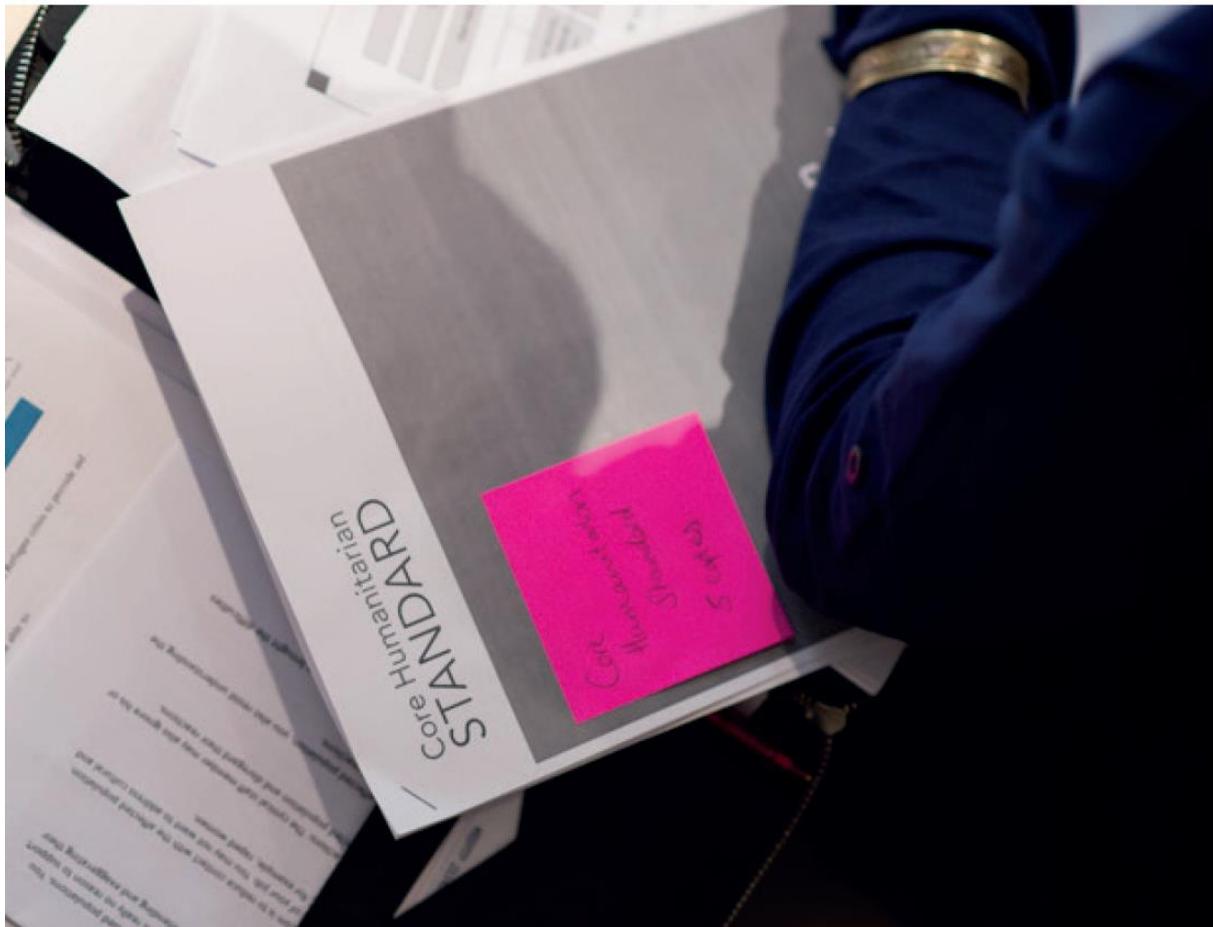


Impact of the Context Staff Development Project

Participant's application of Core Humanitarian Competencies



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Context, led globally by Oxfam GB, is part of the Start Network's Talent Development project. The latter is one of fourteen projects in a portfolio funded by UK Aid (DFID).

Abbreviations

CBHA	Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies
CHCF	Core Humanitarian Competency Framework
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
M&L	Management and Leadership
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE CONTEXT HUMANITARIAN STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Context programme is a staff development initiative that is part of the Start Network's Talent Development Programme. Context was led by Oxfam and implemented by RedR UK in Kenya, Ethiopia, Lebanon and Jordan. The programme aims to raise standards and quality in humanitarian responses through training humanitarian staff. Context consists of two courses - Core Skills, and Management and Leadership. The programme utilizes the Core Humanitarian Competency Framework (CHCF), which sets out six main competency domains considered essential for humanitarian staff.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the overall Context programme evaluation, and complements the other monitoring and evaluation data collected. This research aims to analyse the impact of the programme through assessing 1) improvements in participants' skills and knowledge, and 2) changes at the organisational level. A desk review was conducted on the learning essays and complemented by an analysis of line manager feedback, from 142 participants in 8 cohorts. Using qualitative data analysis techniques, these documents were coded based on the Core Humanitarian Competency Framework (CHCF) competency domains and the main outcomes of the trainings. In these essays, participants described how they applied what they learned, and what they achieved through their action plans. These descriptions were mapped against the CHCF. To get a sense of how common improvements were in each of the CHCF competencies, a count was done on how many participants reported implementing this competency in their work. This analysis was limited by difficulties in determining whether certain competencies were improved based on documents alone, and due to the overlapping nature of the competencies.

APPLYING CORE HUMANITARIAN COMPETENCIES

The research demonstrates that the Context training programme is effective in contributing to improving participants' knowledge and skills across the six competency domains included in the Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework.

- *Developing and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships:* Within this domain, the competency that participants most often reported (77% of participants) as a main area of improvement in their daily work was 'Working with others'. In the essays, participants described how they implemented new skills and tools for better team work and communication.
- *Demonstrating Leadership in Humanitarian Response:* Leadership was the second area of major improvement, with 55% of participants providing examples of improved self-awareness and 46% describing how they were better able to 'Motivate and influence others'. Participants demonstrated how they improved in delegation, providing constructive feedback, using appropriate leadership approaches, as well as motivating and incentivising others.
- *Achieving Results:* Many respondents (54%) demonstrated improvements in ensuring programme quality and impact and put this learning in practice by preparing or improving organisational policies. 37% of participants described how they improved in 'Working accountably', improving communication with and listening to the needs of the affected community as a recurring theme in many essays.

- *Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Humanitarian Principles:* within this domain participants primarily focussed on improved implementation of humanitarian standards and principles (53% of participants) and specially Sphere, CHS, and the ICRC Code of Conduct. 15% of participants described how an improved understanding of the humanitarian context helped them in their work.
- *Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment:* in this domain, 'Maintaining Professionalism' was most reported, namely by 29% of participants. Improved time management and stress management were key outcomes.
- *Operating Safely and Securely at All Times:* A small portion of the participants chose to focus their learning report on changes made in this domain. The most common changes were around enhancing safety and security of staff in their organisations (15% of participants).

Aside from individuals gaining skills and knowledge in the six competency domains, individual participants also benefitted from the programme as their participation to the training led to promotions and increased job responsibilities within their organisations. Additionally, many gained an appreciation and habit for self-study and continued learning, which will benefit them for the rest of their careers.

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Significant changes were made by participants in their organisations through their learning projects and action plans. The most-frequently conducted activities were:

- *Cascading and sharing knowledge* with colleagues and/or partner organisations was described by 51% of all participants, utilising their gained competencies to improve the skills and knowledge of those around them.
- *Writing or improving organisational procedures, guidelines, or policies:* 37% of participants described this. Changes varied from updating codes of conduct to developing staff induction packages and standard operating procedures for a wide variety of situations.
- *Incorporating humanitarian standards/principles into organizational policies and projects:* 30% of participants gave examples of this.
- *Improvements in communication with affected communities:* 31% of participants described different actions taken such as establishing a complaint mechanism or a 'community scorecard' method for feedback.

