

2014 | LEARNING  
REVIEW





**Richard Reed**  
Chair of Trustees  
the innocent  
foundation

# Foreword

**Back in 1999, two friends and I started a little drinks business with a simple aim: to make it easy for people to do themselves, and others, some good. We pledged that we would always give ten percent of innocent's profits to charity. Since we formalised our commitment by setting up the innocent foundation in 2004, we've been privileged to work with a series of world class charities fighting hunger.**

When we met Action Against Hunger back in 2012, we quickly realised that they were special. Why? Not because their experts have been at the forefront of the fight against child hunger since the 1970s - although that is pretty special. It was because we recognised innocent's entrepreneurial values. Action Against Hunger employ incredibly smart people and encourage them to pursue ambitious ideas. They challenge the status quo and take risks other organisations would shy away from. They aren't afraid to try new approaches and then shout about what they've discovered.

This learning review reflects that ethos. Action Against Hunger evaluate their work to an extraordinary degree, and then share their successes and, just as importantly, their failures so that colleagues and other organisations can learn from them. They constantly push themselves to find new, better ways to do things, and invite staff from all over the world to join a global debate about where the organisation is going. In this report, you will read about what Action Against Hunger has learnt from the evaluations conducted in 2014 and how this will influence the way they carry out evaluations in future. You will learn about the discussions

which are shaping Action Against Hunger's evolution. And you will find out how Action Against Hunger are able to help more people more effectively each year through targeted growth and spreading good practice across the organisation.

The innocent foundation's work with Action Against Hunger aims to prove that empowering community health workers to tackle severe acute malnutrition in children can more than double current treatment rates. By evaluating the success of this approach in Mali and Pakistan, we will build a case for Ministries of Health all over the world to change their approach to childhood malnutrition, reaching many more of the 19 million children suffering today. We don't know if it will work, but our confidence in Action Against Hunger encouraged us to take a calculated risk. Whatever the outcome, we hope you'll be reading about it in the 2016 edition of this review.

So read, learn, enjoy. Get inspired to take a risk and do things differently. Just don't forget to come back next year and tell the rest of us what you discovered.



Photo: Kenya, courtesy Christina Lionnet

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# Introduction



**Alexia Deleigne**  
Senior Programme Quality Assurance Advisor  
Evaluation, Learning and Accountability Manager  
ACF-UK

**The 2014 edition of the Learning Review has been put together by a brand new Evaluation Learning and Accountability (ELA) team. The injection of new blood into the team has allowed us to take a fresh look at the publication and come up with new ways of making it even more relevant, analytical and useful for its audience.**

The publication has been redesigned to look more attractive. It aims to convey a more positive tone and provide more impactful infographics which present a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. We hope you enjoy the new “look”!

The spirit of the Learning Review remains unchanged. The publication is still organised around three key sections: (i) a meta-analysis of ACF 2014 evaluations which allows us to learn from our experiences and to integrate learnings into future programming cycles, (ii) a selection of articles which serve to promote debate and discussion, raise burning issues and discuss new approaches and; (iii) a compilation of good practices identified during the evaluations in 2014 which have the potential to be replicated and scaled-up in other contexts.

So what is new about the publication this year? The content has been developed in a more critical way, looking at how ACF adds quality throughout the cycle of a project from design, to implementation, evaluation, and knowledge and information management for organisational learning; taking into account the ACF International Gender Policy.<sup>1</sup> This year's edition also includes learnings from two new types of evaluations – Real Time Evaluations and Emergency Evaluations. The Learning Review strives to provide a platform to keep improving what we do and ultimately to maximize the results ACF delivers for its beneficiaries.

The first section takes a critical look at how ACF can improve the way it assesses its performance against evaluation criteria as

defined by the ACF International Evaluation Policy and Guideline.<sup>2</sup> It reviews methodologies used in evaluations and discusses how ACF can further improve the tools evaluators use to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data so that evaluations are based on solid evidence. It includes a short summary of overall ACF ratings against each evaluation criterion. It also makes some recommendations on how to improve evaluation practice and update the ACF International Evaluation Policy and Guideline going forward.

The second section presents five articles. One looks into ACF's Ebola response and the impact it has had on the nutrition work of the organisation. Two articles discuss how improvements can be made to monitoring, knowledge and information management at ACF. Another article reviews the implementation of ACF International's Gender Policy and provides some recommendations for the future. The last article discusses two new types of evaluation undertaken by ACF on a number of occasions over the past year – the Real Time Evaluation and the Emergency Evaluation. The article reviews our experiences so far in undertaking these types of evaluation and provides guidance on the way forward.

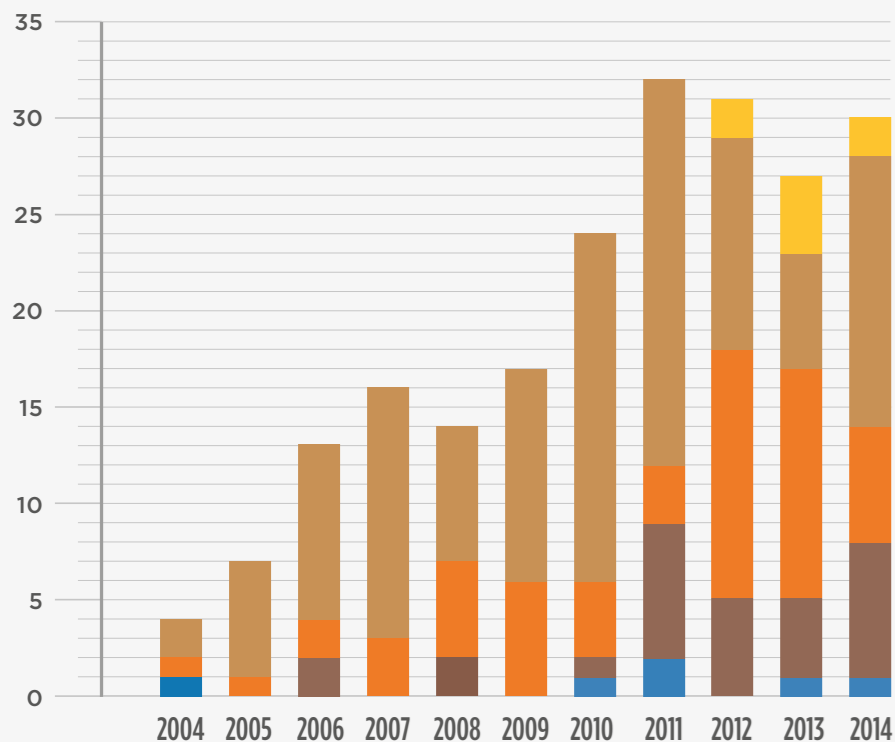
The third section reflects on the definitions of good practices vs. best practices. It presents a compilation of good practices which have emerged through the evaluations conducted during 2014. The good practices included have been narrowed down to those which truly have the potential to be replicated and scaled-up in other contexts.

<sup>1</sup> ACF International Gender Policy: Increasing the impact of ACF's work through gender equality programming; March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> ACF International Evaluation Policy and Guideline: Enhancing Organisational Practice through an Integrated Evaluations, Learning & Accountability Framework; 2011.

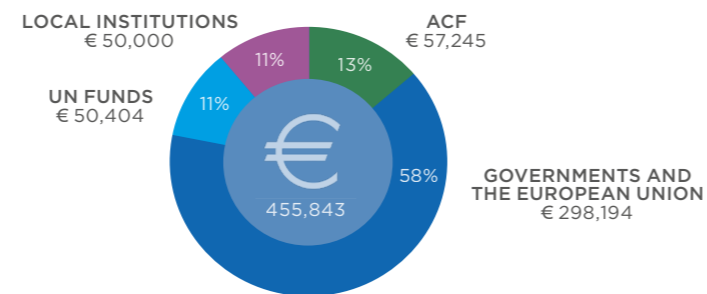
# ACF Evaluations in 2014

NUMBER OF ACF EVALUATIONS BY YEAR AND HQ



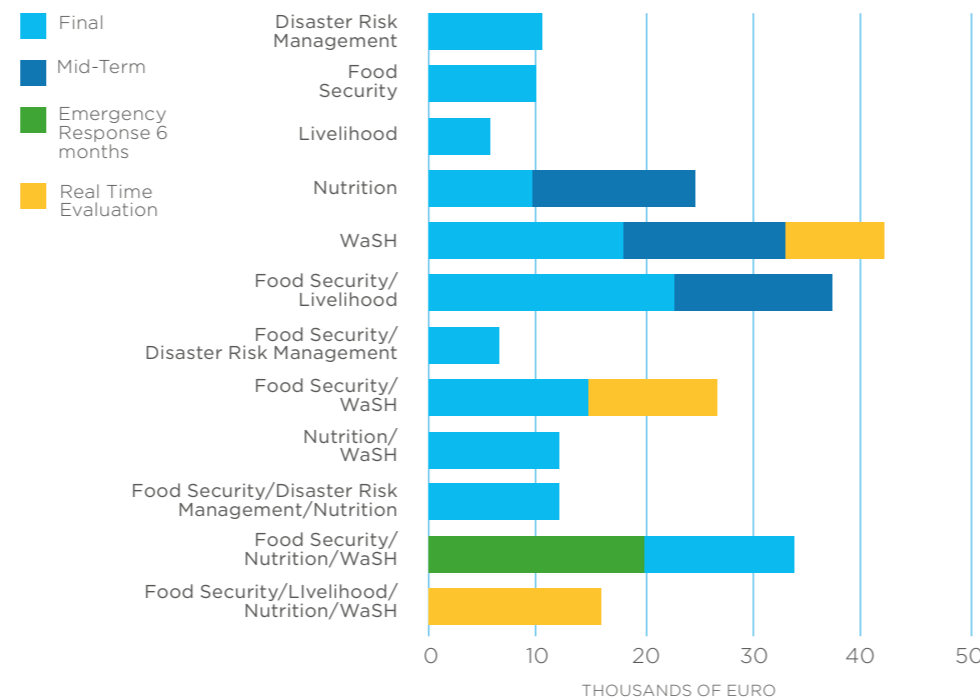
■ Across ACF International  
■ ACF - FRANCE  
■ ACF - SPAIN  
■ ACF - UK  
■ ACF - USA

## EURO SPENT ON EVALUATION BY DONOR FUNDING THE PROJECT



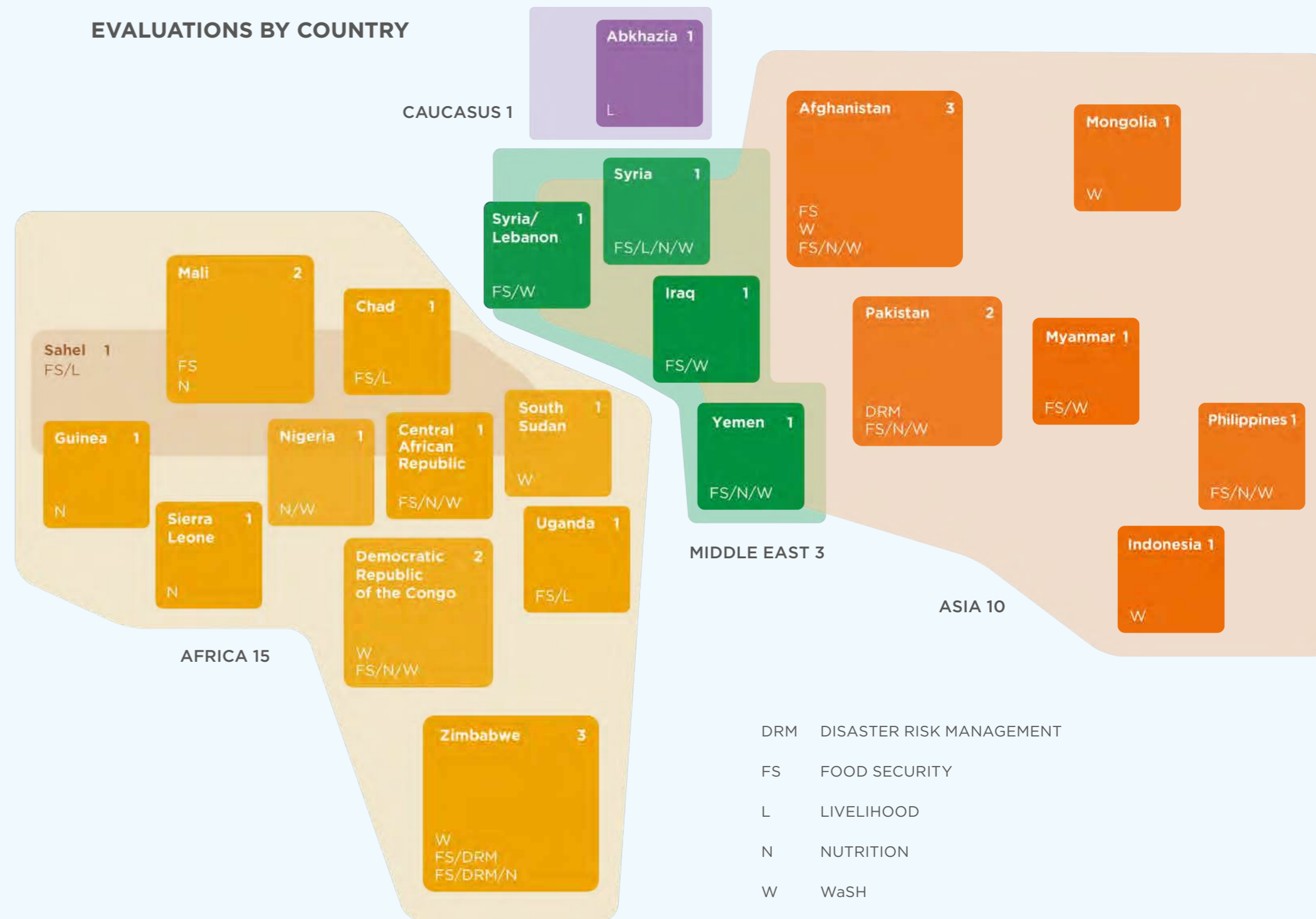
All amounts converted into Euro, based on ACF International Network Exchange Rate during the month of January 2015.

