarian system, including local environmental experts who could serve as key informants.

Key consideration B

Access to relevant data is crucial, for example on humanitarian actors' greenhouse gas emissions and on issues such as deforestation and biodiversity loss. However, such data may not be readily available or may be outdated, as this theme is not yet prioritised by humanitarian actors. Complex and fluid operating environments add to data scarcity.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Consider the potential lack of data when planning your evaluation. Facilitate access to relevant information from different sources.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Use the inception phase to explore data availability, including secondary data from development actors, academia or governmental agencies. Consider that environmental assessments can exist in various forms.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of WFP's emergency response in Myanmar (2018–2022) (October 2023)

Background

This evaluation assesses WFP's emergency response in Myanmar from September 2017 to December 2022. It evaluates if the organisation met its accountability requirements, and it identifies learning to inform a new interim country strategic plan for Myanmar and WFP's emergency response practice globally.

How the evaluation addresses the environment and climate crisis

The evaluation addresses environmental sustainability under the inter-connection criterion (albeit labelled connectedness).

The TOR includes a specific question on environmental sustainability. The evaluation matrix breaks this down into: 1) the use of risk matrices and mitigation measures, 2) knowledge and application by staff of social and environmental standards, 3) degree to which assessments are performed, and 4) degree to which staff apply environmental and social risk sensitivity.

The evaluation explores the use of different tools related to the environment by the country office, sub-offices and partners, noting evolution from basic environmental screening checklists to expanded environmental and social standards and new screening tools. The evaluation also examines mitigation measures in specific projects, such as terraced land development to reduce slash-and-burn practices in hilly regions and the distribution of fuel-efficient stoves. It includes one recommendation linked to the environment.

- Linking findings at country level and sub-office level to WFP organisational standards on the environment provides an appropriate reference point, enabling an evaluative judgement to be made.
- Including a recommendation related to the environment ensures that these issues are followed up by management.

Source: WFP (2023b).

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY

Effects

Intended or unintended changes due directly or indirectly to an intervention (OECD, 2023).

Inputs

The financial, human and material resources used in humanitarian action (ALNAP, 2016).

Outcomes

Intended or unintended changes or shifts in conditions due directly or indirectly to an intervention. They can be desired (positive) or unwanted (negative). They can encompass behaviour change (actions, relations, policies, practices) of individuals, groups, communities, organisations, institutions or other social actors (ALNAP, 2016).

Outputs

The products, goods and services that result from an intervention (ALNAP, 2016).

Results

The outputs, outcomes or impacts (intended or unintended, positive or negative) of an intervention (OECD, 2023).

Results chain

The causal sequence of an intervention that stipulates the different stages leading to the achievement of desired objectives. In general, the results chain starts with inputs, which then link to activities and outputs and culminate in outcomes and impacts. In some cases, reach is included as part of the results chain (OECD, 2023).

Theory of change

A comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It focuses particularly on mapping out or 'filling in' what has been described as the 'missing middle' between what a programme or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved (Center for Theory of Change, n.d.).

ANNEX 2: CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Cross-cutting issues intersect with various criteria and can be integrated into all stages of the evaluation process. Two are considered in this guide: inclusion and adaptiveness.

Table A 1: Cross-cutting issues explained

Cross-cutting issue	What it is	Why it is important in EHA
Inclusion	Inclusion means that humanitarian action focuses on those affected most by crises in terms of need, without discrimination (e.g. on the basis of nationality, race or ethnicity, gender, religious belief, class, disability, sexual identity and orientation). It also means that humanitarian action addresses the specific and diverse needs of different groups/individuals. This is where gender equality fits.	This value underpins humanitarian action. As such, it is elevated to being part of the coverage criterion. This ensures that EHA pays attention to who is included and who is excluded in humanitarian action. It is also a cross-cutting issue, which may be considered in relation to all other criteria. It includes and goes beyond gender equality to consider other patterns of marginalisation and discrimination as well, and, as far as possible, their underlying causes.
Adaptiveness/ adaptive management	Adaptive management refers to adaptations in response to changes in context or understanding that go beyond everyday good management. It implies an iterative rather than linear approach to planning, implementation and evaluation, with multiple decision points, better suited to complex and uncertain contexts. Adaptive decisions and practices should be evidence-based (see Buchanan-Smith and Morrison-Metois, 2021).	Adaptive management is key to effective and relevant humanitarian action. This is because of the dynamic and unpredictable nature of humanitarian crises, and also the fast-paced characteristic of humanitarian action, especially in the early stages of a crisis, or in a new crisis paradigm such as a global pandemic. Evaluators may look for evidence of this iterative approach to planning and implementation of humanitarian action in response to changing context and need.