Together, these actions contribute to improved effectiveness and relevance of the humanitarian assistance provided.

VARIATION BETWEEN COURSES AND COUNTRIES

There were minor differences observed between the courses (Core vs M&L), among the countries where the courses took place (Jordan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon), and between the geographical regions (Middle East vs Africa). However, differences were generally minor, and a larger sample size may be needed to establish trends.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the participants' essays demonstrates that the Context programme has enabled participants to apply Core Humanitarian Competencies within their work, and make significant changes within their organisations. These changes are likely to not only improve the organisation's capacities, but ultimately contribute to improved assistance to beneficiaries.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT PROJECT

Context - an initiative of the Start Network - is a comprehensive and dynamic staff development programme for humanitarian organisations. It aims to raise standards and quality in future humanitarian responses by building core skills as well as leadership and management capacity among humanitarian staff - especially national staff, who are increasingly at the forefront of humanitarian response. The project aims to do this by using the Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework (CHCF) to develop staff skills across the wide range of competencies needed to work effectively in the humanitarian sector.

RedR UK is implementing the Context project in Jordan, Lebanon, Ethiopia and Kenya. This consists of a six-month Core Humanitarian Skills programme (entry level), and a nine-month Management and Leadership (M&L) programme (middle management). The courses include two face-to-face workshops, coaching sessions, peer support through buddy groups, line manager engagement, action plans and practical learning projects implemented on the job and closes off with a final graduation event. For further information about the learning methodologies please see the [Context website](#).

At the end of the course, participants are expected to write an essay to describe how they have applied the learnt competencies in their work, and report the concrete changes they brought in their work as a result of this. The assessment consisted of "learning essays", the final assignments of the participants.

Purpose of the study

This report focusses on the review of the learning essays, which feeds into the overall Context project evaluation. The analysis has developed a better understanding of what competencies participants have been able to apply based on what they have learned in the Context programme, and the impact this has had on their individual and organisational performance. This will contribute to the overall evaluation of the project, which will incorporate a broader range of data and sources. Therefore, this paper sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What impact does the Context training programme have on core skills and knowledge of participants in developing an effective humanitarian response?
2. What impact does the Context training programme have on developing an effective humanitarian response at an organisational level?

Report structure

This report begins with a description of the methodology and limitations. It then moves into the results, first discussing participants learning by competency domain and related competencies. It then explores additional results and achievements including concrete actions, as well as line manager feedback and participant reflections on the learning journey. There is then a discussion of the findings, including differences between Core and M&L cohorts and differences between countries/regions. The report ends with conclusions about the impacts of the Context training programme.

METHODOLOGY

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

This paper presents the findings regarding eight cohorts in four countries; Ethiopia, Kenya, Jordan and Lebanon. Two cohorts were implemented in each country, one Management and Leadership course and one Core Skills course.

Table 1: Breakdown of Participants

Cohort	Total	F	M	INGO	National NGO	Gov	Essays
Management and Leadership Kenya (cohort 4)	24	14	10	16	8	0	24
Core humanitarian skills Kenya (cohort 4)	18	11	7	12	6	0	18
Management and Leadership Ethiopia (cohort 3)	12	1	11	7	3	1	9
Core humanitarian skills Ethiopia (cohort 3)	21	10	11	12	9	0	21
Management and Leadership Jordan (cohort 2)	18	7	11	12	6	0	18
Core Humanitarian skills Jordan (cohort 2)	20	10	10	11	7	1	20
Management and Leadership Lebanon (cohort 3)	18	10	8	9	9	0	16
Core humanitarian skills Lebanon (cohort 3)	19	13	6	7	12	0	16
Totals	150	76	74	86	60	2	142

LEARNING ESSAYS

A total of 142 learning essays were analysed, which were on average 1,000 words in length. The assignment requested the following (see annex 2 for full instructions):

- *Application of competencies*: To choose two competencies which they considered themselves to be weak in at the beginning of the programme, and describe how they improved these competencies and applied them in a real-life situation.
- *Results of action plan/learning project*: To describe to what extent they have implemented their action plan and learning project, and any results they had achieved both personally and in their organisation.
- *Professional development*: To provide a brief paragraph on their learning reflection from the programme, and how they planned to further pursue their professional development.
- *Line manager feedback*: After completion of the essay, participants were requested to submit the document to their line manager, who was requested to provide a 100-200 word briefing on any observed changes in the participants competencies, in addition to achievements observed during the course of the programme.

DATA ANALYSIS: CORE HUMANITARIAN COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

The Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework (CHCF) formed the basis of the Context project as well as the analysis of the learning essays. The CHCF was developed in 2011 as the first generic set of guidelines for competencies development in the humanitarian sector. It defines competencies to mean "the behaviours that employees must have, or must acquire, in order to achieve high levels of performance in their role." The CHCF consists of six core competency domains, and under these are a number of competencies (total 14) (see Annex

1). The CHCF has been widely used by humanitarian actors in relation to recruitment, human resource management and professional development.

A content analysis of the learning essays was conducted using a qualitative and mixed-method data analysis software, namely Nvivo 11 Pro. Coding was then conducted on each of the individual learning essays. Following the structure of the learning essays as described above, codes were applied to each session. The CHCF was used throughout the essay to categorise the described behaviours and achievements of the participants.

GAPS AND CONSTRAINTS

Missing essays: A total of 142 essays were analysed out of the 150 participants who graduated in the selected eight cohorts. Eight essays were not available at the time of data analysis and therefore not included.

Quality of the essays: The quality of the learning essays varied between individuals and between countries. A good quality learning essay was regarded as one that is well-elaborated (often meeting or exceeding the 1,000 word limit), clearly articulated with concrete examples of using competencies, and providing in-depth analysis and learning reflection. On the other hand, some participants submitted essays with an unclear structure, limited analysis, or describing project activities without relating them back to the training and the CHCF. These differences can perhaps be attributed to a number of reasons such as different levels of English language ability, differences in the amount of guidance provided by the trainers in developing the essay, differences in the education system and experience with essay writing, history/duration of humanitarian aid in the country, as well as length of experience of individuals within the humanitarian sector. Overall, the essays from the Kenyan participants in particular were of higher quality on average.

Bias: As is inherent in qualitative research, there is a risk of bias in coding as it is dependent on the interpretation of the researcher to assess under which competency a section of text falls. Bias was reduced by having three people involved in reviewing the coding, the initial researcher who set up the coding, a second researcher who finalised the analysis and the report writing, and a RedR staff member who oversaw the process.

Attribution: Some participants described learning projects and activities without clearly linking them to the CHCF or what they learnt in the Context Programme. In these cases it was not possible to discern what difference the Context programme made, if any.

Using the Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework: There were a number of challenges related to using the CHCF as a framework for analysis. Participants did not always use the wording from the CHCF framework in describing which competencies they improved in, but would select a competency such as 'Time management' which can be considered a skill that's part of the CHCF but not specifically indicated as one of the 14 competencies.

The main methodological issue with the coding was overlaps between the competencies, and that many activities conducted by participants could fall under multiple competencies which made it difficult to determine which competency a particular action or learning should fall under. For example, 'Listening and creating dialogue' overlaps with 'Working accountably' as it discusses listening to affected communities, and 'Working with others' as listening is part of communication. For details on what decisions were made in terms of what falls under which competency, please see Annex 3.

RESULTS BY COMPETENCY DOMAIN

OVERVIEW OF COMPETENCY RESULTS

The Context participants from Jordan, Lebanon, Ethiopia and Kenya described a wide variety of activities which fit into the CHCF throughout their learning essays. The tables below show how many participants described improvements and application of learning in each of the competency domains. It should be noted that participants were asked to focus on two competencies they have improvement in, rather than to comment on their progress across all of the competencies. The below thus represents the competencies participants felt they improved most in. This is reflected both as a count, and the percentage of participants (out of a total of 142) that chose to focus on this domain or competency.