## HOW MUCH HAS ACF SPENT ON AVERAGE ON EVALUATION IN 2014 (IN EURO, PER TYPE OF EVALUATION, PER PROJECT SECTOR)



THOUSANDS OF EURO

## EVALUATIONS BY COUNTRY



DRM DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT  
 FS FOOD SECURITY  
 L LIVELIHOOD  
 N NUTRITION  
 W WaSH

# ACF Evaluations in 2014

## NUMBER AND COST OF EVALUATIONS DISAGGREGATED BY SEX

EVALUATIONS OF ACF INTERVENTIONS DISAGGREGATED BY SEX OF EVALUATOR

69%  
20



Male



71%  
€293,211

28%  
8



Female



27%  
€111,415

3%  
1



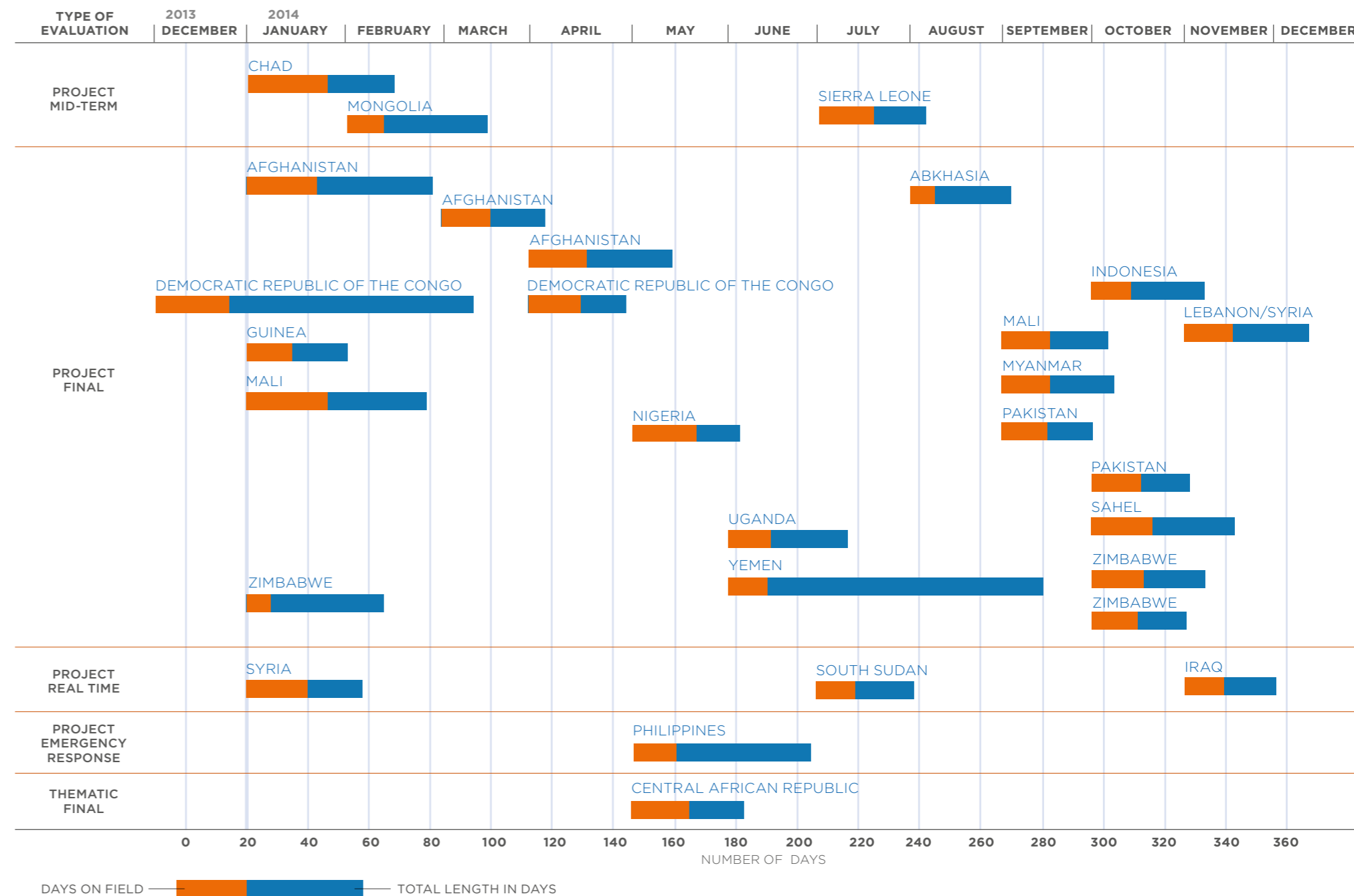
Male & Female



2%  
€6,491

TOTAL COST OF EVALUATION OF ACF INTERVENTIONS DISAGGREGATED BY SEX OF EVALUATOR

## EVALUATION TIMINGS BY DURATION AND COUNTRY IN 2014



# The Evaluations and the Evaluators

## Mid-Term Project Evaluation



**Zlatan Ćelebić**

*Chad*  
Soutien à la sécurité alimentaire des populations vulnérables du Grand Kanem dépendant de l'élevage du Grand Kanem (Action Bétail I) et du Bahr el Gazal (Action Bétail II)



**Julie Patinet**

*Mongolia*  
Improve access to Water, Sanitation, Hygiene in the Ger areas of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, by providing proven and innovative solutions



**Jane Keylock**

*Sierra Leone*  
Reinforcing institutional capacity for treatment of acute malnutrition, prevention of malnutrition in Freetown Peninsula, Western area and national sensitisation for nutrition security in Sierra Leone



**Christine Bousquet**

*Guinea*  
Renforcement des capacités institutionnelles et communautaires dans la commune de Conakry pour la prévention et le suivi du traitement de la malnutrition aiguë



**Ebbie Dengu and Moyo Duduzile**

*Zimbabwe*  
Reducing community vulnerability to the impacts of climate change in Zimbabwe: building resilience to drought through scaling up mechanized Conservation Agriculture



**Peter DeVillez**

*Zimbabwe*  
Sanitation, Water and Hygiene in Rural areas of Zimbabwe: An empowering and Sustainable Approach for Millennium Development Goals



**Jeff Duncalf**

*Sahel*  
Final Project Evaluation Food Security and Livelihoods - From Recovery to Resilience



**John Egbuta**

*Nigeria*  
ACF Emergency Nutrition Programme Implementation in Northern Nigeria



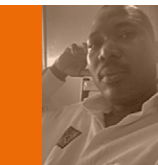
**Bert Fret**

*Zimbabwe*  
Building Disaster Resilient Communities in Masvingo and Manicaland Provinces, Zimbabwe



**Yvan Grayel**

*DRC*  
Programme d'intervention pour limiter et prévenir la propagation de l'épidémie du choléra en République Démocratique du Congo



**Aly T. Mana**

*Mali*  
Projet de renforcement des capacités de résilience des ménages les plus affectés par la crise alimentaire dans les cercles de Kita (Région de Kayes) et Banamba (Région de Koulikoro)



**Sylvain Marilleau**

*Afghanistan*  
Comprehensive Livelihoods Intervention in Ashtarlay District of Daykundi Province, Afghanistan



**Matteo Mode**

*Abkhazia – South Caucasus*  
Livelihood projects in Abkhazia from 2011 to 2013



**Caterina Monti**

*Afghanistan*  
WaSH support to vulnerable communities in Chaghcharan city, Ghor province, Afghanistan  
*Pakistan*  
Humanitarian Support to Vulnerable Populations in Pakistan



**Niaz Murtaza**

*Pakistan*  
Reducing Vulnerability through Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Phase II



**Cliff Nuwakora**

*Uganda*  
Combating Gender-Based Violence and Enhancing Economic Empowerment of Women in Northern Uganda through Cash Transfers



**Paul O'Hagan**

*DRC*  
Improving nutritional status through an integrated multi-sectoral approach in South and North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo



**Andrew Prentice**

*Yemen*  
Integrated emergency nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene and livelihoods interventions for vulnerable populations in Yemen



**Anton Rijdsdijk**

*Indonesia*  
Improving access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene services through a community-based approach and local capacity building in Kupang District, NTT Province, Indonesia



**Montserrat Saboya**

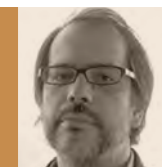
*Mali*  
Projet Intégré d'appui à la lutte contre la malnutrition en milieu urbain, Bamako, Mali (PIALMU)



**Walter Welz**

*Myanmar*  
Integrated Wash and Food Security Project for Uprooted Communities in Kayah State, Union of Myanmar

## Real-Time Evaluation



**Patrick Andrey**

*Iraq*  
ACF International's Response to the IDP Crisis in Kurdistan Region of Iraq



**Jeff Duncalf**

*Syria*  
ACF International's Response to the Syria Crisis



**Julie Gauthier**

*South Sudan*  
ACF-USA's Response to Cholera Emergency In Juba



**John Ievers**

*Philippines*  
ACF International's Response to Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines



**Niaz Murtaza**

*Syria / Lebanon / Jordan*  
Humanitarian assistance to the populations affected by the Syrian conflict in Syria and the neighbouring countries



**Phil McKinney**

*CAR*  
Multi-Sectorial Surveillance System in the Central African Republic



**Brian Majewski and Avenir Analytics team**

*Global*  
Global Wash Cluster

## Emergency Response Evaluation

## Thematic Final Evaluation

## Evaluation For External Partners

# PART I

## Evaluation Criteria Analysis



Photo: Pakistan, courtesy Caterina Monti

## Introduction

### Evaluating ACF performance through the DAC lens

This section shares the findings of the meta-analysis of evaluations conducted between 18th December 2013 and 15th December 2014.

An evaluation could be defined as the systematic assessment of the operations and/or outcomes of an intervention, compared to a set of implicit or explicit standards, as a means of contributing to its improvement (Weiss, 1998), or simply, as the systematic determination of the quality or value of something (Scriven, 1991). In practice, an evaluation could have a range of objectives but in nearly all cases they relate to improvement, learning, and/or accountability. Of the range of possible evaluation approaches developed in recent decades, the OECD-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria approach has acquired a hegemonic presence in the Aid Industry, providing a pre-established set of areas<sup>4</sup> which are widely regarded as the most relevant and appropriate for the evaluation of humanitarian and development programmes.

The biggest strength of the DAC approach is its ability to use the same format to evaluate interventions, unifying language on the definition

of programme quality. The latter is what enables comparison and measurement of progress over time. But this is also a derived weakness of the approach; the set of criteria has been defined by the richest countries in the world and guided by “donor vision”. The criteria are therefore unlikely to be the same for the other stakeholders involved, who might be willing to look at a different set of criteria considering their diverse social contexts and value systems. As such, using this approach potentially hinders their interest in participating in the evaluation process or using the findings of the evaluation. Moreover, the approach focuses on judging the result dimension of interventions and risks disregarding the analysis of the implementation aspects (the process dimension linking inputs with outputs). This has the potential to hinder a real understanding of why objectives might not have been reached and therefore could limit further learning. These weaknesses invite a reflection of the convenience of complementary systemic approaches, such as Real Time Evaluations, which focus on processes rather than results with enhanced participation mechanisms to assure quality in ACF’s evaluation practice.

As stated in the ACF Evaluation Policy and Guideline, ACF’s interventions are assessed in relation to seven criteria - relevance/appropriateness, coherence, coverage, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. In each case the interventions are judged on their ability to reach the standard set. Evaluators are requested to rate the intervention using the ACF set of criteria outlined from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). This section provides the average rating achieved by the organisation for each criterion as defined in the Evaluation Policy for 24 out of the 29 evaluations implemented in 2014 which involved the provision of ACF-UK support.<sup>5</sup> For each of the criterion there is a brief introduction to how they are measured,<sup>6</sup> followed by examples of how ACF’s interventions in various contexts have determined the collective performance of the organisation. At the end of this section a summary highlights the core aspects of the DAC analysis and offers a set of recommendations on how to improve key evaluation-related issues.

<sup>4</sup> (i) relevance, (ii) connectedness, (iii) coherence, (iv) coverage, (v) efficiency, (vi) effectiveness, and (vii) impact.

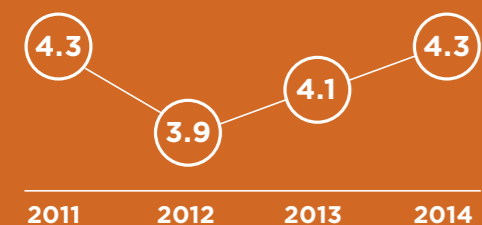
<sup>5</sup> The evaluations excluded were: three RTE (South Sudan, Syria and Iraq), one Emergency Response (Philippines) and one thematic evaluation (in CAR for not having the DAC chart).

<sup>6</sup> In future publications this section will be fed by actual measurement examples coming from real evaluation planning reports. In 2014 less than 25% of evaluations specified the tools and techniques applied to answer the evaluation questions per each criterion, and less than 10% presented differentiated techniques to approach the different criteria.



*“A measure of whether interventions are in line with local needs and priorities (as well as donor policies), thus increasing ownership, accountability and cost-effectiveness”*

DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Relevance & Appropriateness

## Measuring it

In relation to the logical framework, **relevance** can be used to evaluate the wider elements of the intervention, such as the **overall goal or outcome**; whereas **appropriateness** can be used to evaluate **inputs and activities**.

Both criteria draw close attention to the extent to which the project design takes into account the local context. Thus, there should be a strong coherence between appropriateness and each project dimension (inputs, processes, results). The validity of the objectives could be assessed looking at the adequateness of the needs assessment in terms of its ability to identify clearly, and in a participative way, the differentiated basic needs of the affected population with cultural awareness. As for the appropriateness of inputs and type of activities, evaluations could take into account the institutional capacity, looking at capacity in terms of staffing, local knowledge, and experience in the country or region to conduct a sound response. Finally, M&E systems have been proven to provide key inputs to keep track of the relevance of objectives and the appropriateness of inputs and activities throughout the life of the project.

## Achieving it

This criterion achieved the **highest absolute score of the seven criteria measured**, representing an increase from the previous year and a recovery towards the highest score of the 2011 Learning Review.

In general, the evaluations reflected that ACF had performed well in the implementation of relevant and appropriate interventions by correctly identifying key stakeholders and needs and designing well-aligned interventions. In a Livelihoods intervention in Afghanistan in Daykundi Province, ACF's local knowledge of the context after more than a decade of working in the province combined with a sound bottom-up approach to needs, were identified as key inputs which contributed to relevant and appropriate project design. Given that there were certain deficiencies in the monitoring system in place, the evaluation attributed a high score to the assessment of relevance due to the genuine motivation of the population to actively participate in all project activities. Activities linked to women's home gardening generated strong motivation and interest among women. This was probably bolstered by the fact

that almost 50% of the local staff were women, leading to open, quality feedback from women and verifiable productive outcomes.

Another good example of relevance and appropriateness was an innovative WaSH project in the Ger area of Ulaanbatar in Mongolia. The project succeeded in implementing ecological sanitation to a cold and arid climate in a peri-urban context which suffered from water shortages. The population's WaSH needs were met both in a temporal and sustainable way; temporal as they fitted in with the capital's major urban development plans, and sustainable due to the expected mass arrival of new migrants to suburban areas (estimated at 30,000 families a year). One slight issue was that during the local context analysis of the project, key official stakeholders involved in the Regulation Commission were not involved until quite late in the process; a factor which should be addressed in the future.

On the other hand, despite having a sound needs assessment, the project design of a Food Security project in the Samangan province of Afghanistan addressed only a limited part of the deeper causes of livelihood deterioration and food insecurity caused by climate change and

a lack of access to the basic materials needed to restart rural activities. While restricted to community leaders, community participation proved to be consistent, but a lack of feedback mechanisms giving voice to women and the most vulnerable community members identified one area for improvement.

In another example, the evaluation of a Nutrition project in Mali in urban settings emphasised that a better knowledge of the urban context (no updated vulnerability studies were undertaken to inform project design) would have helped the project to adapt better to deliver Nutrition interventions.

Finally, with regards to ACF's response to the Syria crisis, although the programme was considered relevant, community participation was weak, with more than half of the beneficiaries reporting to have not been consulted by ACF regularly during the project cycle. A formal complaint mechanism would have given valuable feedback for the adaptation of activities to the beneficiaries' real needs.

## THE WRAP

A comprehensive understanding of the local context is needed for sound project design (including needs of women and men, key local stakeholders, local capacity and culture). This requires a participatory approach, facilitating equal stakeholder participation along the entire project cycle. Moreover, strong M&E systems seem to be associated with the highest performing projects in this category.

“The need to assess the existing interventions, policies and strategies to ensure consistency and minimize duplication”

#### DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Coherence

## Measuring it

So far as the logical framework is concerned, **coherence** is most closely **associated with the outcomes of a project**. That is to say the extent to which the intermediate or longer-term contributions of different actors impact the humanitarian action.

Given its **focus on wider policy issues**, this is one of the more “political” DAC criteria. Outside the humanitarian sphere, the assessment should look at the extent to which policies of different actors were complementary or contradictory. Within the humanitarian sphere, it should look at the extent to which all actors are working towards the same goals. In order to operationalize its measurement a robust context-specific **stakeholder analysis** should be carried out.

The evaluation of coherence should complement that of **coordination**, with coherence focusing on the policy level, and coordination focusing on operational issues.

## Achieving it

Coherence in ACF’s evaluated projects was the **second best score among the criteria set**. There

was no variation from the previous year, and the criterion score has been constant since 2011.

Among the top scoring projects were both WaSH projects in Afghanistan (Ghor and Samangan), where ACF coordinated with the relevant government bodies, implementing national and regional regulations which had been developed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation. Evidence of ACF’s actions shows that they correctly interpreted the government’s strategy which aimed to decentralise the responsibility of water structures and other assets and create ad-hoc community structures for maintenance and caretaking. ACF’s gender mainstreaming was also taken into account by the inclusion of specific training on hygiene for women. In Mongolia, the evaluation looked at internal and external coherence. ACF’s decentralised solutions were deemed to be suitable considering the new urban development plans of Ulaanbaatar. In order to move towards maximising external coherence, ACF needs to ensure regular coordination with the Municipality and the appropriate Mongolian institutions, since it is already the key WaSH “player”.

