

IRISH AID HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME PLAN 2017-2018 IMPLEMENTED BY CONCERN WORLDWIDE

META-EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

In 2017 and 2018, Concern received support from Irish Aid's HPP. The funding was implemented in eight country programmes: Afghanistan, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria/ Iraq. Out of these, there were only two that did not also have Irish Aid Programme Grant (PG) funding: Syria/ Iraq and Lebanon. The remaining six country programmes had PG and HPP funding from Irish Aid, but there were two, DRC and Ethiopia, where the PG and HPP programmes were being implemented in different geographic areas.

As articulated in the contract between Concern and Irish Aid, the programme of work aimed to achieve the following results:

1. Saving lives and alleviating suffering in response to new and existing emergencies;
2. Ensuring that programmes are designed to maintain the dignity of disaster-affected populations; and,
3. Identifying and building on existing community capacities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters, and to build that capacity through our interventions.

The objective of this evaluation was to assess the contribution of the HPP-funded programme to the achievement of the results. Specifically, the evaluation aimed to determine whether the programme targeted those most in need; to assess the implementation against standard criteria; and to review Concern's capacity to strengthen synergies between humanitarian response and development programming.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was carried out in two phases. The first phase, from September to November 2018, involved individual evaluations of each of the country projects funded by HPP. The second phase, the meta-evaluation, used the eight individual evaluation reports to aggregate the findings. This was carried out in December 2018 and January 2019.

The first phase evaluations were conducted by Concern staff, teams of two people. The one exception was the external consultant recruited to undertake the meta-evaluation who was the lead evaluator for the Lebanon programme evaluation.

In all eight country projects, the evaluations involved a desk review of the programme documentation and quantitative data. This was followed by a one-week field visit to gather qualitative data. In most cases this involved Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and direct observation.

Phase two was conducted by reviewing the eight country-specific evaluations using Nvivo software to identify common themes. Additional documents, such as relevant policies and guidelines, discussion papers and statistical websites, were also reviewed.

MAIN FINDINGS

Overall, the performance against the extended DAC criteria across all programmes was good according to the reports. No projects were assessed to have been unsatisfactory against any of the criteria.

Appropriateness/ relevance: There was evidence that all eight projects were satisfactorily appropriate and relevant. The responses met needs that were articulated by target communities and contributed to country-wide targets and priorities. For the most part, they were based on needs assessments and were adjusted in response to changes. Community participation could be strengthened, particularly in the design and monitoring of the projects. Similarly, complaints response mechanisms (CRM) were not effective in at least half of the projects. Improvement in participation and CRM would increase accountability and likely result in greater ownership by the community.

Connectedness: Across most of the projects, there was a focus on provision of emergency response without sufficient consideration to the long-term impact or connected problems. There was a lack of clarity on the nexus thinking. In two of the projects, the context was deemed to be “an emergency” and therefore staff felt that it was inappropriate to consider long term programming. This thinking assumes the need to have a development programme with which to link emergency response – which is one way to establish linkages – but it overlooks causes, linkages and relevant approaches. Despite the weaknesses identified, staff in at least three of the projects are working in a context which requires delivery of concurrent humanitarian and development activities and they are looking for innovative ways to be responsive and address changing needs. Concern has capacity to strengthen the synergies between humanitarian response and development programming but must find ways to share and disseminate the learning.

Coherence: Overall the adherence to internal policies, government plans, HRPs, Country Strategic Plans and guidelines was good. Most projects showed adherence to the policies most relevant to their intervention. They also demonstrated the humanitarian principles and showed consistency with national level strategies. An area of weakness was the need to ensure that all staff are familiar with the relevant policies, especially national staff.