Table 2: Participants who focussed on improvements in this competency domain

Competency Domain	No.	%
Developing and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships	117	82%
Demonstrating Leadership in Humanitarian Response	116	82%
Achieving Results	109	77%
Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Humanitarian Principles	90	63%
Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment	72	51%
Operating Safely and Securely at All Times	29	20%

Table 3: Participants who focussed on improvements in this competency

Competency	No.	%
Working with Others	110	77%
Self – Awareness	78	55%
Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact	77	54%
Applying Humanitarian Standards and Principles	76	54%
Motivating and Influencing Others	65	46%
Working Accountability	53	37%
Adapting and Coping	50	35%
Maintaining Professionalism	41	29%
Understanding the Humanitarian Context	22	15%
Managing Personal Safety and Security	21	15%
Listening and Creating Dialogue	18	13%
Making Decisions	16	11%
Critical Judgement	16	11%
Minimising Risk to Communities, Partners and Stakeholders	15	11%

The following sections examine each competency domain and competency to understand the key learnings that participants achieved in these domains.

UNDERSTANDING HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS AND APPLYING STANDARDS

Overview

The 'Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Standards' competency domain forms the basis of all work that will be undertaken by both NNGOs and INGOs in implementing projects and programmes. However, it was not the most often selected by participants as a key area of improvement; 90 participants described learning and applying this competency domain (63% of total participants), making it the fourth most-reported competency domain.

This domain consists of two competencies, which are described in more detail below. For all regions, the competency 'Applying Humanitarian Standards and Principles' was more often quoted as an area of improvement than the competency 'Understanding the Humanitarian Context'.

Understanding the Humanitarian Context

22 participants (15% of total participants) discussed in their essays how the Context programme helped them to better understand the humanitarian system and the context that they were working in. The following are some examples of what participants reported as improvements they made in this regard:

- Accounting for marginal groups in humanitarian response, including disabled individuals
- Adapting responses to the social, cultural, and political contexts
- The need to learn about local customs and religion to best implement a response, for example how to deal with cultures that do not respect female humanitarian workers
- The phases of humanitarian response and the relevance of disaster preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction

For example, this participant describes how he felt studying the humanitarian context, in combination with better understanding of the humanitarian principles, allowed him and his team to develop a more effective humanitarian response:

My understanding of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and how they can be applied increased during the nine-month Context training. ...It was very important for me to keep abreast of the changing humanitarian context by reviewing the [lists key documents], and taking part in humanitarian working groups.... It was not only important to know the need at the national level but also the changing priorities and who is doing what at the Woreda level....At times, we were forced to change initially identified target areas and activities in order to address the changing priorities.... Overall, we developed a very good understanding of the 2016 humanitarian context in our target areas in Ethiopia and I believe that we were able to utilize our skills to respond to the need in our target areas with neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

Participant M&L Cohort, Ethiopia

Applying Humanitarian Standards and Principles

In terms of 'Applying Humanitarian Standards and Principles', this was referred to as a key area of improvement by 76 participants (54% of total participants). Participants referred primarily to The Sphere Handbook: *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response* (Sphere Standards), The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), the Red Cross Code of Conduct, and the humanitarian principles (humanity, neutrality, independence, impartiality). However, some participants also self-studied industry-specific standards, such as the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) for livelihoods interventions.

Participants undertook several actions when it came to better understanding and applying humanitarian standards and principles in their work, including:

- Examining programme practice in light of CHS and accountability
- Conducting a survey to measure how the Code of Conduct is incorporated in programs
- Revising HR documents to incorporate CHS and humanitarian principles
- Reviewing international emergency policy according to standards
- Conducting an organizational assessment using CHS tools
- Utilizing Sphere in everyday work
- Improving coordination and contact with UN OCHA and cluster meetings (as part of applying the Sphere Standard on coordination)

The following participant explains how they utilized their new knowledge of humanitarian standards and principles to ensure the organisation's activities were aligned with the Code of Conduct:

This learning project is to check the level of implementation of the ten Principles of Conduct in (my) programme unit. Therefore, each one of the principle of code of conduct was evaluated against the actual works of (the) programme of the location.

Participant M&L Cohort, Ethiopia

27 participants (19% of total participants) described further cascading their knowledge regarding principles and standards to team members, executives, and even partner organisations, focusing primarily on the Sphere Standards, Code of Conduct, and CHS.

ACHIEVING RESULTS

Overview

The achieving results competency domain was the third-most coded of the competency domains, with a total of 109 participants reporting implementation of learning in this domain (77% of total participants). The learning in this area supports findings in other areas such as 'Understanding the Humanitarian Context' as many of the participants saw the training as an opportunity to improve their day to day progress and improve their success rates in delivering projects.

Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact

Within this domain, 'Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact' was most often selected by participants as a main competency they improved in, with 77 participants (54% of the total) demonstrating improvement in this area.

In this competency, participants demonstrated learning in this topic through:

- Discussing project cycle management
- Designing and implementing standard operating procedures for various programmatic components
- Discussing the ability to deliver timely and appropriate results in spite of limited resources
- Developing and implementing M&E tools and plans
- Working with stakeholders to avoid duplication and maximize resources
- Prioritizing work
- Conducting SWOT analyses of the team and project
- Developing clear project workplans
- Using project cycle management knowledge in exit strategies

The following is an example of how one participant utilized this competency in their work:

Donor funding for the refugee operation in Kenya has been greatly affected, this has had impact on the number of staff to handle legislative and policy reforms. Due to skills acquired in the course of Context programme, I was able to plan better for this and redefine roles and responsibilities within my team. Particularly, I redefined the roles of staff working under advocacy programme keeping in mind their core competencies. I was also better able to collaborate with other agencies and tapped into resources available within other stakeholders to enable us cover the legislative and policy reforms work.

Participant M&L Cohort, Kenya

Working Accountably

53 participants (37% of total participants) discussed in their essays how the Context programme helped them to better work accountably. One of the most-frequently mentioned topics was the importance of placing crisis-affected people at the centre of any project design. Additionally, participants discussed designing and implementing tools to ensure accountability, such as through developing M&E plans, implementing activity trackers, establishing quality circles, and reviewing the organization's "Feedback, Quality and Accountability Framework". Other participants linked the need to work accountably to some of the humanitarian principles/standards, such as Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, Sphere Standards and the Code of Conduct on involving programme beneficiaries.

The importance of community and other beneficiary feedback and complaint mechanisms within humanitarian programmes is highlighted in many essays as an issue which was brought to the attention of participants during the Context learning programme. It is also one which participants reported had often been previously overlooked in the management of projects. 44 participants (31% of the total) reported improvements in communication with affected communities.

Below is one example of how the Context training helped to raise awareness of working accountability amongst humanitarian staff, in turn positively impacting the project outcomes, and by doing so indicating their

proficiency of the achieving results competency domain. A Programme Field Coordinator from the Jordan Core Skills Cohort describes how community feedback affected the project:

In one of the projects we were implementing in schools in Jordan, I was preparing for a health awareness session for secondary girls school in the east of Amman. I had planned for an oral health session with all the preparation done, ready for the visit. At once came the question of what if, it is not the priority for this age group in this area to talk about? What if they have attended such sessions before?

So I contacted the principle, who consulted the teachers and the girls. She came back with a different topic, that was not in our design at the first place in the project, the girls have voted for a session about personal and the menstrual cycle hygiene, after referring to my manager we agreed on replacing this activity with the suggested one by the schools' staff and students.