Also, in the Livelihoods projects in Abkhazia, the evaluation based the maximum score for coherence on the high complementarity between ACF’s work and the interventions of

other partners, highlighting several instances of coordination (participation in international partnerships or coordination meetings with local and international aid actors), as well as specific tools or mechanisms to avoid duplication of efforts which lead to increased overall aid support among aid actors. However coherence with de-facto authorities’ policies and strategies could not be measured.

Another top achiever in terms of coherence was a WaSH project in Indonesia, where ACF’s support was identified as being closely linked to the Indonesian development strategy and relevant ministries. Good coordination with other aid actors, including local and international NGOs, was also reported, highlighting promising perspectives for more cooperation between the governmental and nongovernmental development partners.

ACF co-operated and co-ordinated well with governmental institutions and other NGOs based in the Sahel. The intervention followed a two year programme, and was deemed to be coherent with the ACF International Strategy (2010–2015). The programme’s outputs were in line with the plans and ambitions of local government, as well as with the ACF regional strategy. It was also suggested that there was good potential for future cooperation between ACF and the local

authorities in all operational countries, not only for to programme interventions, but also with respect to working with government authorities at a planning level to create synergies and to build local capacity.

## THE WRAP

Like previous years, communication, coordination and complementarity with different stakeholders, from governments to implementing partners, have contributed towards a strong performance in the coherence criterion.



“The need to reach major population groups facing life threatening suffering wherever they are”

#### DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Coverage

## Measuring it

In the logical framework, **coverage** is usually incorporated in **results statements and indicators** relating to the numbers and types of the affected people targeted. Results statements should be clear concerning the **numbers to be covered**, as well as **particular groups being targeted**. ‘Vulnerable groups’ should be **disaggregated** by **socioeconomic status, sex, age** and **ethnicity**.

Evaluation of coverage involves determining **who was supported by the humanitarian action**, and **why**. Even though the evaluation of coverage could take place at an international, national/regional and local level, in practice it is only usually measured at the regional and especially at local levels. Targeting should be undertaken in a comprehensive manner from geographical, political, community and intra-household perspectives.

The evaluation should look at **targeting practices**, assessing their appropriateness from the perspective of primary stakeholders, or from the organisation’s own standards for coverage, and evaluate to what extent these have been met. Evaluation reports should present an estimate of the proportion of those in need

covered, expressed as a percentage, rather than an absolute number.

## Achieving it

Coverage of ACF’s programmes achieved the **third highest score among the criteria set**, with a slight increase from the previous year and a steadily increasing trend since 2011.

**In ACF’s projects, coverage was mostly assessed based on the geographical reach of a project, focusing mainly on whether the most vulnerable parts of the population were reached and whether targeting was appropriate.**

In a Food Security and Livelihood project in the Samangan province of Afghanistan, high comparative outreach capacity and geographical coverage of remote areas was achieved by ACF (compared to national government programmes or other NGOs). However, the targeting criterion was considered to be too general and not adapted to the context, which proved to cause problems in the selection of beneficiaries.

On the other hand, during a Food security project in the Daykundi province of Afghanistan, even though the coverage rate was high, largely due to fact that

the intervention focused on a geographically restricted area, the selection of beneficiaries was accurate, matching activities to different vulnerability social profiles (from direct aid distribution for the poorest categories, to decision-making responsibilities for better off households).

Furthermore, a WaSH and Nutrition project in Pakistan was another top achiever under this criterion, with selection criteria to identify beneficiaries enabling the targeting of vulnerable groups to take place homogeneously, as well as communities as a whole, even though village selection was not investigated under this evaluation. In Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, the evaluation also revealed that, on the whole, ACF selected the most vulnerable people in each location.

Interestingly, in a Food Security programme in Zimbabwe, ACF’s project had a low coverage (13.3%, four wards of 30 wards) in terms of the number of wards covered, but this allowed for holistic interventions comprising crops, livestock, DRM, nutrition and WaSH to take place. This was viewed as a positive step towards an integrated approach to fighting food insecurity and increasing the beneficiaries’ ability to resist calamities.

With the mission closing at the beginning of 2015, ACF should work towards ensuring that comprehensive integrated projects such as these will continue to be delivered by NGO and government partners in the remaining wards of Chipinge.

## THE WRAP

As in previous years, evaluation of the coverage criterion focused on analysing whether the most vulnerable people in the population were being reached and whether that targeting criteria was appropriate given the importance of disaggregation. The apparent trade-off between coverage and effectiveness is an issue ACF continues to find ways to reconcile.



“A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results”

#### DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Efficiency

## Measuring it

Efficiency is mainly covered in the input and output columns or rows of the logical framework.

Assessing efficiency usually involves looking at the characteristics of **key structural elements enabling the implementation of activities** (funds, infrastructure, staff, leadership, coordination, financial control, partnerships, procedures, culture, planning, etc.) as well as a **financial analysis** of relevant areas of the expenses (costs per sector, comparison of inputs nationally and internationally, transportation costs per type, etc.), and the **ability to deliver outputs on time**. It is also worth **taking risk factors into account** (change in political priorities, partners' commitment to the intervention, economic stability, infrastructure, organisation's capacity and leadership) which might cause interventions to be inefficient.

## Achieving it

Efficiency was the **second lowest score among the criteria set**, showing a slight increase from the previous year. This is encouraging considering that the score had been steadily decreasing since 2011.

**Several projects have dealt with delays, access challenges, cancellation of activities, insecure environments and the lack of capitalisation from previous experiences.** Nevertheless, the positive attitude of ACF staff and the ability to catch-up with work plans have balanced these challenges. ACF's evaluation reports from 2014 highlight delays in the start of activities and poor synchronisation between activities or between activities and the seasonal calendar (particularly for food security projects). There were also a number of suggestions from evaluators for programmes to **focus on maximizing cost efficiency by planning logistics and materials better**.

In line with that, a Food Security project in Bahr-el-Gazal in Chad, highlighted the practice of procuring materials from the local market whenever possible, as well as the advantages of producing higher quality constructions when seeking tenders from different suppliers. The latter was weighted highly in the measurement of efficiency despite the lack of supporting follow up documents for accountancy or inventory tracking.

For a Disaster Risk Management project in Pakistan, the evaluation recommended that ACF considers managing major procurement

to reduce financial risks, and to include partner staff as members of the procurement committees so as to increase the sense of ownership while ensuring goods and services purchased were in line with local requirements.

Others, like a Nutrition Programme in Sierra Leone, were found to have an inefficient use of human resources, as the evaluator argued that the same quality could have been achieved with fewer staff; **if a more “hands-off” approach had been put in place sooner, the dependence on ACF may have been lessened and would have allowed time for other activities to take place (such as community-based participatory discussions or efforts to strengthen links between different stakeholders).**

One example of efficiency was seen in a Food Security and Livelihoods project in Afghanistan which made savings in support costs lines, re-allocating it to project activities. This was quoted by the evaluator as being an **“uncommon good practice that scales up benefits for beneficiaries and attests the agency's capacity to optimize the use of funds”**.<sup>7</sup>

## THE WRAP

Evaluators focused heavily on procurement, human resources and budgets to assess the efficiency of interventions. The way forward will be for ACF to further develop risk analyses and monitoring in its interventions and for evaluators to take a more holistic approach to evaluations by developing a deeper understanding of key structural elements, a cost-efficiency analysis and a review of risks affecting the intervention.

<sup>7</sup> “Promotion of Women's Nutrition.... Samangan Province”, Pantera, Gigliola, March 2014



*“The extent to which the interventions objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance”*

#### DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Effectiveness

## Measuring it

In the logical framework, effectiveness is assessed as the contributions of outputs to achieving outcomes.

Assessing effectiveness involves a **logical framework analysis** and an examination of the main reasons why the intervention achieved or did not achieve particular objectives, including **the process by which the change was brought about** and the suitability of the **resources allocated**. It is also advisable to look at the levels of **stakeholder participation** both for project design and for the analysis of implementation mechanisms, including feedback from the affected population over the intervention through sound **M&E Systems**.

## Achieving it

The Effectiveness criterion showed an **average performance compared to the other criteria**, with an increase compared to the previous year and a slight recovery trend after a big fall in 2012.

**Most projects evaluated seemed to achieve their objectives against the indicators that were**

**articulated in the proposals, even when delays in the launch of activities were reported.**

For a Food security project in Chad, the delays were due to internal coordination, procurement and security issues, resulting in detrimental impacts on physical construction and output quality.

The Nutrition Project in Mali also achieved its objectives despite some delays, but the lack of involvement of partners in the design and monitoring, as well as the lack of coordination with other actors working on the same or similar contexts may have hindered effectiveness.

A project in Zimbabwe which focused on building disaster resilient communities was the top achiever on effectiveness owing to the attainment of all logical framework indicators (and even a number of indicators in the M&E Plan), along with the hard work of the team and its experience of working in the region. No remarks, however, were made regarding the implementation processes involved. It was mentioned that the M&E system prioritized the monitoring of a number of relevant indicators over the identification of “lessons learnt”, hindering the integration of M&E lessons into the project implementation.

In other cases, such as during an Afghanistan Food Security project, the activities had

observable positive results but it was reported to have a poor monitoring system due to a lack of simple indicators linked to easy data collection. Moreover, surveys were not directly linked to the outcomes of the project.

Similarly, in the Sahel programme it was possible to assess beneficiary target numbers, but due to monitoring difficulties it was not possible to assess if individual targets stated in the logical framework had been reached.

Also in Myanmar, the quantitative data component of the project’s M&E system was found to not provide the data to allow more definitive analysis of the project components and activities which could have been the more critical factors contributing to the improvement of household dietary diversity.

Furthermore, the effectiveness performance of many projects and programmes varied considerably depending on which of their objectives were evaluated. Some projects which involved support for Water and Sanitation infrastructure and other types of infrastructure, ACF needs to work more to ensure quality and adequate construction with a maintenance plan. In projects or programmes with training and capacity building activities, the general feeling

is that ACF can be quite effective in **supporting beneficiaries and local communities, positively contributing to the intervention objectives.**

## THE WRAP

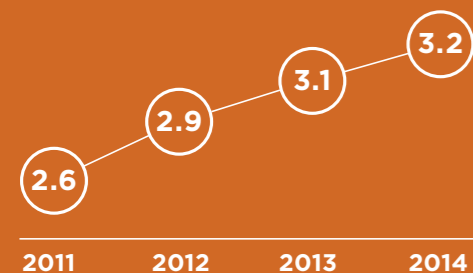
A solid project design with SMART<sup>8</sup> objectives and indicators has proven to be key when assessing effectiveness. Furthermore, well-functioning M&E systems are a strong asset towards providing quantitative and qualitative data for sound analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound.



*“A measure of whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after the donor funding has been withdrawn and project activities officially cease”*

DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Sustainability

## Measuring it

In the logical framework, an evaluation of **connectedness** will mainly cover the **linkages between outputs and outcomes**. The assumptions column may also include information about risks related to sustainability or connectedness.

Humanitarian actions should establish a **framework for recovery**; therefore evaluations should assess whether the key **linkages between the relief and recovery phases** have been established. This could be evidenced by the existence of an **exit strategy** (requiring availability of funds, timelines, allocation of responsibility and details on handover to local organizations).

As a proxy to measure this criterion, evaluations could identify and assess the **nature of partnerships** (especially the ones that already exist between international and national NGOs) and the extent to which local capacity has been supported and developed.

An evaluation plan for a Disaster Risk Management, Nutrition and Food Security project in Zimbabwe explicitly mentioned the need to look at partnerships and capacity, whereas the

review of the exit strategy document was clearly stated for the planning of the Sahel evaluation.

## Achieving it

Based on the review of the evaluations from 2014, the sustainability of ACF's support varies quite significantly between projects and between the different areas of intervention. Overall, this criterion is the **lowest rated among all the criteria set**, with a continuous slight increase on an annual basis since 2011.

A Food Security/ Disaster Risk Management project in Zimbabwe can be considered as a good example of how partnerships and capacity building have been incorporated in project design. The project focused on implementing activities through government ministries and service provider institutions (in particular government extension services in crops and livestock), setting up local structures to ensure operationalization at all levels with decentralized autonomy, delivering assets to support further management of ACF's projects and investing in local capacity through trainings and workshops to government partners.

Similarly, local capacity building was the focus of a WaSH and Nutrition project in the Sindh Province

in Pakistan. The combination of a construction component comprising hand pumps and water reservoir rehabilitation and a soft component of hygiene promotion implemented through the PHAST approach (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation) proved to be successful in **building a better understanding of the root causes of a non-hygienic environment**. Communities also created a fund through Village Project Committees in order to manage maintenance and collect cash for the repair of the hand pumps. This is an interesting example of how **greater impact is inherently linked to greater sustainability**.

In Chad, where a Food Security and Livelihoods project was implemented, the local Committees for the Prevention and Management of Conflict were already in place, and recognized and accepted by communities. The project made efforts to reinforce the function and notoriety of these committees, enhancing the continuity of the project's outputs, but failed to manage the development of contingency plans for the management of Cereal Banks. It also did not provide training to build the capacity of the Committees to effectively respond to crises (a very important factor considering the volatility and insecurity of the region).

Many more examples demonstrate that ACF needs to improve clear handovers of projects

to the local communities, governments and businesses. A good example of this was a multi-sector integrated project in North and South Kivu in the DRC, where the delay in starting a community-based structure management and exit process jeopardised the sustainability of the work of the project.

Similarly, a Nutrition project in Bamako, Mali received a low rating on sustainability due to problems with the establishment of partnerships between NGOs and community associations. Community associations took on an exclusive implementing role with high dependence on ACF, therefore on ACF's departure it was judged that they would have limited capacities to continue actions. In line with this, the evaluation pointed out some problems in the project design with a lack of a clear reference to the appropriation issues.

A clear example of how linkages between outputs and outcomes can be challenged was the Livelihood projects in Abkhazia. Based on a short term strategic approach, livelihoods were supported with small grants. This was done assuming that the beneficiaries would have the capacity to buy inputs and materials and pay for infrastructure maintenance. However the context had little or no capital available and access to affordable credit and loans was limited.

Moreover, the economy and the security situation were **external factors** which were beyond the control of beneficiaries. These factors should be **carefully taken into account in the assumptions of the project design, and methods need to be found to mitigate their impact on sustainability**.

Finally, a WaSH project in Afghanistan in Ghor, was also rated poorly due to poor community mobilization and empowerment, and particularly a lack of engagement of women who were key stakeholders for water in this part of the country. Communities had simply not developed a sense of ownership for the water assets provided by ACF.

## THE WRAP

Local capacity building at the institutional and community levels, well-articulated partnerships and community participation and ownership have once more proved to be at the core of sustainability performance. External factors stated in the assumption/risk column of the logical framework should also be carefully monitored and analysed to assess sustainability.

“Positive and negative, primary and secondary, short, mid and long-term effects produced by an intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended”

#### DAC RATING AVERAGES BY YEAR



# Impact

## Measuring it

Impact can be considered as a **higher-order measure** and thus **relates to the outcome** column in the logical framework, as well as to the intervention goal. In fact, impact occurs beyond the life span of the intervention and therefore assessing the impact of ACF's interventions would require an ex-post evaluation. Ex-post evaluations can be directed toward improving programme design, learning about the why of impact and identifying what works and what does not work.

A thorough impact or effects measurement looks for the changes in the outcomes that are directly **attributable** to the programme. To be able to estimate the causal effect, any method chosen must estimate the counterfactual - what the outcome would have been for programme participants if they had not participated in the programme - which is only possible with the aid of a sound comparison group. **Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation designs** are the ones giving the most robust estimations of effects but are highly costly to implement.

An attempt to measure impact is to do before-and-after comparisons with the use of **base line** and **end line** data. This comparison assumes that if the programme had never existed, the outcome for programme participants would have

been exactly the same as their pre-programme situation, which rarely holds true considering that other factors which change over time affect the same outcome, resulting in biased impact estimations. **Before-and-after comparisons** could still be useful though for monitoring trends but never as a method to measure causality.