Table A 2: Applying inclusion to the evaluation criteria

Criterion	Inclusion
Relevance	<p>Use an intersectional lens to facilitate analysis of the different needs and priorities of underrepresented and/or marginalised groups and communities (OECD, 2021).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which cultural and social factors – such as gender, age, socioeconomic background, livelihood and existing caregiving and community roles – have been factored in by humanitarian agencies to ensure that their activities are relevant (Thu, 2024)?
Effectiveness	<p>Understanding and establishing variations in outcomes provides important nuances when evaluating effectiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How might outcomes vary across different groups, communities or geographical areas? Pay attention to cultural and social factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic background, and livelihood. <p>Combine the evaluation of effectiveness with coverage and inclusion for in-depth analysis of outcomes and achievements across different population groups, to understand different needs and experiences of the crisis.</p>
Efficiency	<p>The most marginalised and vulnerable groups are sometimes the most difficult and most expensive to reach. When evaluating efficiency, consider if this was taken into account in resource allocation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have sufficient resources been allocated to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable? <p>When evaluating operational efficiency, consider the inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups in decision-making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Whose voices have been heard when making decisions, for example on how resources have been allocated? ● Have marginalised and vulnerable groups been given the opportunity to influence the decision-making process? For example, have affected women and girls been able to influence the process (OECD, 2021)?

Inter-connection	<p>Explore whether humanitarian action is linked to any long-term work addressing root causes of discrimination faced by marginalised and vulnerable people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Does the humanitarian action connect with that work or is it siloed? ● Have connections been made between humanitarian actors and local actors representing marginalised or vulnerable people, for example local organisations promoting the rights of women and girls, people living with disabilities or people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)? ● Have investments been made to strengthen the capacity of these actors to respond to a humanitarian crisis?
Coherence	<p>When evaluating policy alignment explore whether policies related to inclusion have been considered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have internal policies considered, for example, diversity, gender equality and/or disability? ● Have international and/or national norms and standards been considered? For example, humanitarian frameworks such as the CHS, or human rights commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OECD, 2021)? <p>To consider inclusion when evaluating coordination, explore which actors were included in coordination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which local organisations have been included? Have local organisations been included who represent groups or communities whose voices traditionally are not heard? For example, organisations representing people living with disabilities or people with diverse SOGIESC, or organisations representing the interests of Indigenous people?
Impact	<p>Pay attention not only to what impact has occurred as a result of humanitarian action but also for whom (OECD, 2021).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How have different groups, communities or geographical areas experienced impact? Pay attention to cultural and social factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic background, and livelihood. <p>Combine the evaluation of impact with coverage and inclusion for in-depth analysis of impact across different population groups, to understand different needs and experiences of the crisis.</p>

Table A 3: Applying adaptiveness to the evaluation criteria

Criterion	Adaptive management/adaptiveness
Relevance	<p>Explore what information has been sought by, and has become available to, humanitarian actors that reveals the relevance of their humanitarian action over time. This may be from ongoing monitoring and/or directly from engagement with people affected by crisis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent has there been flexibility to fine-tune humanitarian action and its modalities as humanitarian actors gain deeper understanding of the needs and priorities of the affected population? ● To what extent has humanitarian action been adapted to the changing needs and priorities of affected people over time and as a crisis has evolved?
Coverage and inclusion	<p>Monitoring and other assessments, including feedback from affected people themselves, provides important data and information about who is being reached through humanitarian action, who is not, and how this relates to need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What evidence is there of an adaptive and iterative approach to broadening and deepening coverage and inclusion based on this emerging information?
Effectiveness	<p>Adaptive management is key to the quality of humanitarian action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent have humanitarian actors demonstrated commitment to continued learning about the outcomes of their humanitarian action and what has determined those outcomes? ● How have actors applied this learning to continually adapt and improve humanitarian action to achieve better outcomes more aligned to the needs and priorities of people affected by crisis?
Efficiency	<p>Adaptive management based on good data and analysis (for example from audits, and from feedback from partners and peers) can potentially improve the efficiency of humanitarian action over time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have resources (financial, human, technical, environmental etc) been used more economically over time? Has waste been reduced? ● Have processes and procedures been streamlined appropriately to be more cost-effective and efficient?