In the session the girls were really curious to hear and they were highly engaged. I am glad that we did that, the idea of engaging the beneficiaries as stakeholders is really helpful, and I believe it does increase the efficiency of any project, that's a thing that I didn't know or I wasn't exposed to before the course.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Jordan

Participants of the Context course had also developed numerous methods to engage with communities and gather data on feedback and complaints. Many other tools and activities were used in gathering community input on their needs as well as feedback, including:

- Developing questionnaires for beneficiaries
- Establishing complaint and feedback mechanisms
- Conducting community feedback sessions
- Conducting a needs assessment
- Convening focus group discussions
- Creating incident reports
- Designing a beneficiary satisfaction survey tool
- Organising a meeting for community leaders
- Strengthening reporting to beneficiaries
- Utilizing "Ground Truth" methodology
- Installing complaint/suggestion boxes in field locations



Figure 1: Participant in Kenya engaging with the community

Humanitarians were creative with developing solutions for difficulties in both accessing populations and getting meaningful feedback. One Context participant set up a telephone hotline to address the issue that many of their beneficiaries could not read or write, and so could not fill out complaint forms. Another method used was the 'Community Scorecard'. The scorecard essentially breaks down the project into different sections and allows beneficiaries to mark their satisfaction level with each section, providing a blueprint or improvement for the programme going forward.

Many employees came to my office in daily bases and sometimes they came without any appointment to tell me about the problem they are facing in their daily tasks. In the past may way of dealing with this situation was totally deferent than now, I ask kindly for the employees came to my office to find suitable and convenient time for both of us to talk then I started practicing the communication and active listening skills, really I gain more respect from the employees with my line management and I felt better understanding for their difficulties and challenges they deal with on their tasks. Also finding better solutions and sharing responsibility is one of the impact after implementing the skills with others.

Participant M&L Cohort, Jordan

Working with Others

This competency was most-often demonstrated in the reports, with 110 participants (77% of the total) demonstrating this capacity to some extent. 102 participants (72% of all participants) reported improved communication skills. The most common communication changes included organising more staff meetings and improving the organization of meetings (through setting agendas, for example), improving communication channels (such as establishing Whatsapp groups for communication and reviewing the email policy), giving and receiving feedback to staff, and receiving and giving coaching sessions. The benefits of increased communication cited were reduced conflict and stress amongst and between staff members, and also a positive effect on the programme quality and delivery as staff members had more clarity on their roles within teams and what was expected of them in terms of performance. The regular communication through staff meetings also allowed potential problems to be raised earlier than they might otherwise have been.

One participant, for example, advocated with department heads to improve the use of the organisation's notice board, established an all-staff Whatsapp group, and introduced a weekly meeting between department heads and staff. She saw various improvements as a result of this, including improved knowledge of staff on activities, quicker sharing of information and more staff feedback. She concluded:

The implementation of the action plan has helped improve coordination between the different departments in the organization... There is also increased motivation among staff members as there is increased feeling of ownership who feels involved in decision making on a day to day basis.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Ethiopia



Figure 3: Kenyan participants conducting an exercise on trust and working together

In addition to communication skills, participants improved other skills and were able to employ them in their work, including:

- Establishing trust in teams
- Keeping all team members aware of progress
- Coordination, collaboration and resource-sharing with other stakeholders and partner organisations
- Stakeholder mapping
- Negotiation and conflict management skills
- Working at a distance

The structure of the programme itself resulted in participants being better able to work with others, as the buddy groups, coaching sessions and small group exercises demonstrated to participants the value of teamwork and teambuilding, as well as skills for communicating, especially in multicultural environments.

60 participants (42% of total participants) demonstrated improvement in this competency through sharing information and knowledge with their team members, colleagues, and partners. More information on this in the “Cascading and Sharing Knowledge” section.

OPERATING SAFELY AND SECURELY AT ALL TIMES

Overview

29 participants (20% of total participants) demonstrated improvement in the competency domain ‘Operating Safely and Securely at All Times’, making it by far the least reported area of participants’ improvement. It was most often reported by participants from Kenya (17 participants, 12% of total), who used it in insecure contexts such as in Dadaab refugee camp, near the Kenya-Somalia border and in certain areas of Nairobi. Learning to manage personal safety and security was overall reported more often than learning to minimise risk to communities, partners and stakeholders.

The low number of participants reporting improvement in this area may be due to the very specific nature of this competency domain. It may also be due to methodological issues as some learning which fell into other competencies (such as ‘Listening and Creating Dialogue’) may overlap with ‘Minimising risk to communities, partners and stakeholders’ as they both have to do with doing what is best for the crisis-affected populations (See Annex 3).

Minimising risk to communities, partners and stakeholders

15 participants (11% of total participants) discussed in their essays how the Context programme helped them to better minimise risk to communities, partners and stakeholders. This was the least-often reported competency.

The following are some examples of what participants discussed in this regard:

- The principle of “Do No Harm”
- Conducting vulnerability assessments
- Conducting risk assessments
- Protection of clients through armed guards
- Protecting client confidentiality

- Handling particularly vulnerable populations, such as children

For example, one participant explained how she implemented this competency. She held a training on the effects of displacement on vulnerable community groups, particularly children, focusing on how staff members should interact with these groups. The training included definitions of child protection, the concept of “Do No Harm”, the forms and signs of child abuse, prioritization of vulnerable beneficiaries, and guiding principles and minimum standards for safe identification and referral. In addition to the training, the participant created a document explaining these same concepts.

Managing personal safety and security

21 participants (15% of total participants) discussed in their essays how the Context programme helped them to better manage personal safety and security. It is important to note that within this competency, the majority of participants commented not on their individual safety and security, but rather on championing the importance of safety and ensuring the safety of team members.

Participants demonstrated learning on this topic through the following means:

- Conducting security risk assessments and mitigation strategies
- Contributing to developing the organization’s emergency response planning and contingency plans
- Advocating for adherence to safety and security protocols in regards to transportation (assessing transportation routes, using seat belts, adhering to curfew)
- Discussing with community members to increase their acceptance of the organization in order to ensure safety
- Conducting client home visits in teams (not alone) to ensure safety
- Advocating for evacuation insurance cover
- Providing security training to staff
- Providing higher levels of security to staff through providing more secure infrastructure such as extra alarms, lighting or guards, and developing strict transportation policies

The process of developing more robust security measures, and how the Context training helped with this is outlined by a Logistics and Administration Officer describing how she improved security in her organisation:

Attending the management and leadership course came as an eye opener in many areas even though I had done the course on sphere standards. Coming out of the two workshops and learning the importance of policies, I realized that there was a big gap in our offices in terms of policies and weak security systems. I have been determined to see to it that all the necessary policies in the administration and Logistics department are put in place as needed. (.....). The activities that I took to fill the security gaps that we had were:

- *I did a security survey that identified the gaps that we had as an organization.*
- *We formed a committee in the organization that deals with security matters.*
- *We gave training to our staff on security matters during 2 programme meetings.*
- *In February this year, I went round all our sites and gave training to all our guards.*
- *We added security personnel in our sites each male and female.*
- *We have Implemented the use of metal detectors in our offices*
- *We installed additional lightening was in our main office.*

In cases where there we have had emergencies, the alarm systems have been handy because you can dial it from your desk. The implementation of a good security system has given our staff an assurance of their security at the work place. Since it is also a right for all employees in Kenya that employees be accorded a safe and secure working environment. It is therefore a plus to both staff and the organization.

Participant M&L Cohort, Kenya

MANAGING YOURSELF IN A PRESSURED AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Overview

'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment' is a domain in which improvements were reported by 72 participants (51% of total participants). It was the second-to-least reported competency domain (after 'Operating Safely and Securely at All Times').

The importance of adaption to pressure and staying safe cannot be understated for humanitarian workers. Even in secure contexts, the nature of the work can lead to poor health and poor performance. As indicated in the word cloud for this competency domain, work, time and stress management were the three most common themes.

Managing time effectively, in addition to taking responsibility for their own personal care are amongst the changes which the participants made as a result of the Context training, reporting positive effects on both their own state of mind, their relationships with other team members and the running of the projects overall.