Considering the nature of ACF's projects, and the methodologies and resources usually available to measure this criterion, it should be clear that the scores could at the very most give a flavour of the **“likelihood of impact”**. Together with the before-and-after comparisons (and proper final evaluation timing allowing the existence of end-line data), measurements can take into account actions taken to increase the likelihood of long term impact (probably linked to sustainability) and the use of a bigger amount of **proxy impact indicators**.

It is worth mentioning how an evaluation plan in Zimbabwe considered partnership indicators as proxies to assess impact (or the “likelihood of impact”), which could be an action conducive to increase the likelihood of long term impact, being usually assessed under sustainability. The close interrelation between both of these criteria makes this a clever attempt of measurement.

## Achieving it

Impact has got **one of the lowest scores** of the seven criteria measured, with the biggest

decrease compared to the previous year (-6.5%), and a slightly flat trend since 2011.

The 2014 evaluations showed that impact and behavior change in some programmes are not easy to measure or achieve over such a limited period of time. However some evaluations were able to estimate the likelihood of impact, like a WaSH and Nutrition project in the Sindh province of Pakistan which proved that it had improved the malnutrition situation in villages as expected, with GAM and SAM indicators decreasing from 2012 to 2013 based on baseline and end-line data and with similar results expected for 2014. General improvement was also reported in the WATSAN situation according to community members, with no major unintended consequences discovered. It is worth mentioning the project was closely monitored by a complex monitoring framework, where each project component, including WaSH and nutrition, collected their own data throughout the year, analysing trends and taking into account seasonal patterns of water-borne diseases. Sound impact proxy indicators were used to detect tangible differences within the area, enabling a better assessment of the likelihood of impact.

Also, KAP surveys were used in more than 30% of the projects under analysis to enable before and after comparisons. A poor example can be seen in a Nutrition Project in Mali where methodological problems with the available baseline and end-line KAP surveys forced impact to be assessed based

on discussions and observations, concluding that there was an improved understanding that malnutrition was a “treatable disease”.

On the contrary, in Afghanistan, an Food Security and Livelihoods project in Samangan Province used impact indicators to track changes in dietary diversity, and managed to both achieve and measure behavior changes with KAP and impact surveys. Impact indicators were also monitored through Post-Harvest Monitoring (PHM). It is worth mentioning that the likelihood of impact remains limited especially with regards to gender equality and wider social and economic effects on women.

Nevertheless, a programme combatting Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and enhancing women's economic empowerment in Uganda was said to have achieved a strong likelihood of impact on women livelihoods and access to social services, and also to improving understanding on GBV.

In contrast, an evaluation for a WaSH project in Indonesia found that while women benefitted from the new water supply systems due to reduced needed time for water hauling, gender issues where not addressed in the project design, and that there was limited impact on gender relations.

Finally, ACF's humanitarian response in Syria (including Lebanon and Jordan supporting both

refugees and host communities) was proved to have mixed impacts on beneficiaries' lives. The positive impacts were identified as increased income, improved health status, better cohesion and mental health and greater access to other agencies' services. The negative impacts related to increased water scarcity, rental rises and reduced wages for the local communities. ACF has been working to ameliorate the negative effects of the programme by improving the inclusion of local communities in project activities.

## THE WRAP

In the context of evaluating the impact ACF's projects, it would be more accurate to assess the “likelihood of Impact”. Towards improving the measurement of the latter, projects would need to strengthen both the quality of their baseline/end-line data and their M&E system, including the inclusion of some proxy impact indicators.

## DAC Analysis in a Nutshell

**Relevance/Appropriateness and Coherence** are the **best project performance areas** (rated 4.3 and 3.9 respectively). Both of them have the exact same rating as in 2011, with a more or less steady performance throughout the years in between. This suggests that ACF has a good understanding of context and needs in many areas of operation, as well as general alignment with national policies and strategies.

**Sustainability and Efficiency** are **underperforming areas** (rated 3.2 and 3.4 respectively). Even though sustainability was the lowest rated criterion, it is also the one showing the biggest improvement since 2011 (a 23.9% increase). On the contrary, efficiency shows the biggest decrease in project performance since 2011 (a 6.3% decrease). Further analysis would be required to better understand the reasons behind these trends.

**Impact** (or more precisely “likelihood of impact”) is the **third lowest performing area (3.5)**, with a slight decrease in comparison to the 2011 rating. The limited availability of quality and relevant quantitative data to measure trends, both through base line / end-line surveys or well-functioning M&E systems is hindering further “likelihood of impact” related analysis.

**Effectiveness and Coverage** were both **rated in the middle of the 2014 criteria set** (both 3.7) with opposite historical trends. On the one hand, coverage presents the second biggest increase of the criteria set since 2011 (12.1%) and effectiveness the second biggest decrease since 2011 (a 5.5% decrease). As for the latter, several evaluations pointed out the lack of consistent or complete monitoring data which hindered their ability to evaluate the project’s progress against its objectives.

## Looking Forward: Recommendations for improvement

**Evaluation questions.** Even under a pre-set evaluation approach, considering the unique nature of every project, it is generally desirable to customize questions under each criterion in order to make sure that findings are relevant and useful to stakeholders. **Stakeholder participation** in the crafting of evaluation questions should be encouraged if the likelihood of the **use of findings** is to be improved.

**Methodological triangulation.** All evaluations used more than one option to gather data, such as interviews, observations and documents. Nevertheless, questionnaires and further quantitative analysis has been scarcely used, hindering not only a further validation of data but also a deeper and wider understanding. The ELA will address this issue in two different ways: consistently ensuring that **evaluation plans** are in existence where methodology and techniques for data collection are outlined; and working towards **better M&E, project design and proper data collection and analysis.**

**Recommendation Follow-Up.** Many recommendations stated in 2014 evaluations are similar to the ones made in previous years for similar projects. A **management response** for the recommendations should be submitted by the project manager with a clear **action plan**. The ELA will facilitate the process shortly by starting to carry out **recommendation follow-up** as a way to **ensure the use of findings and**

**to capitalize learning towards continuous improvement.**

**Strengthening M&E to provide a solid basis for quality evaluations.** Out of the 24 evaluations under analysis, associations have been found between **effective M&E systems** and **good effectiveness and impact performance**. Unfortunately few examples of effective M&E systems have been reported. It is recommended that resources are put in place to **assign specialized M&E experts** at the HQ level who can provide support to the field when needed. The ELA is working closely with ACF-US to develop M&E guidelines, including **baseline and end-line surveys, M&E Systems, regular monitoring review and self-evaluations to name a few.**

**Project design:** Some report examples mention that objectives and/or indicators are not SMART. Poor project design is not a sound basis for project implementation and prevents quality evaluation. ACF may benefit from developing clear project design guidelines which would define quality standards for all ACF interventions.

**Baseline and end-line data.** 17 out of the 24 evaluations under analysis were reported to have baseline data while 13 were reported to have end-line data. At least eight of these data sources came in the form of **KAP surveys**. Few of them have actually been successfully used for quantitative measurement due to either

reported methodological problems (preventing the measurement of the desired outcomes) or non-existence of end-line data for evaluation timing. It is imperative to **introduce rigor both in the planning and in the implementation of baselines and end-lines for assuring a quality database for further analysis.**

**Gender Programming.** As an **essential cross cutting issue for the organization**, which is reflected in ACF’s International Gender Policy, **data should be disaggregated by sex** enabling a thorough gender analysis. Since October 2014, in line with ACF’s gender policy, the ELA has started **integrating gender equality related questions in all terms of references for evaluations.**

**Strengthening evaluation practice.** To achieve greater leadership, ownership and accountability in the evaluation process across all HQs, two actions are expected in 2015: the **creation of Evaluation Focal Points (EFPs)** and the **review of ACF International Evaluation Policy and Guideline**. For the former, the ELA team will **proactively approach the ACF Network to identify projects requiring evaluation**, while ensuring **consistency in the application of the EPG and quality across the organization**. The purpose of the latter is to reflect learning from ACF’s experience in evaluation in the past few years, as well as to integrate the learning and reflections stated above.

### Note of Caution on DAC SCORES:

Although the analysis done in this section gives a reasonable idea of ACF’s average project performance in these seven relevant areas, DAC scores should be taken with caution. The interpretation of each criterion could vary, leading to subjective ratings and further potentially biased performance assessments. In particular, the scores attempt to measure core concepts behind each criterion which have, in some cases, been slightly adapted in the EPG from the DAC guidelines. Besides, judging by the base of evidence used by evaluators to assess the criteria, further concept adaptation or even potential misconceptions are

likely to have taken place, probably resulting in ratings which do not necessarily correspond to the original core concept behind each criterion.

For example, in various cases coverage is not assessed based on numerical facts or on whether the largest possible proportion of the population in need was reached, but rather on whether the right people were selected as beneficiaries.

Another example is impact, where there have been several references related to effectiveness and monitoring data. In particular, the reference to the

term “impact” has proven to take several nuances, which can be illustrated by a literal reference to “impact of project activities”, which is an obvious misconception of the term.

Moreover, even if these scores were 100% unbiased, readers should bear in mind that the analysis has been done out of a small sample of 24 projects which in no case should be representative of the entire universe of interventions implemented by ACF.



# PART II

## Debate and Discussion



## Introduction

### Providing a platform for critical reflection and analysis of experience in ACF International

This section of the Learning Review allows ACF staff from around the globe to provide critical reflection and analysis on burning issues in the Network. This year's edition features five articles which can be divided in three categories.

The first category is about reflecting on the Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak and its impact on the treatment of severe acute malnutrition in Sierra Leone. It presents the current situation, ACF's role and what's next in Sierra Leone. It provides a basis for ACF to reflect on tackling new types of crisis.

The second category is about raising awareness, analysing ACF experience and generating synergies around the following cross-cutting issues: monitoring and community feedback mechanism, knowledge and information management, and gender equality. These issues need to be addressed in a systematic and

coherent way across the ACF network and these articles are a stepping stone towards that end. The articles are directly grounded into ACF work on the ongoing development of ACF Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines, the ACF paper on Knowledge and Information Management (December 2014) and the ACF International Gender Policy.

The third category is about looking into other types of evaluations - Real Time Evaluations and Emergency Evaluation - both carried out during the past year. The article explains the added value of such exercises; highlighting how these new evaluations complement the mid-term and final project evaluations and what can ACF learn from the experience.

The intention of this section is to spur discussion, facilitate change and ultimately improve the quality of ACF's work.

# Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Outbreak: The Impact on the Treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in Sierra Leone

There is an initial assumption that the **Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone is impacting the already fragile health system, particularly on maternal and child care services, threatening the progress made with the introduction of the Free Health Care programme.** According to the national SMART survey conducted over the summer 2014 the rate of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) decreased from 6.9% (95% Confidence Interval ranging from 6.3% to 7.6%) in 2010 to 4.7% in 2014 (95% Confidence Interval, 4.3%-5.2%). The situation is expected to have deteriorated however the rapid spread of Ebola has contributed to the disruption of health services at both health centre and community levels; and has had a major impact on the agricultural and trading systems.

Since the Ebola outbreak was officially declared in May 2014, health facilities have been experiencing an overall decline in attendance. This is due to **communities fearing that they might contract**

**the virus while in the health centre or to be identified as suspected cases. This issue is further compound by the fear of the health staff to operate in health facilities without all the necessary protective equipment.** Following the temporary closure of several health centres due to exposure of the staff to Ebola suspected cases, health staff feared providing routine health services implying physical contact. Indeed, the risk of Ebola transmission through unprotected health care is real, and this is particularly the case for children since the normal case definition for Ebola patients doesn't often apply to them, especially when severely malnourished, as their immune system prevent most of the common signs and symptoms appearing. **The fear of the health staff is impacting the perception mothers have of the health services.** During an interview one mother said "we are not enjoying visiting the health facility anymore [...] "the health staff do not want to touch the children anymore as if they were infected".

**Confidence in the health system is also under threat at the community level.** In order to continue monitoring the nutritional status of children under five in the communities, while protecting the community health workers (CHWs), the Ministry of Health (MoH) has revised the procedures for the implementation of the health activities at community level. They have banned the use of the Middle Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) tape for the period of the emergency and limited the identification of SAM cases to visual screening. However, despite the training provided to the CHWs to visually identify SAM cases, the weakness of this method is resulting in incorrect identification and in rejection of referred children at Outpatient Therapeutic Programme (OTP) level. Along with the risk for the CHW of losing their credibility, the **rejections are discouraging mothers from bringing their children to the health facility once referred.** One of the CHWs interviewed reports of mothers saying that since they have been rejected once, they will not go to the health facility if referred again.

As a consequence, in the period between July and December 2014, in the 14 OTPs and two In-patient Facilities (IPFs) supported by ACF in the Western Area, **there has been a decline in new admissions of 45,7% and 77,7% respectively, with a peak during the hunger gap season when a respective decrease of 66% and 90% was recorded.**

**If this situation continues, there will most likely be a rapid increase in the number of SAM cases, as well as deaths of children under five.**

## What is ACF's role?

In a context such as this one, the mission is monitoring the situation and intervening to prevent the nutritional situation from deteriorating even further. **ACF is working at the health facility and community levels to facilitate health staffs and mothers in detecting and treating acute malnutrition reducing the risks of infections.** In order to ensure basic health services are provided, **ACF conducted training on the "infection, prevention and control" (IPC) measures in 100 Peripheral Health Units (PHUs) in Moyamba District and is now extending the support to the main hospital in the same district, as well as in Kambia district.** By regularly monitoring the implementation of the IPC measures and through the use of mobile technology the supply stock is kept under control avoiding health staff from operating unprotected, particularly as most of the infections of health workers occurred in "non-Ebola" facilities. Through monthly meetings with the health staff and the communities, ACF is monitoring the acceptance and the perception of the health centres, ensuring IPC measures are understood by the communities and addressing resistances when necessary.

In particular, **as part of the measures adopted to protect the health staff working with malnourished children, the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) protocol was revised to be adapted to the Ebola context,** i.e. in the OTPs admission and follow-up criteria have been reviewed and the

measurement should<sup>9</sup> be limited to MUAC to limit body contacts,<sup>10</sup> and the Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) ratio is now based on the age of the child instead of the weight so contact is minimized. Yet, in IPFs the health staff directly in contact with patients are advised to wear Personal Protective Equipments (PPEs) and, starting from the main paediatric hospital in Freetown, the staff have begun testing every child for Ebola prior the admission in the hospital in order to reduce the risk of contamination. At community level, to limit the negative effects of the "no-touch" policy, ACF is supporting the MoH in the implementation of an alternative strategy consisting in the provision of a MUAC tape for each child under five and in training to the mothers on its use as monitoring tool for the nutritional status of their children. This strategy, identified as an emergency measures is now expected to be an opportunity for the country to implement an innovative strategy at large scale, aiming at improving the early detection of acute malnutrition cases. Along with the strategy, ACF has supported the MoH in the **adaptation and diffusion of key messages on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) to continue the promotion of breastfeeding without putting mothers and children in danger.**<sup>11</sup> These messages, along with other **key information on nutrition and health are also provided to the communities through radio programmes and jingles, particularly to encourage attendance at health facilities.**

<sup>9</sup> The revised version of the IMAM protocol has not been yet officially disseminated hence it is not always applied.

<sup>10</sup> Measurement done utilizing MUAC tape implies limited body contacts compared to the measurement done through Weight/High.

<sup>11</sup> Breast milk is one of the body fluids through which the Ebola can be transmitted.

For more information:  
Jose Luis Alvarez  
Senior Technical Advisor  
ACF-UK  
j.alvarez@actionagainsthunger.org.uk

## What next?

A “no-touch” policy might seem to be the end of many activities implemented in a health system. Indeed, clinical procedures, even the simplest ones used in Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) protocols (MUAC, weighting etc...) require close contact between patients and health staff. The situation in Sierra Leone has proved challenging but created the environment to develop innovative methods that should be considered in other settings. Adapting the protocols so ratios of RUTFs are based on age may not seem the best approach in a long term project but can indeed be helpful for many programmes that in a given point of time cannot access weight measures. **Training mothers to use MUAC tapes can reinforce community activities in many countries.** Therefore these challenges should not stop SAM treatment being delivered but also can reinforce the current way to implement CMAM protocols.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon that in an emergency situation health centres are suddenly shut down and community activities seriously disrupted, but this is when the role of NGOs is more necessary than ever in procuring additional supervision and supply distribution as well as implementing creative solutions that can serve as a bridge until the national health services are restored. This not only ensures that treatment is still being delivered at some degree during the epidemic but ensures that the trust of the population in the health system does not

disappear. The ultimate commitment of the health system is to the people themselves and the mutual relationship that has been built must be sustained. If this means a modification of established protocols, it should be done.