Inter-connection	<p>Adaptive management may be key to ensuring that the temporal dimension of inter-connection is taken into account.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is there evidence that humanitarian action planned at speed and with a short-term perspective has been adapted as medium- and longer-term implications have emerged? <p>Adaptive management may also be key to the relational dimension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How has the partnership between international and national humanitarian actors been adapted as it has become apparent which aspects of the partnership are working to support locally led humanitarian action and which are hindering it?
Coherence	<p>If it becomes apparent that different policies at agency or sectoral levels conflict, responses may need to be adapted to manage tensions and trade-offs, informed by an understanding of the context and crisis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For example, look for evidence that managers have recognised those tensions according to the best analysis available to them. <p>Ongoing coordination between actors may have revealed areas of duplication, or where complementarity could be enhanced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent has the actor (or actors in a multi-agency evaluation) adapted their humanitarian action in response to such information?
Impact	<p>The incentive to show that humanitarian action has had a positive impact (for example to funders) can mean that potentially negative impacts are overlooked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent has the humanitarian actor been curious about, and investigated, the wider impact of its humanitarian action? ● How flexible and adaptive has the humanitarian actor been to mitigate negative impact and avoid harm, and to strengthen positive impact?

ANNEX 3: EVALUATION CRITERIA AND THE CHS

Where a humanitarian actor is committed to the CHS, this may be an important reference point when evaluating its humanitarian action. This section provides guidance on how the CHS can be integrated with the evaluation criteria.

The CHS has nine commitments (see [Box A 1: The nine CHS commitments](#)), each underpinned with practical 'requirements'. The overall aim is to ensure that organisations support people and communities affected by crisis and vulnerability in ways that respect their rights and dignity and promote their primary role in finding solutions to the crises they face. The CHS is founded on the humanitarian principles and it builds on the Sphere Humanitarian Charter (Sphere Project, 2018).

BOX A 1: THE NINE CHS COMMITMENTS

People and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability...

1. can exercise their rights and participate in actions and decisions that affect them
2. access timely and effective support in accordance with their specific needs and priorities
3. are better prepared and more resilient to potential crises
4. access support that does not cause harm to people or the environment
5. can safely report concerns and complaints and get them addressed
6. access coordinated and complementary support
7. access support that is continually adapted and improved based on feedback and learning
8. interact with staff and volunteers who are respectful, competent and well-managed
9. can expect that resources are managed ethically and responsibly.

Source: CHS (2024).






























The CHS can be applied to any humanitarian actor.³⁰ Some actors prefer the CHS compared to more conceptual evaluation criteria, due to the clarity of the CHS commitments (e.g. stated as sentences), its operational orientation, and therefore its accessibility to programme staff. The CHS has proven particularly popular among some INGOs for real-time learning and evaluation (Buchanan-Smith and Morrison-Metois, 2021).











³⁰ In practice, international and national NGOs are the main users of the CHS, with some choosing an external audit to verify how they apply the CHS.

How does the CHS relate to the ALNAP evaluation criteria?

As with the humanitarian principles, some CHS commitments clearly relate to specific evaluation criteria. For example, commitment 6 on coordination and complementarity fits with coherence. However, most CHS commitments straddle more than one criterion, as shown in . How evaluation questions on the CHS commitments relate to the criteria will depend partly on the particular issue to be explored. And this may be at the discretion of the evaluation manager who drafts the TOR.

Table A 4: Mapping the CHS commitments to the evaluation criteria

CHS commitment	Evaluation criteria							Priority themes		
People and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability...	Relevance	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Inter-connection	Coherence	Coverage and inclusion	Impact	Putting people affected by crisis at the centre	Locally led humanitarian action	Environment and climate crisis
1. can exercise their rights and participate in actions and decisions that affect them										
2. access timely and effective support in accordance with their specific needs and priorities										
3. are better prepared and more resilient to potential crises										
4. can access support that does not cause harm to people or the environment										
5. can safely report concerns and complaints and get them addressed										

CHS commitment	Evaluation criteria							Priority themes		
People and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability...	Relevance and appropriateness	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Inter-connection	Coherence	Coverage and inclusion	Impact	Putting people affected by crisis at the centre	Locally led humanitarian action	Environment and climate crisis
6. can access coordinated and complementary support										
7. access support that is continually adapted and improved based on feedback and learning										
8. interact with staff and volunteers who are respectful, competent and well-managed										
9. can expect that resources are managed ethically and responsibly								