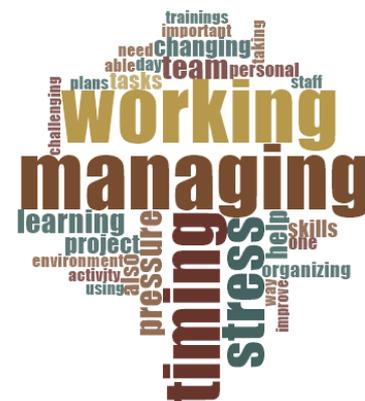


Figure 4: Word Cloud for "Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment"

Adapting and coping

50 participants (35% of total participants) discussed in their essays how the Context programme helped them to better adapt and cope.

The difficulty in managing stress levels was a topic that was highlighted in a considerable number of learning essays. Many Context participants acknowledged their personal struggles in coping effectively in high pressure environments where security cannot be guaranteed, time is often of the essence and projects are under resourced. Through the Context training, many realized the importance of managing stress and maintaining proper self-care, both for themselves and their colleagues. They discussed learning how to identify stress in themselves and in teammates, and discussed different strategies they learned and implemented for managing stress, including:

- Prioritizing health (sleep, exercise)
- Managing workloads
- Writing
- Expressing emotions and sharing difficulties with colleagues
- Engaging in hobbies (yoga, dancing, sports, gardening, reading)
- Meditation
- Psychosocial counselling

- Developing a booklet on stress management for staff
- Encouraging colleagues not to work too late

Participants in some cases acknowledged that they had not previously been aware of the effects stress could have in their working lives, in relation to both team relationships and productivity. A protection officer in Lebanon explains how undertaking the Context training helped her to change her behaviours for more positive results:

Indeed I applied some personal action points from the action plans, such as ... changing my ways of expressing and reducing stress by creating a new communication protocol within the team and with some stakeholders, in addition to finding new ways to release tension, for instance occasionally attending meditation and Yoga sessions and asking for staff care at the organization. The feedback of my team was positive according to this, as they reported during the monthly meetings an improvement in the way of communication within the team generally and with me specifically, as they noticed the change of my attitude and my reaction toward the tension within the team and throughout the work in general. Plus, that my self-satisfaction increased due to the self-care that I was eager to acquire, which was a reason to improve my ability to cope with the continuous change in the work's context and the variety and change of stakeholders.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Lebanon

This quote highlights not just the importance of self-care and stress reduction for staff themselves, but the very positive effects this has on their input to the organisation as a whole. Other participants used their newly-gained knowledge to change organizational policies, such as ensuring the human resource policy promotes full usage of leave days.

Maintaining professionalism

41 participants (29% of total participants) demonstrated how the Context programme helped them to better maintain professionalism in a pressured and changing environment.

Improved organizational management was one of the most noticeable results within this competency. Prioritisation of tasks and delegation of tasks to other team members were described by 12 participants (8% of all participants). 11 participants reported adopting the use of tools such as daily task planners, timetables, To Do lists, and calendars, which supported managers in handling heavy workloads more effectively. In addition, it appeared to enhance a sense of more control over their workloads and had the added benefit of reducing their stress levels as indicated in the quotes below:



Figure 5: Example of Time Table

To ensure that time is utilized efficiently, I maximized the use of use of my diary, to do lists and I come up with personal work plans which has continuously helped in achieving my goals and targets without too much pressure. I also employed the skill of delegation of work has also eased the pressure and reduce workload.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Kenya

After the second workshop, I took the first initiative to organize my work, hence I started with a "to do list" where I organized my priorities according to work deadlines by specializing a specific period of time for each task to be finished and efficiently completed. Usually I started writing my "to do list" on a piece of paper and every time I completed a task I high-lighted it with a marker as a sign that it was done.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Lebanon

In addition to time management tools, participants also described improving their broader planning and organizing skills, such as being able to better set realistic deadlines and goals. Additionally, 2 participants described how they were better able to hold effective meetings such as preparing an agenda, and providing follow-up with action points afterwards. Furthermore, this capacity positively improved the participants' teams as several participants mentioned how they were better able to help colleagues in managing time and deadlines.

The use of the important / urgent matrix, a technique that was taught during the course, was adopted by some of the participants. Prioritisation of tasks was seen as an important skill in the context of humanitarian work where many of the activities may appear to be time sensitive, and the feedback from the learning essays indicates that learning how to manage time more effectively has been very beneficial to some participants, particularly those in management and leadership positions who have to contend with heavy workloads in many cases.

DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Overview

'Demonstrating Leadership' was the second-most coded competency domain with 116 participants (82% of total participants) demonstrating learning in this area. Divided by course, this included 87% of the M&L participants and 77% of Core Skills participants. While higher in the M&L course, leadership skills were thus also often quoted as a key area of improvement amongst Core Skills participants.

Self-awareness

78 participants (55% of total participants) discussed in their essays how the Context programme helped them to improve their self-awareness. It is notable that not many participants chose to explicitly focus on self-awareness in their learning essay. However, it was discussed to some extent in most essays as the programme itself required participants to reflect on their competencies through such exercises as learning about the Core Humanitarian Competencies, self-assessing with the competencies capability wheel, coaching, and completing the learning essay itself. Many therefore reflected on becoming more aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses, including realizing what they did not know prior to the programme, what they learned during the programme, and what they aim to continue to improve. For more information on the latter, please refer to the "Participant Reflections on the Learning Journey and Further Plans" section. By better understanding their strengths and weaknesses, many found increased self-confidence.

I come to understand that I am able to do whatever so long as am focused. The other is that I found myself as a great negotiator which I should enhance and bring it to the level I should do. Besides, I understand myself that I am a good leader. In the last 6 month, I get myself as I am energetic, motivated and enthused individual.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Ethiopia

For those participants who specifically focused on the self-awareness competency, they discussed utilizing various tools to contribute to their self-awareness, including the Johari window, SWOT, Daniel Goleman's emotional intelligence model, and online psychometric tests. Further, several sought feedback from their colleagues, as seen in the example below:

One of the plans I wanted to do after ending up with phase two of the workshop was to make self-awareness. Here I shared one e-mail with few of the coordinators I regularly work with, asking them to share with me the strengths and weaknesses they find in me, and how to these affect the flow of the work between the development and the operation departments. After receiving the replies, I was able to do the "Johari Windows Test" and share it with them.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Lebanon

These tools allowed participants to better understand themselves, their leadership styles and relations with others.

Motivating and Influencing Others

Motivating and influencing others was discussed by 65 participants (46% of total participants) as a skill they improved through the Context programme. Being able to delegate tasks and therefore value the skills of team members was the most discussed growth in this category, and was discussed by 12 participants. Related to this, many participants wrote that they learned about different leadership styles (directive, participative, delegative) and were therefore able to better adapt their own working styles. One participants demonstrated how this learning impacted his team:

When our department was in charge of conducting any assessment, I was always planning, assigning roles and monitoring the whole process from beginning to the end. This made some qualified members demotivated because they were more looking for more senior roles. After I have been more incorporated in Leadership styles, I started to diverse my leadership style based on qualifications, time, and situation. For example, those who have good experience in social studies, I started to incorporate them in designing assessment, and those who have good experience in data collection I let them do training for data collectors and those who are good in data analysis, I let them focal point of analyzing data and generating reports. This created high sense of motivation within the team.