In Sierra Leone **ACF is aiming to gain a prominent role in the districts of operations in supporting the MoH** in the provision of RUTF to SAM children under treatment in the case of temporary closure of the OTP due to exposure of health staff to Ebola; and to **work along with the MoH and UNICEF in providing nutritional support the individuals directly and indirectly affected by Ebola at community level**, such as survivors, children whose mother has died or children whose mother has recovered but can't breastfeed in the recovery phase.

Furthermore, **ACF will continue to support the MoH in establishing a robust nutrition surveillance system** paramount to monitor the evolution on the nutritional status of the population, particularly children under five.

### ACF in Sierra Leone

ACF works in Freetown-Western Area and Moyamba Districts implementing health and nutrition programmes that aim at supporting the Ministry of Health, at national level and in the two districts, in the prevention and treatment of severe acute malnutrition at health facility (more than 50 OTPs and three IPFs) and community levels.



# Minimising risk through Monitoring and Community Feedback Mechanisms

In the humanitarian sector, Programme Quality and Accountability (PQA) or Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) units, are emerging more and more as the backbone of an organization. With changing scenarios and complexities around the world, large numbers of available funds and stakeholders to support vulnerable people suffering from disasters and emergencies, **new ways of ensuring quality and accountability of interventions are needed.** Every donor, organization and individual is generally committed to utilizing funds transparently for the survival of vulnerable people. The donor requirement, organizational core values and commitment towards quality and transparency are the driving forces for the establishment of higher quality and accountability standards in the humanitarian and development arena, spearhead by initiatives like SPHERE, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), People in Aid, ALNAP etc.

ACF's integrated approach has positioned it as among the best organizations working in Pakistan. The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) is among the main donors funding ACF programmes after the flood emergency in Pakistan in 2011, supporting the organization to establish strong monitoring systems for quality deliverables. **As part of ACF**

**Flood Response and Recovery Programme, a PQA team was established in March 2011.** The purpose of the team was to **keep track of ACF's work through monitoring, to ensure quality deliverables and community satisfaction, to control and validate ACF brand and standards, to validate beneficiary lists and check their registration against the specified targeting criteria, to monitor the cash disbursement activities, to monitor communal work quality, to validate selected working sites, to produce diverse intervention maps and ensure that beneficiaries considerations are heard.** All of the aforementioned activities have established an accountability mechanism for ACF Pakistan in line with international quality standards like HAP or SPHERE.

In 2013, during the remote implementation of an ECHO project in the North of Pakistan, a donor visit observed and reported sub-standard work in WaSH hardware deliverables in the intervention areas. The construction work was implemented through contractors supervised by WaSH field teams. Given the report on the poor quality of implementation, the PQA team conducted a detailed **field inquiry through hired WaSH monitoring consultants, who technically verified 100% of the hardware components of the project activities as per quality standards** (Bill of Quantities, Design, SPHERE and engineering standards etc). During the visit each hand pump

and latrine was physically verified, feedback was taken from communities on quality of material and labour payment, and visual evidence was gathered. The report findings confirmed sub-standard construction work on non-functionality of the hand pumps, turbidity in hand pump wells, and quality issues in the constructed latrines. During the visit, the social monitoring team also accessed the communities and met the project committee members and beneficiaries of the villages to find out about the root causes for the low quality of work. The problems identified were the negligence of staff in supervision/follow-up of contractors, the lack of monitoring and timely reporting, staff involvement in corruption and lack of physical verification. **Thanks to the PQA team's involvement, it was possible to rectify these issues and where necessary reconstruct any faulty hardware and infrastructure. Additionally some ACF staff members were released from duty following an investigation, and regular physical verification of hardware at several stages of programme implementation has now been integrated into standard process.**

This exercise **minimized the financial risk** to the organization, **reviewed the HR structure, supported the development of Standard Operating Procedures, improved contract/contractor management, developed monitoring tools and mechanisms, and ensured follow-up and strengthened programme quality.**

Additionally, the **set up of a mission wide community feedback and complaint mechanism (FCM) and Information, Education, Communication (IEC)** materials containing FCM process along with PQA mobile numbers have been **developed and promoted** at community gathering common places. Community committee members were informed to contact this number in order to reach an ACF representative in case of any feedback (negative or positive) or observation of any substandard work by ACF or its contractors.

## The community feedback mechanism

To reduce communities suffering and serve them with dignity, **ACF provides assistance to beneficiaries in a transparent way with commitment to quality, accountability and transparency.** Being accountable for quality and transparency toward the community and to contribute towards international standards like HAP & SPHERE, **ACF established a Feedback and Complaints Mechanism (FCM).** This mechanism helps beneficiaries to have direct and easy access to an independent and neutral department to seek information, give feedback and lodge complaints regarding projects implemented in their target areas. **Five different means have been provided to communities to give feedback and lodge complaints:** mobile phone, feedback boxes, email address, office address and face to face. The feedback can be related to abuse of

any kind (fraud, corruption, harassment, etc.), any type of discontent over ACFs or third parties goods & services, non-selection related issues or other type of complaints, as well as appreciation, support and endorsement of ACF's teams and work. **The system helps ACF to assess, improve, and recognize the quality of work and use significant power effectively to perform better enabling ACF to communicate, implement, monitor and improve its commitments.** This FCM is also in compliance with ACF Charter of Transparency, and Free and Direct Access to Victims.

This mechanism is integrated within the programme, with the idea of **accountability being everyone's responsibility.** It was initiated with a thorough capacity building exercise for field programme teams on different quality and accountability concepts and standards. To ensure accountability towards beneficiaries, communities / beneficiaries were also sensitized on the FCM and disseminated IEC materials for mass awareness were discussed, feedback/complaint boxes installed to facilitate direct access to beneficiaries and community concerns. **This system enables ACF to ensure timely rectification of the gaps, misconduct and other issues that need addressing to improve programme quality, timely service delivery, minimize financial risk, help beneficiaries in accessing the services, minimize risk of fraud**

By Shahzad Ajmal Paracha,  
Programme Quality Assurance Coordinator,  
ACF-Pakistan & Silke Pietzsch,  
Technical Director,  
ACF-USA

For more information:  
Shahzad Ajmal Paracha  
pqaco.pk@acf-international.org

Silke Pietzsch  
spietzsch@actionagainsthunger.org

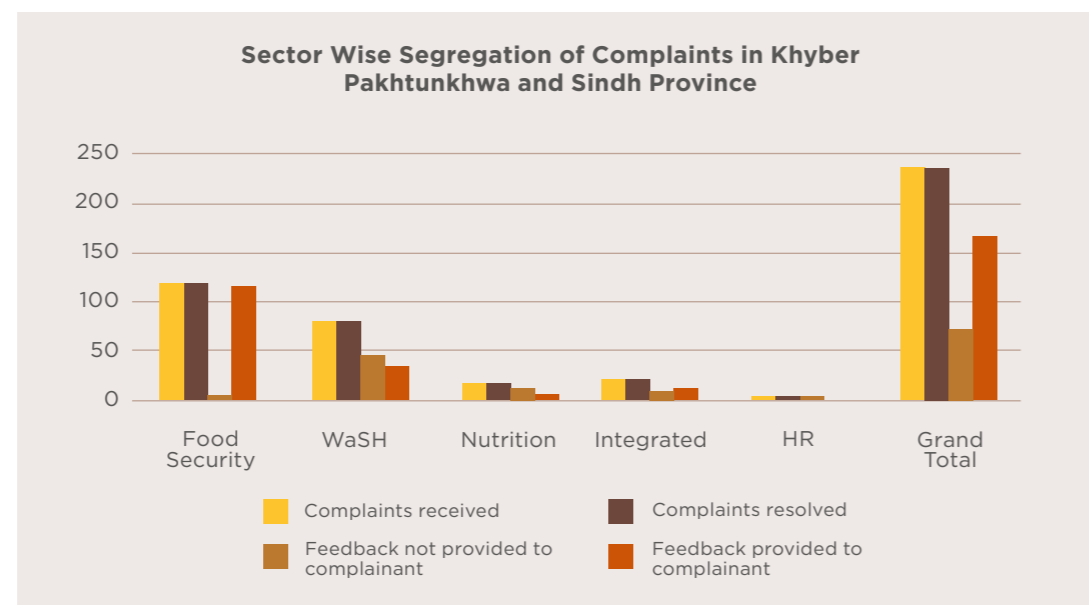
by staff and community leaders and lastly it helps in providing timely information to the management for better decision making.

Complaints received from different sources are added into the FCM database by the PQA team. As per complain category, the PQA team forward these complaints to the regional or national level committee for investigation and solution. Once response on complaints is received, the PQA team provides a response to the complainant and close the complaint. Usually a complaint is dealt within 15 working days.

The graphic (below) gives an overview of how beneficiaries' feedback and provide information directly to ACF. Overall the PQA team received 236 feedbacks during the project life span, 50% of concerns are related to food security & livelihoods, 33% to WaSH, 7% to nutrition, 1%

related to human resources, while 8% of concerns fall under an integrated programme category, which means feedback addressed more than one sector.

100% of the feedback was resolved together with the programme team and feedback has been given to 70% of the complainants. The remaining 30% could not be reached due to cell phone failure, change of cell number, no contact number available in case of written complaints, etc., remaining complaints were received where people wanted to be included in the programme as beneficiaries, though they did not qualify based on the programme criteria. Most of these types of complaints were received through complaint boxes having no contact numbers, and hence ACF teams re-clarified in the villages



with the village management committees about the targeting criteria.

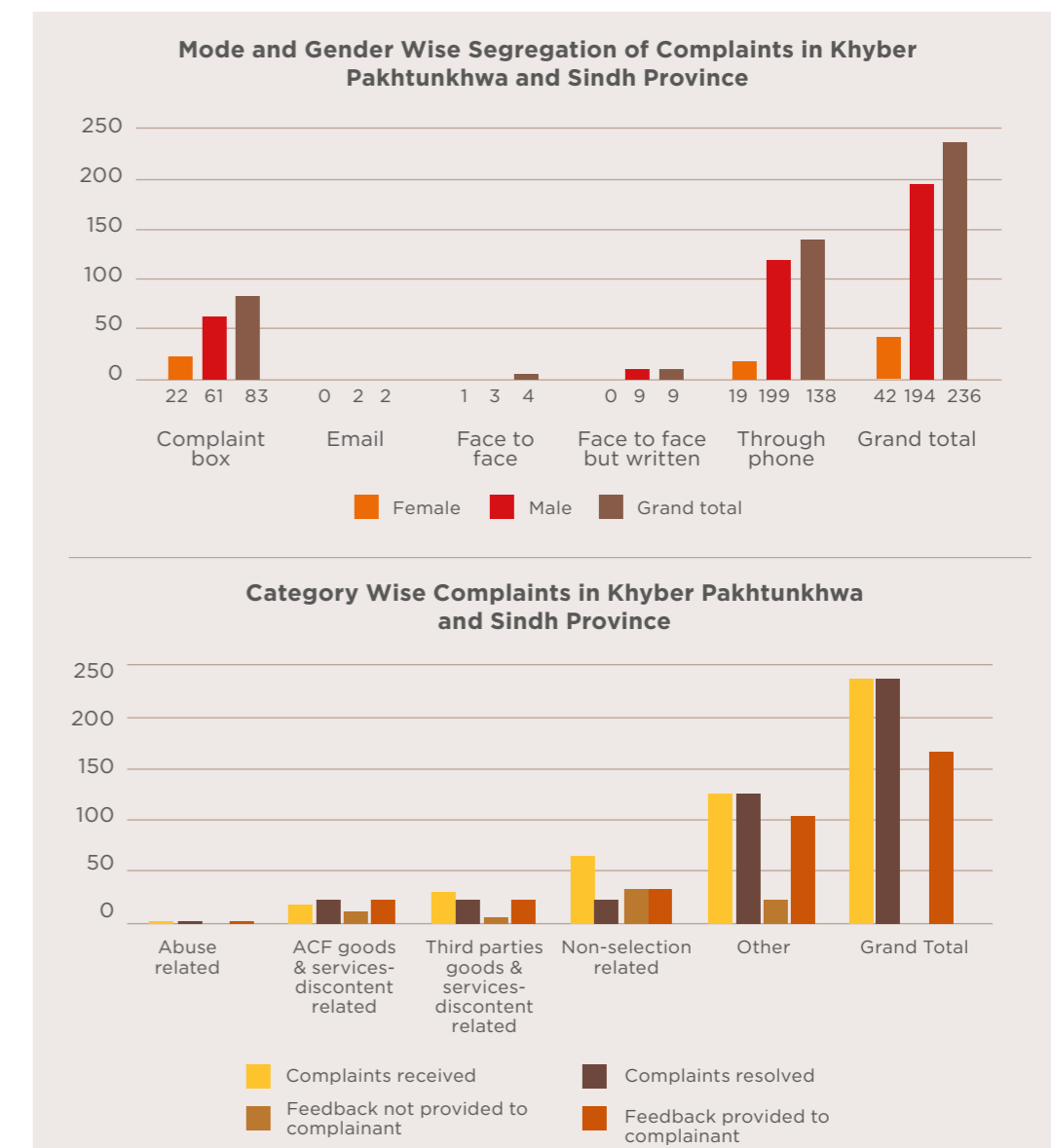
As can be seen in the graph (top right), both complaint box and phone are the preferred means to give feedback. As expected, the proportion of women using the system shows a great unbalance with respect to men (18% vs 82% respectively). It is interesting to note how email or written means are never used by women, probably related to illiteracy issues.

As for the type of complaints, it can be seen in the graph (bottom right) that complaints are focused on the "Other" category, which is intended for general feedback in the form of suggestions, inquiries, positive feedback on ACF work, etc., followed in amount by non-selection related complaints and with a smaller amount of complaints related to abuse and discontent on services.

Despite showing a marginal comparative amount within the categories, examples of some abuse related complaints are illustrated in more detail below.

**ACF Staff involvement in corruption/Fraud:** In February 2014, a beneficiary provided feedback via mobile phone. The call was received from a village, the feedback that an ACF employee<sup>12</sup> was collecting money from community members against low cost latrines and communicating to community members that ACF will provide latrines to those whom pay an attractive amount. The PQA team immediately took action and investigated

<sup>12</sup> Not disclosing the name due to confidentiality.



**the case confidentially.** First they interviewed those beneficiaries whom provided money to field engineer and gathered all of the evidence, and then later interviewed the field engineer and his supervisor. After investigation the PQA team communicated the findings to the country management along with the respective evidence. As a result **some staff were released from their duties and beneficiaries reimbursed their payments.** Additionally, a **community awareness session** about the programme and ACF was facilitated **reiterating the programme details and conditions, and the importance of the feedback mechanism.**

**Fraud by Village committee chairman:**

A female beneficiary lodged a **complaint through mobile number,**<sup>13</sup> against a Village Committee (VC) chairman. "He took Rs. 5000/-PKR from every cash grant beneficiary, but the other beneficiaries do not complain about him, but I inform you people to kindly provide support and give the money to the people".