Coverage: Considering Concern’s emphasis on targeting those who are most in need and least well-served, this is a particularly important criterion. Efforts had been made to identify the most vulnerable populations and communities were often involved in the process to determine the selection criteria and to identify those who meet the criteria. In general, the projects were reaching the most in need. This was confirmed anecdotally by participants in the FGDs. However, in a few cases, there was evidence that the people being targeted, although poor and vulnerable, may not have been those most in need. Improving the targeting would require some further refinement of the selection criteria and some additional effort to ensure inclusivity.

Efficiency: Five out of eight projects were satisfactorily efficient with evidence that the inputs were being used appropriately and had, or were likely to result in the intended outputs. There was evidence that there were good financial controls in place and that staffing levels were appropriate, notwithstanding high staff turnover in certain contexts. There were reported efforts to strengthen and improve the logistics systems. Suggestions for improvement at project level were made in relation to planning and budgeting and, in one programme, in relation to the choice of activities.

Effectiveness and Timeliness: In general, there was evidence that the objective and purpose of projects would mostly be achieved by the activities by the end of December 2018. The reports included some suggested ways to increase the effectiveness by developing detailed implementation plans, improving some of the design decisions and strengthening the monitoring and evaluation capacity. According to those interviewed, most activities were carried out on time and this was confirmed by those who received the assistance.

Impact: There is no doubt that the HPP projects had an impact in the different countries where they have been implemented. Anecdotal evidence of impact included the following:

- A reduction in conflict over water resources in Afghanistan;
- Improved cleanliness in informal tented settlements led to environmental and social benefits for displaced people living in Lebanon;

- Lower incidence of Acute Watery Diarrhoea due to improved water and sanitation in Somalia;
- Improvements in emotional well-being and interaction for children attending Child Friendly Spaces in Syria;
- Access to fresh vegetables for remote communities in CAR;
- Ability to meet priority needs at a household level for families in DRC;
- Access to good quality health care for a wide population in South Sudan;
- Increased dietary diversity in Ethiopia.

In Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia, Concern is able to influence policy due to their experience and presence on various committees and fora. In CAR, the team were able to influence other actors to fill gaps in service delivery in their area of operation.

In summary, the findings showed that Concern's HPP-funded programme has contributed to the achievement of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining dignity for people affected by disaster. To a lesser degree, community capacity has been developed to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. Of particular importance was that Concern staff showed a high level of dedication and commitment. They were trusted and well-liked in many of the communities where the evaluations were carried out and this may be equally as important as the delivery of high-quality assistance. Concern are to be commended for this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In future HPP projects:

- Give additional consideration to livelihoods options as this is the single most common need articulated in this evaluation.
- Share the learning from Somalia on finding durable solutions for displaced communities in urban contexts and from other country programmes that are working in urban contexts. As new programmes are developed, consider including trials based on this learning.
- Look for opportunities to work alongside the private sector especially in areas where they may be the only other actors. This does not need to be in any form of partnership; there are still opportunities that could result in benefits for remote communities.
- Increase advocacy at local and national level based on Concern's experience and expertise.
- Ensure that future HPP programming, whether PG or HPP, is more coherent. This can be done by ensuring that different sectors are complimentary and delivered in the same areas.

To ensure learning:

- Gather and present learning on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to senior management and technical advisors. Do this through information sharing sessions, summary papers or WebEx presentations.
- Develop staff capacity to carry out accurate targeting through training sessions. Include a review of the selection criteria in monthly review meetings to ensure that changing contexts are reflected in targeting. Annually gather and document the broader population data to ensure that Concern remains in the most vulnerable and least-well served areas.
- Concern's Head Quarters should provide leadership in developing feedback mechanisms that are culturally appropriate and accessible. Take cognisance of the fact that there is evidence that target communities often prefer to give feedback directly to staff and find ways to capture that.
- Include guidance on recommendations into Terms of Reference for evaluations so that implementing the recommendations is possible for busy field teams.
- Encourage innovations in HPP and other programmes and ensure learning is captured and shared in appropriate, accessible ways. Use WebEx or similar media so that country teams can download the presentations and set aside time for learning as a team.