Participant M&L Cohort, Lebanon

Other knowledge/skills gained in this competency included:

- Increased appreciation for and understanding of how to provide feedback, particularly through the 3 F's and the SBI model for feedback, as well as the GROWME model for coaching
- Managing a team remotely
- How to motivate and influence a team through being a good role model and demonstrating different types of influence
- John Adair's action-centered leadership model
- The difference between leadership and management



Figure 6: M&L cohort participants in Jordan discuss leadership qualities

Critical judgement

'Critical Judgement' was one of the lesser-discussed competencies, being mentioned by only 16 participants (11% of total participants). Methodologically, this could be due to the broad nature of this competency and therefore difficulty in pinpointing instances where specific judgements or initiatives were improved as a result of the programme. For example, while the learning projects/activities of many participants entailed exercising judgement, demonstrating initiative or tenacity, and/or maintaining a broad strategic perspective, these could not be directly attributed to the Context programme. There were only 5 participants who directly listed this as a competency they focused on. These participants tended to focus on the ability to collect and analyse information in order to take decisions, to think critically, and to think outside the box. The following participant explained this:

There may be difficult judgements and choices... judgement must be made on a case-by-case basis and should always be reviewed over time as circumstances change. I have learnt to investigate the situation, acquaint myself, consider the response time, collect information, surround myself with smart people and seek references like sphere handbook, using websites, reading about old events and my line managers... Also, we should analyze information and the impact before judgement, an example for logistics is that we should analyze the local markets and the impact on local natural environment.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Jordan

PARTICIPANT ACHIEVEMENTS

While the previous chapter described participants' learning within each competency domain, this section summarizes the concrete results that were achieved by participants during the programme, including the types of action plans and learning projects implemented, the improvements seen as per line manager feedback, and the participants' plans for further learning.

ACTION PLANS AND LEARNING PROJECTS

While participants of the Core Humanitarian Skills programme were required to implement action plans, the participants of the Management & Leadership programme also conducted an additional, specific learning project. As to be expected, the action plans were typically simpler and more focused on one-off actions (such as posting the Sphere standards on a notice board) and on personal improvement (such as implementing a daily to-do list) whereas the learning projects were more involved and over a longer time period (such as writing project proposals, writing or improving policies, developing systems, etc.).

The type of actions/projects conducted by participants were quite varied, but the type of activities most frequently conducted included:

- Cascading and sharing knowledge (72 participants)
- Writing or improving procedures, guidelines, or policies (52 participants)
- Incorporating humanitarian standards/principles into organizational policies/projects (43 participants)
- Creating/improving community feedback mechanisms (41 participants)
- Implementing personal time management strategies (11 participants)
- Improving organizational communication structures (9 participants)
- Conducting organizational analyses such as SWOT or security analyses (9 participants)
- Creating/improving induction package/programme for new employees (9 participants)
- Conducting team-building activities (7 participants)
- Clarifying team member responsibilities (4 participants)

Additionally, as part of their action plans, all participants were required to conduct additional self-studying during the programme through e-courses or reading books or articles. 57 participants (40% of total participants) reflected on their self-study in their learning essays. Most of these e-courses and books focused on Sphere or leadership/management, but other topics studied included security risk management, diversity awareness, time management, climate change, building better response, and soft skills crisis management, to name a few.

While most of these actions were discussed in the previous chapter within their relevant competency, it is worth further discussing two actions which were cross-cutting across competency domains and conducted by many participants: 1) cascading and sharing knowledge, and 2) policy changes.

Cascading and Sharing Knowledge

One of the primary outcomes from the programme was that participants cascaded and shared their new knowledge, principally with their colleagues, but also with partner organisations. This was largely done by conducting formal trainings, organizing workshops, lunch-time discussions or preparing a training video. 64 participants (45% of total) chose training colleagues or staff of partner organisations as part of their learning project. Some of the participants did this in teams of two or three. 51 trainings were implemented, and 11 were at various stages of planning by the time the participant finished the Context programme. Many participants additionally expressed a commitment to conducting further staff trainings. An example from the Jordanian M&L cohort highlights this:

I started asking the new staff in Amman and the old staff in Syria what they know about the topics that were covered in both workshops of context programme, it was obvious that they knew nothing about this so I decided to focus on three main trainings (ICRC code of conduct, CHS and the Sphere Standard) First, I designed the curriculum (PowerPoint presentation that includes a number of the Context programme topics such as; humanitarian emergencies, SPHERE project, Principles and challenges in humanitarian action, Interpersonal skills that deliver results, 7Cs and good listening, feedback, effective assessments and the Code of Conduct) I also get a very helpful presentation from Prezi website on international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. I modified it with the help of Code of Conduct mentioned in SPHERE book. Today 18/10/2016 was the first training session on ICRC code of conduct for six participants in Amman, and I will give it in Arabic for the staff in Syria on 25/10/2016.

Participant M&L Cohort, Jordan

Participants provided trainings on a variety of topics. The most-frequent training topics were the humanitarian standards and principles (including Sphere, CHS, and the ICRC Code of Conduct) and communication. Other training topics included leadership, accountability, the Core Humanitarian Competencies, communication, time management, stress management, team building, security and risk management, fraud management and work ethics, decision-making, coaching, providing feedback, data management, conflict resolution and mediation, child protection, and inclusion.

Additionally, participants further encouraged their colleagues to themselves take e-learning courses to improve their knowledge. In some cases, participants assessed staff knowledge to determine appropriate training topics.

Aside from conducting trainings, participants also shared their knowledge with co-workers by putting up posters on walls, sharing the training documents and the Sphere handbook, and establishing a Whatsapp group or Dropbox for sharing resources. Sphere was frequently shared with colleagues, for example 11 participants introduced their teams to Sphere and 3 participants ensured that the Sphere standards were included in the induction for all new staff.



Figure 7: Participant conducting a training at her workplace as part of her learning project

Policy Changes

The implementation of policy changes to various facets of the organisations were another one of the main changes participants made in response to the Context training, made by 52 participants (37% of participants). The changes varied from updating codes of conduct, to providing staff induction packages, and developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for a wide variety of situations. Examples include participants developing/improving the following for their organisations:

- Emergency action plan
- Feedback, Quality and Accountability Framework
- Security policy
- Transport policy
- Exit strategy template
- Orientation manual
- ICT support incident report tool
- Monitoring tools
- Staff evaluations
- Vulnerability assessment form
- Terms of Reference
- Accountability policy
- Field operations and administration manuals
- Human resources policies
- Code of conduct
- Child safeguarding policy
- Reporting format

The results from the learning essays highlight that in many cases the training programme served two purposes in relation to policy changes:

1. It raised awareness of the different types of policies which could be enacted to improve the quality of the project, or staff welfare, which in some cases participants may not have been previously aware of (such as developing terms of references for field visits), and
2. It provided templates and examples of these types of documents and so allowed the participants to create their own versions.

LINE MANAGER FEEDBACK

Participants were asked to provide feedback from their line managers regarding any changes they noticed during the course of the Context programme. Overall, line managers were very positive. Many wrote about the benefits of the participants' projects/activities to the organization, especially regarding providing training and knowledge to other staff. Others wrote about the changes to the participants' working styles, including:

- Renewed vigour in work
- Better team work skills and commitment to other staff
- Improved leadership and management skills
- Better stress management
- Increased attention to beneficiaries' interests
- More willing to voice concerns and provide feedback
- Improved communication skills and listening
- Better organizational skills
- Ability to encourage and motivate other staff
- Improved problem-solving skills

This is demonstrated in the below example of line manager feedback:

(The participant) came back from training with the realization and understanding that the sector that we work in is a dynamic and high-pressure environment that requires actors to be definitely decisive and swift in response. She “preached” this to members of the team passionately. She was able to interestingly change her outlook and way of working which had apposite impact in her overall performance. Her confidence as a manager has significantly increased thereby enhancing her leadership and management capabilities. She is present for her team and provides guidance and the appropriate support. (She) has grown in confidence and makes significant contributions to decision making and has ably represented the organization in various forums.