**The PQA team visited the village and investigated the case.** Initially interviews were conducted with all beneficiaries and further with complainant and committee chairman. The investigation proved the committee chairman was involved, it has been **agreed with complainant and communicated to VC chairman to reimburse the stolen amounts.**

**Complaint against village committee chairman:** A **complaint regarding financial corruption** of the **village committee was received.** A male community member recorded his complaint against the village committee (VC) chairman that "there are **two female beneficiaries registered**

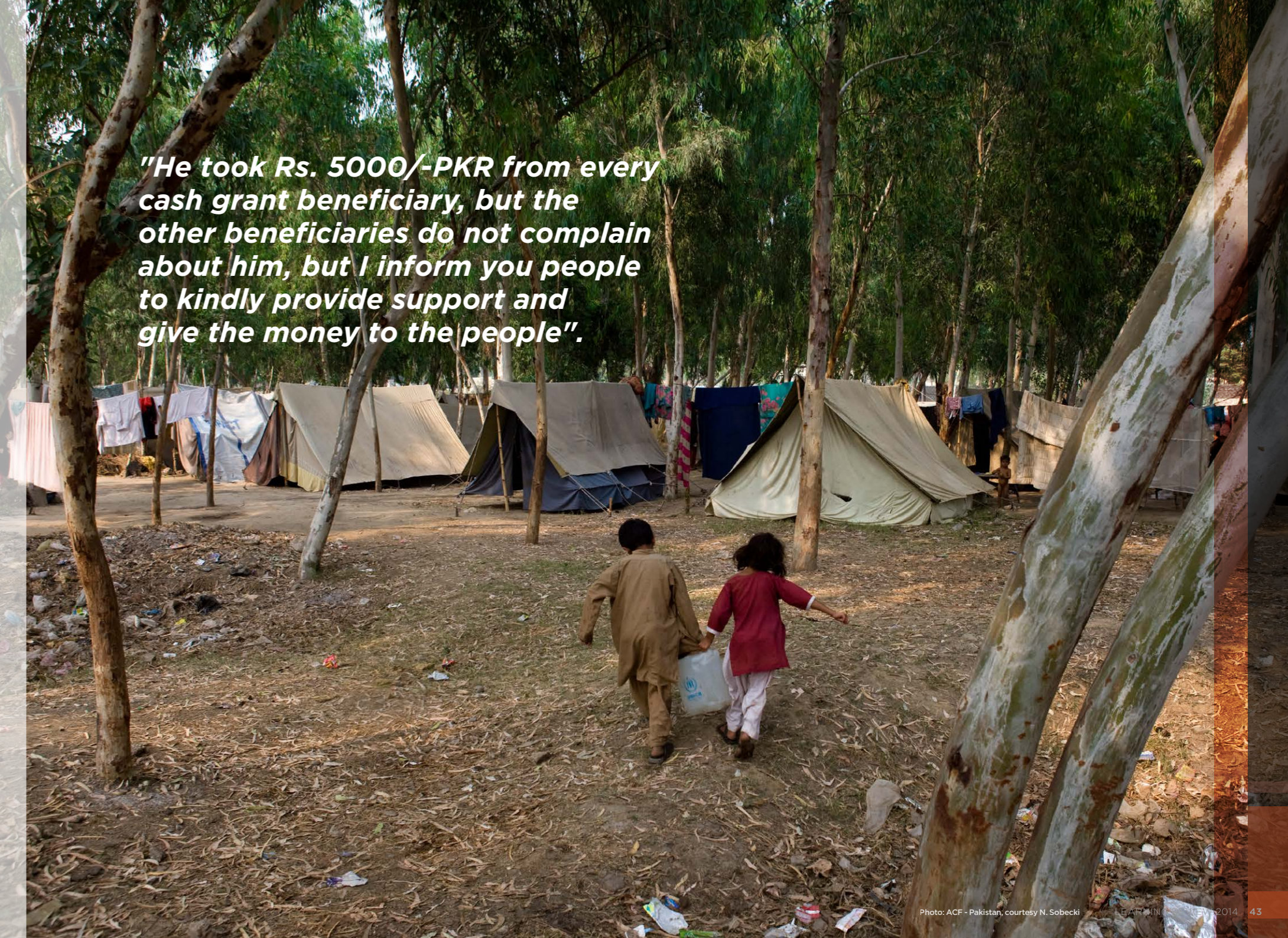
<sup>13</sup> A dedicated mobile number for receiving complaints/feedback

**for cash grants.** As on the day of distribution there was no male member available at home and due to cultural norms females are not allowed to go outside alone. In this connection the **VC chairman received an amount of Rs. 33,600/PKR as an alternate beneficiary** but he only provided Rs.10,000/PKR to both females and had stolen Rs. 23,600/-PKR".

The **PQA team investigated the case,** first Food Security Livelihood programme and Bank documentation/records were checked and verified that amount was provided to VC chairman. Later they investigated at field level with beneficiaries and found that the VC chairman hadn't provided the actual amount to the beneficiaries. After meeting with **the VC chairman, he accepted that he hadn't provided the amount and agreed to pay the full amount, and finally paid the stolen/remaining amount of Rs. 23,600/-PKR to beneficiaries.**

Overall this **mechanism has contributed to increase the ACF downward accountability towards beneficiaries & communities.** Beneficiaries benefit, the quality of services is improved, and the risk of financial corruption is minimized at staff, community and individual levels. The **system helps as well to empower the local communities to speak up and take charge of their programmes.**

*"He took Rs. 5000/-PKR from every cash grant beneficiary, but the other beneficiaries do not complain about him, but I inform you people to kindly provide support and give the money to the people".*



# Knowledge and Information Management: What is it? Why do we need to strengthen it? What is the way forward?

There is growing recognition in ACF that we need to improve the way we manage information, make it available in a timely manner and share the knowledge we generate. But what is knowledge and information management in the context of ACF, why do we need to strengthen it and what is the way forward? We have asked David Lamotte, Knowledge Management Officer in ACF France to shed some light on the subject.

## **What is Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) in the context of ACF?**

**Knowledge and Information Management (KIM)** is the process of capturing, maintaining, developing, sharing, and effectively using organizational data and expertise.<sup>14</sup> For ACF, this means; maximizing the potential of its staff, achieving a solid and mature collaboration with its partners and enhancing its ability to nimbly adapt to its environment.

To attain these three objectives, ACF will focus on: **Committing to identify and collect the right information** i.e. data that is relevant for the organization of our mission and/or consistent with the realization of our mandate. This involves a solid assessment of our programmes,

monitoring and evaluation, and strengthening the capacity of ACF to collect and share robust evidence to develop and share insight through the lessons we learn.

**Developing capacity to refine the data being collected at the field level** to make the data available and meaningful for the rest of the organization. That is how ACF will grow knowledge assets, increase the organizational effectiveness and achieve overall efficiency.

**Being proactive in disseminating, but also questioning, knowledge assets with both our internal and external audiences;** foster individual and collective intelligence, encourage debates and create room for innovation.

**Ensuring the whole network is committed to KIM** which relates to our dedication to embed mechanisms into our decision-making process

and operational procedures. We aim to grow a culture that makes KIM systematic and timely throughout the organization.

## **Why KIM?**

To appreciate why KIM is important for ACF, we need to address what makes ACF Knowledge invaluable. Roughly, we consider that this lies in three major areas:

The **ability to learn from experience** to strengthen our capacity and develop versatility;

The **focus on collecting evidence** to contextualize our approaches, formulate our positions, shape our policies and legitimize our voice;

The **commitment to work transparently** and in **synergies with our partners.**

For the above to work efficiently, it is important to identify the potential challenges. One challenge consists in **allowing a good balance between top-down and bottom-up knowledge exchanges.** We need to ask ourselves whether we're doing the "right thing" before asking if we do "things right" and ascertain that we are relevant in a given situation. This requires seamless knowledge exchanges and constant connection between parties.

Another challenge comes from the focus on immediate results. There is a risk of remaining

stuck in our comfort zone and hesitating to bring in new perspectives. This compromises ACF's capacity to challenge its model and devise new approaches. With that in mind, we need to **create space for discussion and informed decision making.**

The last challenge lies in our **capacity to create synergies and enable effective cooperation.** Making the most of our expertise and leveraging the interactions with our partners requires a sound communication matrix. That's why KIM addresses organizational siloes.

## **Why does ACF need a policy?**

We collectively recognize that the mobilization of knowledge and social capital is a key driver for ACF to fulfil its mandate. This will not happen by magic. As an organization, we need a framework to organize our effort and a mutual commitment to KIM: enhanced capitalization & sharing of knowledge, streamlined organizational learning and greater connectedness. This calls for a direction and a proper endorsement from all ACF parties.

This is why the policy is made to: devise a method, create ownership and rally adhesion and accountability.

## **... and why it is timely to do it now?**

There are two reasons why we need to act now.

Firstly, because it is core to our vision as ACF. We know that being more effective<sup>15</sup> and better connected calls for an integrated organization, more solid knowledge sharing and learning capacity, all of which KIM strives to cement.

Secondly, because we appreciate that organizing and securing the capacity transfer to our partners and to the civil society is a key condition to strengthen the appropriateness and coherence of our programmes and achieve sustainability. In addition, two years after the Transformative Agenda<sup>16</sup> was launched, ACF which has always actively supported inter-agency coordination recognizes the onus to develop its own KIM practice to reinforce cooperation and foster cross-fertilization.

## **How will a position on KIM change the way ACF works?**

The main expectation for devising a position on KIM is to set the ground for a solid approach in the two interrelated areas of Information Management (IM) and Knowledge Management (KM) as well as fostering good practice and commitment from its staff. Concretely, the KIM paper prepared by ACF France lists what we consider are the key milestones for ACF to meet its ambition and become a role model in a field that will shape the future of the Humanitarian sector agenda.

By David Lamotte  
Knowledge Management  
Officer  
ACF-France

For more information:  
David Lamotte  
dla92270@gmail.com

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Thomas H. Davenport and Laurence Prusak, 2000, "Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know".

<sup>15</sup> See Chloé Pukett article "Conduction Delivery Science in ACF" in the Learning Review 2013

<sup>16</sup> For more information on how ACF participates to the Transformative Agenda, refer to "ACF International and the transformative agenda", May 2014. Available on ALNAP: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/12553>

# Paving the way towards Gender Equality Programming

The term “gender” is frequently misinterpreted to mean women, women’s rights or women’s empowerment. **Gender** refers to the **social differences between men and women throughout the life cycle**. These **differences are learned and are influenced by a range of factors thus they may vary across cultures, age groups or marital status**.

In an emergency context, organizations work at high speeds to set up a humanitarian response. The need to pay attention to gender issues can often go unrecognized or de-prioritized as humanitarian actors move quickly to save lives, meet basic needs and protect survivors. Failing to recognize the different needs, capacities and contributions of women, girls, boys and men can have serious implications for the protection and survival of people caught in humanitarian crises.

It is against this back drop that the ACF International Gender Policy & Toolkit have emerged. Throughout 2013 ACF engaged in a consultative process with staff across the organization to develop both the policy and the practical tools. The policy is our commitment at the organizational level towards increasing the impact of our work through gender equality programming. The toolkit supports the implementation of the policy by offering a

practical guide to ACF International teams to effectively integrate gender and gender equality into their day do day activities and work.

A remarkable amount has been achieved with the development and roll out of the ACF International Gender Policy and Toolkit. In 2014, nearly 1,000 ACF staff across the organization were trained through various regional and country level trainings as well as gender sensitization sessions during annual ACF workshops and meetings. At this point it is too early to determine how the trainings and sensitization sessions have contributed to shaping concrete and lasting changes in individual and organizational practices pertaining to gender equality programming. However, the fact that such large numbers of staff have been reached has led to the ACF International Gender Policy and Toolkit being a widely recognized initiative that spans across missions, HQs and the various departments.

To ensure that gender is institutionalized and fully integrated into organizational processes, systems and strategies, a strong organizational commitment and continuous efforts will be required for 2015 and beyond.

Based on the lessons learnt over the past year of implementation, the following five key

recommendations should guide the next phase of further integration of the policy and tools:

**Continued management commitment and ACF staff ownership of the policy** - The policy and toolkit have been widely disseminated and are available in different visual forms, for example, posters, flyers and a dedicated website. Despite these efforts made, it was found that during some of the gender events that took place in 2014 staff highlighted that they had not read the policy and toolkit or were not familiar with it at all. A communications plan is needed to ensure that management commitment to the policy is sustained and ACF staff ownership of the policy continues to be built through the systematic dissemination and socialization of the policy and toolkit.

**Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation** - staff trained and sensitized on the gender policy and toolkit are an important asset for its continuation. Without any specific activities or time frames to follow up on, the tendency is to continue with business as usual due to competing priorities. At the same time in the absence of a clear ACF accountability framework, efforts to implement the Gender Policy and toolkit may vary by country. Developing a set of core qualitative and quantitative indicators and tracking the gender marker coding at various levels in the organization will ensure pilots can be scaled up,

results can be measured effectively and that everyone is working in the same direction. The development of a five year international strategic plan for 2016-2020 provides the organization with an opportunity to prioritize internal quality and accountability initiatives, including the monitoring and evaluation processes around this policy and subsequent phases of its implementation.

**Information Management** - The policy makes the case for the need to consider gender in all ACF interventions thus evidence needs to be continually and systematically collected from the field and shared across the organization. Utilizing a common internal information sharing platform which provides an effective structure to share internally our best practices, tools, and challenges will be a practical way to ensure easy and equal access to information for ACF staff.

**Learning from other agencies** - ACF staff are highly engaged within the humanitarian community. Part of the process in building our own capacity on gender will require absorbing the lessons learnt from our existing partners and organizations who have successfully institutionalized gender. There is space for ACF to externally share our own experiences and draw from different organizations’ expertise and documentation on gender in each country.

**Gender Leadership** - institutionalizing the gender policy and toolkit goes beyond just a

single entity within ACF as it requires many different pieces to be put in place and work together simultaneously. Establishing strong leadership around gender through the setting up of an organizational gender task force divided into different working groups according to different sections of the policy: Communications, Capacity Development, Gender Marker, M&E etc. will help to promote continuous engagement and a multi-faceted approach.

It is important to note that there is not one size fits all approach when it comes to the implementation of the gender policy and toolkit across the organization. Progress will depend on the commitment of management to prioritizing the spirit of the policy, national operational context, strategic goals of our programming as well as a range of other internal and external factors that shape the environment of each ACF office. Nevertheless establishing the basic elements of the Gender Policy will enable us to build a strong foundation and work towards the same goal of ensuring quality programming and providing a strong humanitarian response with a gender lens.

*By Faye Ekong, Director, Training Centre, ACF-USA & Paula Tenaglia, Director of Operations, ACF-Canada*

For more information:  
Faye Ekong  
director.tc@acf-international.org  
Paula Tenaglia  
ptenaglia@actioncontrelafaim.ca



# Real Time Evaluations (RTEs): What are RTEs? Why do we do them? What can we learn from our experience?

*“RTEs are formative, utilization-focused, process evaluations that provide immediate feedback. Their main function is of improving rather than proving, and can be applied when a programme is in continuous state of change”<sup>17</sup>*

## RTEs in ACF

At ACF, **Real Time Evaluations (RTEs)** are a form of **evaluation designed to review and influence the performance of interventions as they happen**. The introduction of RTEs in ACF reflect a growing need to be able to take stock of our emergency responses as they happen, rather than waiting until the end to identify lessons for the future.

**ACF’s Emergency Management System (EMS)** recommends that **RTEs should be carried out within six weeks of the start of emergency operations**, and for them to **last no longer than seven days**. RTEs are expected to **provide simple, practical recommendations** that are **actionable in the short-term**. At present, all emergencies for which the EMS has been activated are expected to comply with the RTE requirements. For other emergency responses, the initiative to launch RTEs is expected to come from the Country Offices involved in the response. The greater the interest in the RTE at field level, the more likely that the evaluation findings will be taken on board. The **HQs and Country Offices** implementing the emergency response are **expected to plan,**

**budget and fund RTEs**. In 2014, ACF conducted three RTEs in Syria, South Sudan and Iraq and one follow up evaluation to the RTE in the Philippines.<sup>18</sup> The RTE in South Sudan was funded by ACF-USA HQ and the RTE in Iraq was funded by ACF-France HQ. Sometimes RTEs are cost-shared by two ACF HQs as was the case for the RTE of ACF International’s Response to the Syria Crisis this year which was funded by ACF-France and ACF-Spain HQs.