Line Manager of participant in M&L Cohort, Kenya

Due to these improvements, 3 participants reported receiving promotions, 4 participants reported serving as deputy or taking over responsibilities while their manager was absent, and 4 participants reported receiving more responsibilities.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS ON THE LEARNING JOURNEY & FURTHER PLANS

One section of the essay asked participants to reflect on their learning journey. In this section, participants were largely positive about the training and stated that they gained knowledge, skills, and resources from the programme, which improved their work and the organization as a whole. Several participants expressed increased confidence as a result of the programme, and many became more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. Improved collaboration and teamwork was also one frequently-mentioned result of the training. For example, one participant wrote:

The 6-month study program has enabled me gained great self-awareness on my leadership and teamwork skills. Context has equipped me with skills to deliver effective humanitarian response in a safe, efficient, professional manner that benefits the communities I work in. The learning journey has been an eye opener because it provided me with opportunity to interact with various learning and resourceful materials... I also intend to continue with a culture of continuous learning and self-studying to advise my knowledge and skills for my personal growth and development.

Participant Core Skills Cohort, Kenya

In addition, many participants gained an understanding of the importance of continued learning and committed to continuing their learning independently after the course. For example, one participant created a professional development plan and stated, *“On a monthly basis, I commit to do one online course, watch at least 4 Tedtalks and read one motivational book.”*

Several participants wrote that they planned to take further courses, primarily e-courses, including on the topics of “Do No Harm”, Emergency Response and Preparedness, cash transfers, HEAT, MEAL, protection and gender, negotiation and risk management skills, and problem solving and decision-making. 5 participants aimed to completed Masters studies in the fields of human rights, peace and development, international relations, business administration, and gender and development.

Finally, many participants mentioned that they would continue to self-study through reading books, journals, and humanitarian sites such as ALNAP, ReliefWeb, and the CHS Alliance. Others planned to continue utilizing the coaching and buddy networks established during the programme.

DISCUSSION

The following section provides a discussion of the findings, including differences between Core and M&L cohorts and differences between countries.

Differences between Core Skills and Management and Leadership cohorts

This section explores the differences between the Core Skills and Management and Leadership cohorts. The analysis included essays from 75 Core Skills participants and 67 Management and Leadership participants.

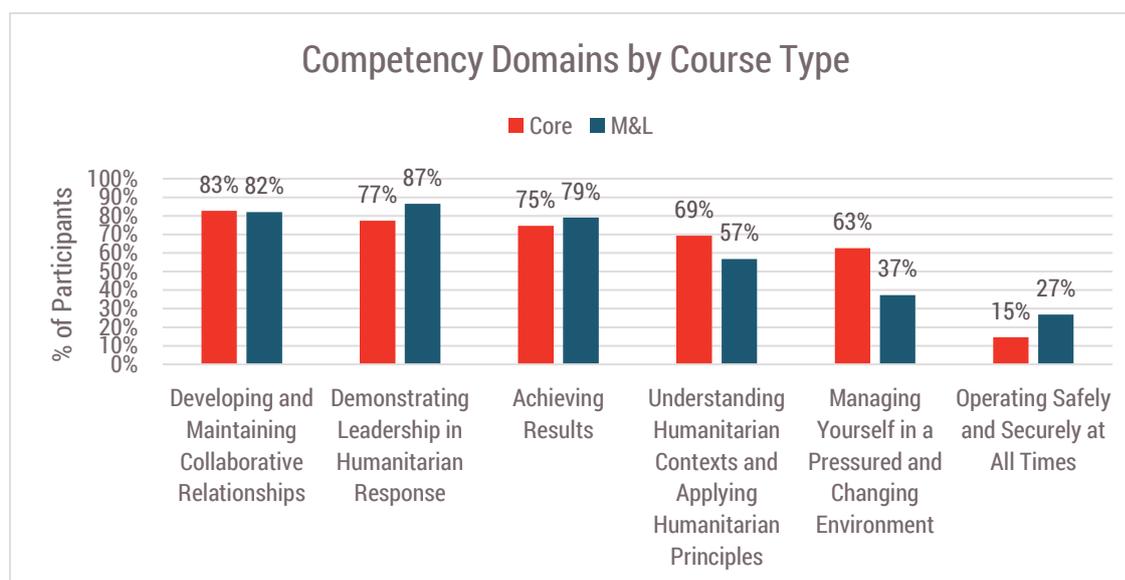


Figure 8: Competency Domains by Course Type

Learning in the six competencies was generally similar between the two groups with a few exceptions. A larger percentage of M&L participants demonstrated the 'Demonstrating Leadership in Humanitarian Response' and 'Operating Safely and Securely at all Times' competency domains, while a larger percentage of Core participants demonstrated learning in the 'Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Humanitarian Principles' and 'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment' domains. The biggest difference between the courses was the learning in 'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment' as 63% of Core participants demonstrated this competency domain compared to only 37% of M&L participants.

The below chart shows differences within the competencies in each domain. Here again we see many similarities. The biggest differences were within the 'Maintaining Professionalism' competency and 'Adapting and Coping' competencies, with the Core Skills cohorts reporting more changes in these competencies than M&L cohorts (18 and 16 percentage points difference respectively). On the other hand, M&L participants were more likely to demonstrate growth in the 'Motivating and Influencing Others' and 'Listening and Creating Dialogue' competencies than their Core Skills counterparts (15 and 13 percentage points difference respectively).

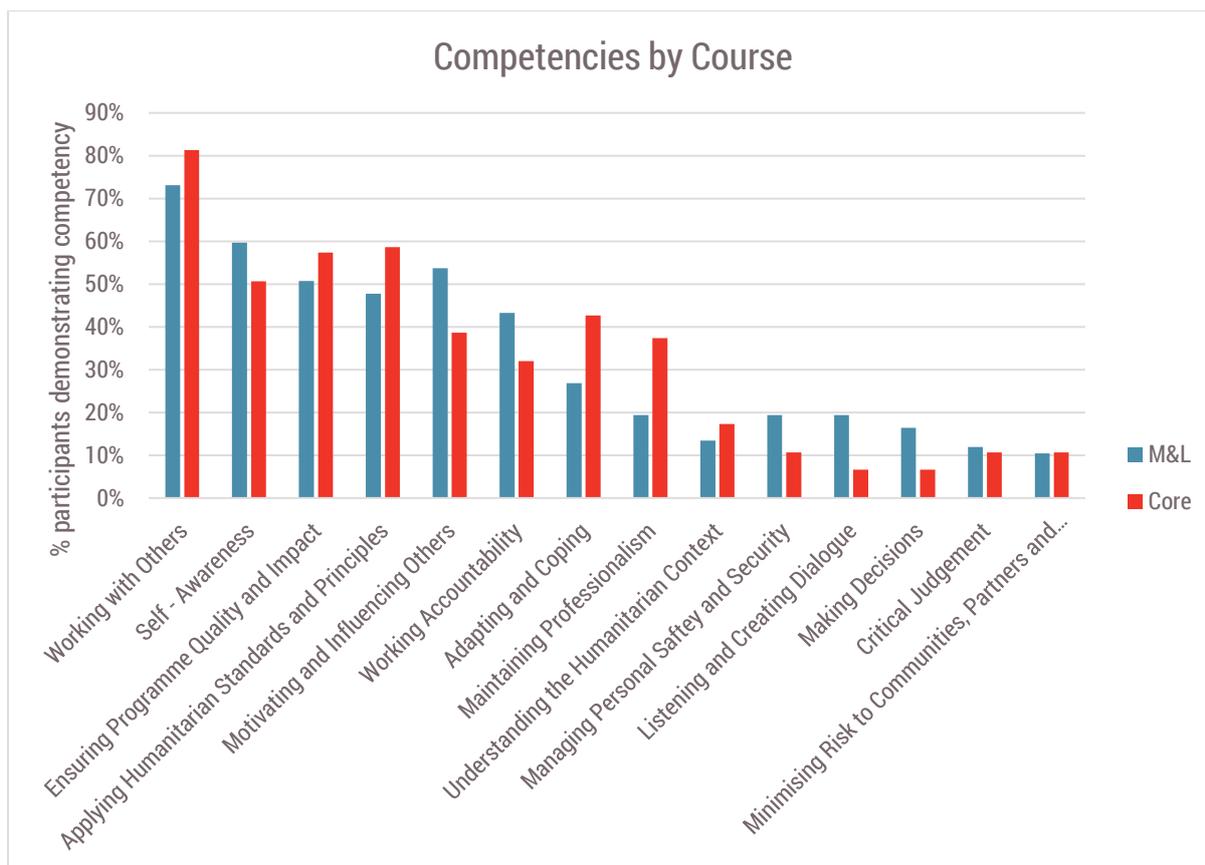


Figure 9: Competencies by Course Type

Differences between countries

The essays analysed in this report are roughly equally divided between the four countries in which the courses took place, 42 participants from the cohorts in Kenya, 30 who took the course in Ethiopia, 38 in Jordan, and 32 in Lebanon. It should be noted that in some cases, the country where participants took the course is not where they worked; for example Ethiopian participants also took the course in Kenya and vice versa. In Annex 4, a number of tables are included that show a breakdown of the competencies by country.