The **Philippines and Syria responses RTEs** were **lauded for their ability to provide a platform to discuss and analyse the level of coordination between different HQs**. Since emergency responses (certainly EMS activated ones) compel HQs to work together not just in terms of coordination but actually in the field as well, they force the HQs to front up to relationship issues and what one might term ‘politics’. In the Philippines all HQs were implicated in one way or another and both Spain and France’s emergency pools were deployed. The Syria evaluation was a key step in forming the regional office, which ACF-France and ACF-Spain were struggling to set up.

**RTEs are about immediate priorities and reform, at the field level**. They **do not provide a holistic analysis of the quality of the emergency response**, that is why they are generally **followed by a final independent evaluation to review the performance of the intervention over a longer**

**period of time**, and as a means of reviewing how the recommendations made by the RTE led to strategic and tactical changes in the response.

This year has seen an **increase in the number of RTEs**, from one last year to three this year. As we continue to improve their quality and their linkages with final independent evaluations, the **number of RTEs carried out** and their **influence in the organisation is expected to keep increasing**. Their implementation has been challenging as emergency responses are very different (earthquake, typhoon, regional conflict, slow onset drought etc.), although from a systems point of view they do share some similarities.

**ACF’s ability to improve its humanitarian response depends on its ability to learn from RTEs** and to **take immediate actions on RTE’s recommendations**. ACF also needs to systematically extract learning from one emergency response to the next to ensure it improves its response.

## What can ACF learn from RTEs experience?

The objectives of RTEs tended to be similar and included assessing the deployment/response to the needs of the affected population, identifying good practice and lessons that can be drawn from the response, and providing practical and realistic short term recommendations. **All of the RTEs proposed solutions to operational and organizational problems**.

RTEs tended to have **common evaluation methodologies** focussing on **key informants interviews, field visits and observations and formal document review**. There was **little evidence of triangulation of data** through the use of different methods and crossing quantitative and qualitative data to support evidence-based judgement. This gap may be attributed to the fact that as in humanitarian emergencies objectives are constantly shifting as the situation in the field quickly evolves, planning tends to be poorly

documented and monitoring systems absent. The follow up emergency evaluation in Philippines recommended that RTEs methodology **include a workshop to further cross-validate information collected through other methods**. This would **further strengthen the dissemination of RTEs findings and reinforce ownership of the recommendations**.

Indeed, the RTE reports pointed out the following as the main **limitations to the evaluation methodology**: (i) **consistent lack of M&E data** in Syria and South Sudan which led one evaluator to help the project to set up an M&E system in South Sudan, (ii) **security issues** in Syria, (iii) **short timeframe available to analyse and triangulate findings** in Iraq, (iv) **sensitivity with national counterparts and insecure nature of communication channels** in Syria and (v) **lack of staff availability due to time constraints in humanitarian settings** in Iraq.

The RTEs brought up similar issues among all ACF emergency projects. These mainly evolved around (i) **Human resources**: recruiting and training the right calibre of staff in such a challenging environment and the high dependency on expatriates; ensuring that HR strategies and policy are fully developed for national staff, retaining qualified staff despite the short term nature of work contracts and ACF low salaries compared to other INGOs; (ii) **coordination and knowledge and information management within the ACF Network**: set up an information management system to ease collection of data and adaptive management, respect for protocols for decision-making and communication lines which sometimes risked the unity of the team; and financial and institutional risk sharing protocol which require further agreement.

The RTE conducted in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq highlights the following **key factors of success for ACF response**, which have the potential to be replicated in other contexts:

**Timeliness of ACF humanitarian response** (48 to 72 hours) is key to rapidly position ACF as a key figure within the humanitarian community, complemented by an active presence in media and social networks; **Leadership of the team on the ground** freed up opportunities for the team to be flexible and for decisions to be taken at the appropriate level of the organisation without having to resort to a hierarchical system of validation which would have reduced the overall effectiveness; **Appropriate approach to risk management** which allowed a good balance between financial and security risks on one hand and programmatic priorities on the other hand; **Capacity and commitment of all staff** which translated in a tendency to transform constraints into opportunities and have a solution driven team spirit; **Approach to funding and donors** both in terms of providing the donors with a strategic steer in a very timely manner in the response and also in showing sufficient maturity to leave the scope and objectives of the proposals as open as possible in order to adapt to constantly changing needs.

The **evaluation follow up to the RTE** in the Philippines mentions that the **RTE provided both operational and future recommendations, which remain valid six months after the completion of the RTE**. The **weakest point** remains the **process to follow up on the recommendations** which was unclear at the time. An action plan was created based on the recommendations which emerged from the RTE, but the **monitoring of the progress was unclear**. ACF was slow in implementing the suggested changes. In addition, new and existing staff interviewed during the evaluation follow up did not have any knowledge of the RTE recommendations. To address this issue, the follow up emergency evaluation recommended **future RTEs to include clarity on follow-up and support as well as one-pager key message section for the field offices**.

By Alexia Deleigne,  
Senior Programme Quality  
Assurance Advisor and  
Evaluation Learning and  
Accountability Manager,  
ACF-UK

For more information:  
Alexia Deleigne  
a.deleigne@actionagainsthunger.org.uk

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from: Evaluating Humanitarian Action in Real Time: Recent Practices, Challenges, and Innovations; Riccardo Polastro, IOD Parc, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Namely: RTEs - A Real Time Evaluation of ACF International’s Response to the Syria Crisis; February 2014. A Real Time Evaluation of ACF’s Response to Cholera Emergency in Juba, South Sudan; July 2014. Real Time Evaluation of ACF Response to the IDP Crisis in Kurdistan Region of Iraq; December 2014. Follow-up to RTE - Evaluation of ACF International’s Response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, June 2014.

# PART III

## Good Practices

### Introduction

#### Highlighting what works and what has the potential to be replicated or up-scaled in other contexts

Throughout the ACF Network, the ELA promotes self-reflection and continuous learning and adaptation to remain relevant and efficient. As we try to practice what we preach, we have taken a closer look at the way we label these 'Best Practices'. Based on numerous internal discussions, a review of articles and an analysis of how our peers define 'Best Practices vs. Good Practices', we have decided to rename this section 'Good Practices'. This does not indicate that these practices are lacking quality or significance, but rather that the practices should be thought-provoking. Good practices are not something rigid and we do not believe that one-good-practice identified in a certain context may be applicable in any other context.

No single path leads to a good practice as various factors contribute to its success, such as the project location, environment and associated risks, stakeholders' participation and capabilities of the implementing staff. Moreover, what makes a good practice is subjective and depends on the perspectives of the observer and evaluator of the practice.

These practices should instead be seen as positive incentives, and encourage users to make them their own, adapt them to their context and help them evolve. Lastly, reviewing good practices frequently and integrating new research or advanced technologies is vital for future improvements. As in previous years, the valuable contribution of many people across the ACF Network helped to identify the following good practices that have the greatest potential to be replicated and scaled-up in other projects or programmes.

In future, ACF will develop a database to track emerging good practices, share them and facilitate their incorporation into new project designs. ACF will also establish greater connections between good practices from year to year and show how these are being adapted to other contexts, which then will be communicated through the Learning Reviews.



# Have you met...

## Referral system for vulnerable beneficiaries in Abkhazia

### Intro

ACF's Learning Review 2011 highlighted an innovative good practice from Afghanistan to reach those in need. It was recommended to explore alternative ways to discretely target vulnerable populations and this edition features another approach to reach those most vulnerable.

Over the years, ACF has developed strong collaborations with organisations such as the local NGO Avangard, in Abkhazia. Through exchanges between these two organisations, in 2013 the idea came about to strengthen both of their interventions by introducing a formal referral system between them.

Through the partnership with Avangard, ACF was able to assist women survivors of domestic violence and SGBV.<sup>19</sup> While Avangard provided medical and psycho-social support to these women, it was also important to address their degree of economic independence. It serves as the basis of sustaining themselves and their children, instead of being forced to return to the household where they experienced the violence. In this regard, ACF was able to support these beneficiaries with training and grants, which has increased their economic independence and prospects.<sup>20</sup>

### The Practice

ACF provides support to vulnerable individuals to (re)establish and develop their livelihoods, based on a set of criteria developed jointly with UNHCR and agreed with Avangard, who then uses them to refer their beneficiaries to ACF. The criteria used includes: extremely low or no income, specific vulnerabilities (e.g. large families),

women-headed households, beneficiaries of previous UNHCR shelter assistance, survivors of domestic violence and SGBV. While age group and other criteria remain the same, the gender ratio is greatly increased, with 80% of beneficiaries set to be women. ACF works closely with local communities who are also aware of this set of criteria which is communicated either through written public announcements or direct engagement with community representatives and local authorities. Avangard and UNHCR referred eligible individuals to ACF or the beneficiaries applied directly to ACF.

The referrals are based on a good collaboration between humanitarian actors, joint monitoring and interaction with communities. Once referred, the beneficiaries follow the same track for pre-selection and selection for assistance by ACF (provision of a four month training and/or financial support for income generation). In particularly sensitive cases, identity of beneficiaries is not revealed to the members of the selection committee for income generating projects (in this case composed of the ACF, UNHCR and Avangard representatives). When deemed necessary, a confidentiality agreement is signed between ACF and Avangard in order to formally protect the privacy of survivors. The number of referrals is low compared to the overall number of ACF project beneficiaries, but this is a unique system that enables ACF and its partners to jointly support individuals at risk that otherwise might remain without adequate assistance.

The referral system is accepted by the Abkhaz authorities; it serves a dual purpose of, firstly, supporting those most in need and secondly, observing the imposed geographical restrictions

that hamper free access to populations. Since the majority of referrals are women, survivors of domestic violence and SGBV, the system provides them with an opportunity to reach some level of economic independence, gain confidence and avoid being forced to remain in abusive households. It also encourages women to break the silence and challenge the taboo of domestic violence as an acceptable behaviour in their society. It gives them the opportunity to improve their lives with dignity. ACF and Avangard recorded many examples of victims that received support, moving on and restarting their lives.

Moreover, the referral system is also used to refer potential beneficiaries to other partners that are better placed to provide assistance within the scope of their ongoing interventions. The referral system is effective, because it optimises the complementary efforts of partners.



Photo: Abkhazia, courtesy Matteo Modè

### Moving forward

This practice can be replicated elsewhere by a number of simple coordination measures, such as: holding regular meetings to share information on current and future projects, identifying complementarities between respective activities and putting in place concrete mechanisms to make them operational, as well as sharing values and learning on common topics of interest.

The referral system can also be adopted in other projects/programmes in the food security and livelihoods sector, as well as across other sectors. It can be adapted to various contexts taking into account the cultural context and other factors influencing project implementation.

The system may face some challenges, especially when it comes to women survivors of domestic violence and SGBV, as well as in very conservative cultures in which access to specific groups at risk is highly limited. For the system to be effective, it is of the utmost importance to have good understanding and acceptance of the concept by the implementing agency's staff and good collaboration and coordination between partners, local authorities and other humanitarian actors at the field and policy level.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Ervin Blau: [eblau@sc.acfspain.org](mailto:eblau@sc.acfspain.org) or Anika Krstic: [akrstic@gn.acfspain.org](mailto:akrstic@gn.acfspain.org)

# Action against distance

## Remote project management in Syria

### Intro

Due to several factors such as the security situation and the lack of permission from governments and controlling parties, one of the main challenges to the implementation of humanitarian activities in Syria and other contexts, is limited access to the field.

In an increasing number of contexts, agencies have to operate in areas where they face travel restrictions. This may include situations where no staff members are able to travel regularly and freely to field sites or in less extreme cases where there are only limits on expatriate staff. In some cases field staff can travel, but must be accompanied by authority representatives. Nevertheless, the precarious situation of vulnerable people dictates that agencies must continue to deliver services.

Therefore, delivering services due to the humanitarian imperative has to go hand in hand with other humanitarian principles such as political neutrality and ensuring that services are not diverted to others and agencies have to come up with innovative management practices to balance these competing demands.

ACF's Learning Review 2011 edition featured an article on remote management with an example from Somalia. Back then, the following aspects were highlighted as important: (i) Staff Profile & Training; (ii) Clear Roles and Responsibilities; (iii) Adequate Communication and Feedback; (iv) Reporting, Monitoring & Evaluation; and (v) Synergy between Strategic & Implementation Teams.

A recent programme titled 'Humanitarian assistance to the populations affected by the

Syrian conflict in Syria and neighbouring countries', faced similar constraints to the ones in Somalia. The five lessons identified, once more proved valuable. This good practice will explore them further.

### The Practice

As one of the NGOs operating from inside Syria, ACF is facing limited access to an entire country. Expatriate staff are rarely given permission to travel to field sites. Even national staff must be accompanied by local authorities when going to the field and interacting with beneficiaries. INGOs are not allowed to conduct needs assessments although field staff can talk with beneficiaries, but cannot formally record their responses.

To overcome these challenges and ensure proper implementation, ACF has adopted these activities:

**Trainings:** building capacities of local counterparts to ensure host-nation staff members are prepared to take numerous day-to-day decisions regarding project activities, as well as undertaking a wide range of trainings on programme, management, finance and technical aspects to support national staff working in the field offices and dealing with these circumstances

**Monitoring:** selecting monitors from each target community who were trained by ACF staff to follow up on the provision of services as per ACF guidelines.

**Decision-making:** delegating a greater level of decision-making on financial and logistical matters to field staff, while ensuring that final approval of procurement remains at the head office level. This enables quicker decision-making.

### Partnerships and Advocacy:

**Expanding** its network of partnerships with different ministries which allowed ACF to follow various implementation methodologies and gain better access through each partnership.

**Investing** significant amounts of time in building trust and rapport with local authorities, which ultimately implement the restrictions imposed by central authorities. This has helped increase the space available to local staff to carry out project activities at the field level.

**Devoting** considerable time in coordinating with other agencies to exchange notes, gather information, advocate and develop strategies for dealing with issues arising in the field.

**Supplier relationships:** making suppliers responsible for delivering goods at the field level since they are likely to be targeted less often and have better access to the targeted areas.

**Neutrality:** consulting community leaders who support and ensure the neutrality of ACF's activities in the areas and disseminating its humanitarian principles.

**Develop On-the-Ground Networks to Enable Accountability:** making ties with local government officials, community leaders or influential locals, who can be contacted via phone to ensure that on-the-ground staff is continuing to provide aid, avoid corrupt practices and otherwise performs well.

### Moving forward

Agencies dealing with similar situations are advised to review the feasibility of the strategies in their own contexts. Furthermore, they are advised to design more thorough and proactive plans for remote management of emergency operations globally as part of their emergency contingency planning exercise and develop specific strategies for how to deal with similar situations.

A number of different ways to implement remote management programmes exist, including using different methods of monitoring, and levels of direct oversight, which all share the common, important objective of maintaining some level of humanitarian assistance that would otherwise stop if an agency withdrew.

Four remote programming modalities have been identified: a) Remote control; b) Remote management; c) Remote support and d) Remote partnering.

**Remote control programming** involves the centralisation of all decision-making authority among expatriate personnel based in a safe location and the delegation of on-the-ground implementation to host-nation staff in a conflict-affected location.

**Remote management** is similar, but generally involves increased delegation of decision-making authority to personnel in the field.

**Remote support** enables the local staff members on the ground to manage day-to-day activities; the remote managers primarily oversee financial management, donor reporting and capacity building.

**Remote partnering** allows the international institution to serve as a financial intermediary, raising funds for activities which are completely managed by an experienced, accountable in-country partner.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Svetlana Kapustian: [skapustian@sy.acfspain.org](mailto:skapustian@sy.acfspain.org)

# Four Star Meals!

## Organising local Behaviour Change Communication events in Zimbabwe

### Intro

**The International Rescue Committee (IRC) - in partnership with ACF and the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development (IWSD) have implemented a comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction programme in Zimbabwe since the end of 2013. This is aimed at addressing vulnerabilities and mitigating risks through targeted Risk Management Policy and Practices, WaSH, and Food Security interventions in Manicaland and Masvingo provinces in Zimbabwe.**

**ACF's part in this programme was the promotion of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and of national integrated food and nutrition policy and frameworks across ten priority districts, spread evenly over the two provinces. DRM committees were set up in three of these districts. In all ten districts, Food Security and Nutrition Security Committees (DFNSCs) were set up or revived, and strengthened through training and coaching. The overall aim was to strengthen the capacity of the government and of the communities to mitigate their vulnerability to disasters and to build long-term resilience.**

### The Practice

ACF made 500 USD available per district for the ten supported DFNSCs in Masvingo and Manicaland provinces, Zimbabwe. This allowed the committees to set-up Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) events of their choice designed for the wider public, responding to local needs and preferences. The money was given in cash without many strict rules, except for a submission of a financial report for accountability purposes.

The exercise was communicated as: "organise a local event, for as many people as possible, in a captivating and convincing way, to encourage people to change some of their habits on some specific issues in the field of nutrition".

Half of the districts used the money for events that informed the local public about nutrition issues that are locally relevant. Most of these events were public gatherings of a festive nature, with music and a meal for the attendants, at a central place in the ward, often at the home of the local chief.

One public event was organised with songs, drama and poetry, to promote the cultivation and use of small grain cereals in dry areas, rather than the commonly used maize, which is drought intolerant. At that occasion, about a month before the expected onset of the rains, seed packs of sorghum and/or finger millet (rapoko) were distributed for free among interested farmers.

In two other cases the central activity was the preparation - and joint tasting - of dishes of cheap and local food. These plates were prepared in alternative ways to constitute "complete meals", with all four categories of daily required nutrients clearly labelled a "four star meal" (starch, proteins, vegetables, fruit). These delicious meals were shared for free with all visitors to encourage them to try to prepare them at home, and make a habit of it.

In one case, on National Breastfeeding day in Zimbabwe, an event was organised with music,

poetry, and a meal for everyone, promoting exclusive breastfeeding of babies up to the age of six months. This event was organised in a rural ward in the district with the lowest percentage of exclusive breastfeeding mothers of the province. The festive atmosphere and its coinciding with National Breastfeeding day helped to draw several hundreds of people to attend the event.

This opportunity was given to DFNSCs only once. One of the prerequisites of these activities was that they were supposed to ensure that they promote positive Behaviour Change to the target group. These events took place at different times depending on how well prepared the DFNSCs were with ACF only providing limited support, as a way of fostering independence and ownership to the initiatives.



### Moving forward

In this project in Zimbabwe, only a few of the DFNSCs have used the money for an event that really promotes healthy and sustainable nutritional habits. The other half used the money to pay for the costs of organising and training Food and Nutrition Security Committees at ward level.

The following recommendations can be taken from this project:

**Discussions** between DFNSC and ACF about the plans for the event allowed ACF to provide guidelines and advice on expected results; without removing ownership from the DFNSC.

**The value** of a Behaviour Change Communication event increases when it is part of a more coherent campaign. Other elements could therefore be added to the Behaviour Change effort, e.g. improved dish cooking sessions in villages, intensified explanations on food issues to the households in the nutrition gardens, drama sessions in the villages by secondary school children.

**Externally** funded projects enable regular events e.g. once or twice a year. Ideally, after the external intervention, local authorities are able to budget for the organisation of these events by themselves.

**Facilitated** knowledge transfer visits allow and promote the exchange of experiences, ideas and lessons learnt. This would enable events to be improved and have a greater effect.

**ACF** could write up some "guidelines sheets" for various types of communication events. These sheets could outline elements to consider during preparation, practical ideas for setting up, suggestions for making the event attractive to a larger audience, and approaches to improve the effect on specific target groups.

It is necessary for the DFNSC or people implementing the practice to be highly motivated and pro-active. Funds may be available, but if the key people fail to buy into the idea then it will not be a success. The idea needs to be built into projects early on, so that the key people are aware and prepare appropriately. It is also necessary for continual coaching and/or reminders of events during routine meetings so that it will not come as a surprise when it is implemented.

This practice can be replicated, especially for missions that have signed on to the SUN Movement (Scaling Up Nutrition Movement) and have activities going on around building capacity of stakeholders. Only a reasonable budget is required and as practices around promoting food and nutrition security are included in most government policies, it will be a great initiative to include in future programme designs.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Mpho Chiringa: [foodsec-manic@zw.missions-acf.org](mailto:foodsec-manic@zw.missions-acf.org) or Julie Bordes: [jbordes@actioncontrelafaim.org](mailto:jbordes@actioncontrelafaim.org)

# The sooner the better

## Village-Level Early Warning Systems Capacity Building in Pakistan

### Intro

Over the last decade, Pakistan has experienced large-scale internal displacement caused by a range of natural and manmade disasters. Structural poverty, rapid urbanisation, inadequate infrastructures, increased deterioration of the environment - deforestation, more human settlements in hazard prone areas, have all amplified their vulnerability to disasters.

Early warning is a major element of disaster risk reduction as it saves lives and reduces economic and material losses. To be effective, community based Early Warning Systems need active involvement of the community itself, strong public education on the risks of disasters they potentially face and an effective communication system ensuring a constant state of preparedness.

### The Practice

The community Early Warning Systems (EWS) objective was to build the capacities of communities and to strengthen Community-based Early Warning Systems in order to respond before disasters occurred.

ACF has taken several measures to institute an Early Warning System at the village level in Pakistan. Firstly, village committees have assigned two people from within the committees specifically for early warning work, who are then trained on early warning concepts and systems. Secondly, it has provided village committees with telephone numbers of key local and provincial level sources of information on early warnings for floods. Thirdly, it has linked village committees with local authorities for early warning by giving

the contact numbers of each party to the other party for use during emergency periods. Finally, it has also given village committees loudspeakers to make announcements once they receive an early warning.

Through these activities, ACF aims to encourage communities to:

**Analyse** basic information, key messages, useful aspects and experiences concerning impending disasters;

**Keep** themselves informed on natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, floods and domestic hazards from government and other sources;

**Take** steps to protect their own and their family's safety;

**Develop** a proper vulnerability and capacity map in their own village and use the information for the development of proper Early Warning Systems and Community Disaster Preparedness Plan (CDPP).

This is an innovative and useful exercise for the following reasons:

**Traditional** EWS in Pakistan are slow and top-down and rarely provide accurate and timely early warnings to communities. In contrast, ACF's approach empowers communities to be proactive and have access to timely information; **It builds** the capacities of communities in technical matters related to EWS;

**It creates** linkages among government and communities and encourages government officials to treat communities as active partners. Community members (adults) are the targeted participants of this system and the associated training programme. Taking this into account, it

should use methodologies, practical exercises and different mediums that are appropriate for their learning, noting that interactive education and activities play a powerful role in the training process.

Furthermore, people assigned early warning responsibilities must be well-known within villages and must be proactive and able to take quick decisions. The equipment given to communities must be kept somewhere which is safe and easy to access and must remain functional at all times. The links between communities and government officials must be strong and two-way to ensure the timely dissemination of information. Since the success of local EWS depends on the effectiveness of higher level EWS, agencies must also undertake advocacy to improve the working of the latter.



### Moving forward

The people-centred approach to early warning, promoted by the Hyogo Framework for Action, focuses on how communities must understand threats in order to avoid them. Disasters are partly caused by external hazards, but they also stem from vulnerability: people being in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or without adequate protection or resources to respond to a warning.

Obviously, the success of this village level Early Warning System is linked with how effective the provincial and national level Early Warning Systems are. Unfortunately, currently they are still very weak in Pakistan. While ACF cannot directly influence this issue, it should use the Disaster Risk Reduction Forum to jointly advocate with other agencies with the government to fill this gap in the early warning capacity at the provincial level.

This good practice can be developed further, by inclusive specialised training for the communities on the community EWS, and the development of community linkages with district-level departments and the national meteorological department, as well as with Provincial Disaster Management Authorities, and National Disaster Management Authorities.

It would be beneficial if this practice could be replicated in other ACF programmes and ACF missions, which is possible, because in this approach the communities are actively involved. It is sustainable as community ownership is encouraged and the activity is designed, planned, and led by the community, as well as monitored. The biggest challenges are the community and district-level departments' motivation and sensitisation. To make this practice more sustainable it would require proper mobilisation and advocacy in order to convince and encourage the community and district-level departments on the importance of the community Early Warning Systems. The involvement of other stakeholders is important for the sustainability and effectiveness of the practice.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Rangaiya Kanaganathan: [washco.pk@acf-international.org](mailto:washco.pk@acf-international.org)

# The grain in our granaries

Ensuring the availability of grain reserves to vulnerable populations in Chad

## Intro

The Bahr-el-Gazal zone, located in the west of Chad, is characterised by frequent droughts and rainfall irregularities, resulting in uncertain food production. During the rainy season, stretching from June to August, this area faces a severe hunger gap. Structural and chronic deficits in production are evident, leading to an inevitable lack of grain resources for the population. This is accompanied by a significant increase in prices, which can at times double. To address this, ACF developed an approach, referred to as the “Cereal Bank”, aimed at supporting the most vulnerable households to have access to food supplies at low costs during the lean season. This approach, in opposition to food distributions, is designed to last.

## The Practice

In order to improve food security for the local populations, Action Against Hunger set up a Cereal Banking system in the Bahr-el-Gazal region. First established in areas with a surplus production and then replicated in zones with a deficit production, these Cereal Banks (CB) are used to stock grain, bought at a low cost after the harvest, and stored until the lean season, during which it will be sold at affordable rates to local families.

In a previous programme (2010-2012), ACF has built, through a participative construction, Cereal Banks, each one containing 6.5 tons of millet. However, ACF realized that the existing Cereal Banks covered only 5% of the population in need in the intervention area, so a new programme (2012-2014) was set up to address

this. New buildings were built, containing up to 21 tons and providing a better coverage.

Looking at the effect of this practice on the Bahr-el-Gazal region, it can be noted (in 2014) that the beneficiaries of the Cereal Banks pay 19% less than the market price for a 100kg bag of millet and 23.5% less for a 100kg bag of corn. Moreover, it is possible for them to purchase cereals on credit, which is a great advantage for those populations who usually cannot access this type of facility, which is an encouraging result.



## Moving forward

Even though a positive change is visible thanks to the cereal banking system, some aspects need to be kept in mind and improved:

**The main challenge** for this practice is to make sure that the management committee is able, in the long-term, to become fully autonomous from the supply to the management of stocks. The local communities must be in direct contact with the producers and carriers, as well as able to oversee the whole supply chain. It is also necessary that they have been trained in the use of monitoring tools (stock sheet, sell documents, bank book, etc.). Even though it is vital to ensure the sustainability of the project, it was reported that the management committee still need (after one or two years of operation) close monitoring from ACF. Thus, it is essential to be aware that this process requires a large time commitment.

**Another important aspect** is the lack of prior selection of the beneficiaries of the cereal banks. The management committee should prioritise the most vulnerable populations and encourage other families to visit the local market instead. Otherwise, the cereal banks would simply become regular stores, where anyone can buy supplies, including those who can afford to buy food elsewhere.

**In order to extend the coverage** of this practice or reproduce it in other parts of the globe, an efficient strategy needs to be developed during the planning phase, including a detailed study of the number of villages concerned, their respective needs in terms of cereal and the actual or potential source of supply. During the implementation phase, special attention needs to be paid to the management committee, so as to have a long-term effect in the target region.

For more information on this practice get in touch with Chloé Milloz: [cmilloz@actioncontrelafaim.org](mailto:cmilloz@actioncontrelafaim.org)

# Credits

The production of the Learning Review would not have been possible without the invaluable front line work of our ACF Staff in the field and the affected population who welcomed us.

## The Learning Review 2014 was produced by:

**Alexia Deleligné** Senior Programme Quality Assurance Advisor and Evaluation Learning and Accountability Manager, ACF-UK  
**Hannah Wichterich** Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing Officer, ACF-UK  
**Macarena Magofke** Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing Officer, ACF-UK  
**Mariagni Ellina** Evaluation Learning and Accountability Assistant, ACF-UK  
**Laurane Briguet** Evaluation Learning and Accountability Intern, ACF-UK  
With the priceless support of **Saul Guerrero** Director of Operations, ACF-UK

## We also wish to thank the following for editing the publication:

**Hugh Lort-Phillips** Coverage Monitoring Network Assistant Coordinator, ACF-UK  
**Eleanor Rogers** SAM Bottleneck Monitoring Guidelines Study Coordinator, ACF-UK  
**Sophie Woodhead** CMN Coordinator, ACF-UK

Moreover, we would like to thank ACF colleagues and friends from around the ACF network for their technical inputs and expertise. We want to express our deepest appreciation to each contributor for this year's edition.

## For the Debate and Discussion Section:

**Imran Ali** PQA Supervisor KPK, ACF-Pakistan  
**Ben Allen** Global Emergency Coverage Advisor, ACF-UK  
**Jose Luis Alvarez** Senior Technical Advisor, ACF-UK  
**Faye Ekong** Director Training Centre, ACF-USA  
**David Lamotte** Knowledge Management Officer, ACF-France  
**Shahzad Ajmal Paracha** PQA Coordinator, ACF-Pakistan  
**Aalia Parvees** PQA Manager-TMK, ACF-Pakistan  
**Silke Pietzsch** Technical Director, ACF-USA  
**Isotta Pivato** Advocacy Expert, ACF-Sierra Leone  
**Tariq Raheem** Deputy PQA Co, ACF-Pakistan  
**Abid Razzak** PQA Manager-KPK, ACF-Pakistan  
**Uwimana Sebinwa** Health and Nutrition Head of Department, ACF-Sierra Leone  
**Paula Tenaglia** Director of Operations, ACF-Canada

## For the Good Practices Section:

**Mona Al Dib** Emergency Program Manager, ACF-Syria  
**Muhammad Asif** DRM Program Manager-KP, ACF-USA  
**Ervin Blau** Head of Base, ACF-South Caucasus  
**Julie Bordes** Program Support Officer, ACF-France  
**Mpho Chiringa** Programme Manager, ACF-Zimbabwe  
**Barbara Frattaruolo** West Africa Regional Food Security and Livelihood Advisor, ACF-WARO  
**Amador Gómez** Technical Director, ACF-Spain  
**Rangaiya Kanaganathan** WaSH and DRM coordinator, ACF-Pakistan  
**Svetlana Kapustian** Country Director, ACF-Syria  
**Anika Krstic** Country Director, ACF-Guinea  
**Cyril Lekiefs** Senior Technical Advisor Food Security and Livelihoods, ACF-France  
**Rachel Lozano** Nutrition Survey and Prevention Advisor, ACF-France  
**Chloé Milloz** Technical Operational Advisor Food Security and Livelihoods, ACF-France  
**Isabel Navarro** Food Security and Livelihoods Coordinator, ACF-Syria

Finally, we would like to thank the evaluators for their commitment to delivering quality evaluations for ACF and their willingness to learn with us and keep improving our evaluation practice.

For more information of the evaluations featured in this Learning Review and for further information on the good practices, please contact the Evaluations, Learning and Accountability Unit, ACF-UK at: [ELA@actionagainsthunger.org.uk](mailto:ELA@actionagainsthunger.org.uk)  
+ 44 (0) 208 293 6190

Front cover photo: ACF Bangladesh, courtesy Sadeque Rahman Saed  
Back cover photo: Tacloban, Philippines, courtesy Jeff Duncalf  
Design by Quito Sierra





**ACF-CANADA**

1150, boulevard St-Joseph est  
Suite 302 - Montreal, QC - H2J 1L5  
T: +1 (0) 514 279 4876  
[www.actioncontrelafaim.ca](http://www.actioncontrelafaim.ca)

**ACF-FRANCE**

14/16 Boulevard Douaumont  
CS 80060  
75854 Paris Cedex 17  
T: +33 17084 7070  
[www.actioncontrelafaim.org](http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org)

**ACF-SPAIN**

C/ Duque de Sevilla, 3  
28002 Madrid  
T: +34 91 391 5300  
[www.accioncontraelhambre.org](http://www.accioncontraelhambre.org)

**ACF-UK**

First Floor, Rear Premises  
161-163 Greenwich High Road  
London, SE10 8JA  
T: +44 (0) 208 293 6190  
[www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk](http://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk)

**ACF-USA**

247 West 37th Street, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
T: +1 (0) 212 967 7800  
[www.actionagainsthunger.org](http://www.actionagainsthunger.org)