The conclusion from this is that the main trends in terms of which competencies participants report most improvement in are the same across countries. In certain competency domains, there are countries that jump out, but due to the small sample size it is difficult to interpret this difference. For example, in the Core Humanitarian Skills course, relatively more participants who did the course in Ethiopia reported improvements in 'Understanding the Humanitarian Context and Humanitarian Principles'. In addition, one difference that stands out is that participants in Kenya (in both Core and M&L) more frequently report improvements related to the competency domain 'Operating Safely and Securely at all Times'.

A comparison was also done between the cohorts included in this report, and two cohorts which were delivered in Arabic in Jordan (see Annex 4). This showed that the improvement in competencies in these cohorts also broadly followed the same pattern, with participants focussing on communication skills (including negotiating, presenting, holding meetings). One notable difference was that participants of the Arabic Core training more often discussed improving their skills in time management and stress management.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, it is clear that the Context training programme has proven useful for most participants. This section summarises the answer to the main two research questions: 1) What impact does the Context training programme have on core skills and knowledge of participants in developing an effective humanitarian response? and 2) What impact does the Context training programme have on developing an effective humanitarian response at an organisational level?

Impact of the Context training programme on core skills and knowledge of participants

The research suggests that the Context training programme is effective in contributing to improving participant's knowledge and skills in the six competency domains of the Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework. The top three domains were: 1) 'Developing and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships', 2) 'Demonstrating Leadership in Humanitarian Response', and 3) 'Achieving Results'.

The greatest impact of the Context training programme has been in the area of 'Developing and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships' with 82% of participants. 'Working with Others' was the competency in which the most participants demonstrated learning from the programme. Participants learned skills in team work and communication. Additionally, many shared information with their colleagues and therefore cascaded their knowledge through trainings.

'Demonstrating Leadership in Humanitarian Response' was the second area that Context had the most impact in, with 82% of participants demonstrating improvements. This is partially because the training programme itself leads to participants reflecting on their knowledge and skills, and further gaining an appreciation for continued self-assessment. 'Self-Awareness' was the second-most improved competency. The programme also helped participants gain skills in delegation, providing constructive feedback, using appropriate leadership styles, and motivating and influencing others.

77% of participants demonstrated gaining skills in the 'Achieving Results' competency domain. Improving communication with and listening to the needs of the affected community was a recurring theme in many essays. Additionally, many learned about 'Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact' (the third-most cited competency), and put this learning in practice by preparing or improving organisational policies.

While 'Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Humanitarian Principles' was not in the top three areas of improvement, it was still reported as an area of learning by 63% of participants, with learning focused primarily on Sphere, CHS, and the ICRC Code of Conduct. Just over half (51% of total participants) of respondents reported learning in 'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment'. Time management and stress management were key outcomes in this domain. Only a small percent of participants demonstrated implementation of learning in 'Operating Safely and Securely at All Times'. This is probably due to the very specific nature of this competency domain.

The Context programme impacted participants of the Core Skills cohorts and Management and Leadership cohorts in fairly similar ways within the competency domains. However, there were some differences. For example, the M&L participants were slightly more likely to describe improvement in the leadership competency and safety/security. Core participants demonstrated more improvement in 'Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Principles' and 'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment'. When comparing different countries or regions, there are only minor differences in the Context programme's impacts.

Aside from individuals gaining skills and knowledge in the six competency domains, individual participants also benefitted from the program as acknowledgement of their learning led to several promotions and increased job responsibilities. Additionally, many gained an appreciation and habit for self-study and continued learning, which will benefit them for the rest of their careers.

Impact of the Context training programme at an organisational level

The Context programme reached 150 participants in the eight cohorts analysed in this report, but the programme's impact is demonstrated to be much broader. Context participants effectively utilise their new skills and knowledge to improve their organisation and the skills and knowledge of those around them. This was clear through the nature of the projects participants conducted as part of the training. The most-frequently conducted actions were: 1) cascading and sharing knowledge, 2) writing or improving organisational procedures, guidelines, or policies, 3) incorporating humanitarian standards/principles into organizational policies/projects, and 4) creating or improving community feedback mechanisms.

Cascading and sharing knowledge is a particularly noteworthy action. 72 participants (51% of all participants) demonstrated this, with many sharing the knowledge they gained from Context with their peers and with partner organisations. Depending on the number of people and partners they reach and the quality of the cascading activities, this potentially has a very wide impact. Many participants additionally shared resources for their colleagues to self-study, further cascading professional development in the sector. Therefore, this action should not be underestimated in the impact of the Context programme.

Writing or improving organisational procedures, guidelines, or policies (and incorporating humanitarian standards and principles into organisational policies and projects) likewise has a broader impact. These changes not only improve the organisation, but ultimately can result in improved assistance to beneficiaries.

The action of creating and improving community feedback mechanisms additionally contributes to ensuring humanitarian action is as effective and relevant as possible. In this competency domain, we can see some very concrete and direct changes that are already improving the quality of the humanitarian assistance provided.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework

<p style="text-align: center;">Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework Keeping disaster and conflict affected people at the centre of what we do</p> 						
Competencies	<u>Understanding of humanitarian contexts and application of humanitarian principles</u> <i>Key issues and practices impacting current and future humanitarian interventions</i>	<u>Achieving results effectively</u> <i>Behaviours to use resources efficiently and effectively to achieve results, considering the need for speed, scale and quality</i>	<u>Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships</u> <i>Behaviours to develop and maintain collaborative, coordinated relationships at times of heightened complexity and risk</i>	<u>Operating safely and securely in a humanitarian response</u> <i>Behaviours required to take responsibility to operate safely in a pressured environment</i>	<u>Managing yourself in a pressured and changing environment</u> <i>Essential personal behaviours required to operate effectively within a humanitarian context</i>	<u>Leadership in humanitarian response</u> <i>Seeing the overall goal within the changing context and taking responsibility to motivate others to work towards it, independent of one's role, function or seniority.</i>
<p>Core Behaviours for all staff in humanitarian response, informed by skills and knowledge</p>	<p>The humanitarian context Demonstrate understanding of phases of humanitarian response including preparedness and contingency, DRR, response and recovery</p> <p>Apply understanding of the political and cultural context and underlying causes of the humanitarian crisis</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the gender and diversity dimensions of humanitarian situations</p> <p>Keep vulnerable people at the centre of the humanitarian response</p> <p>Applying humanitarian standards / principles Ensure that programme goals and activities uphold the principles of the key national and international humanitarian frameworks, codes and commitments under which humanitarian organisations operate</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of your role and that of your organisation and others within the humanitarian system</p>	<p>Programme quality Demonstrate understanding of agency project cycle management</p> <p>Participate in the design and implementation of effective projects and programmes</p> <p>Accountability Collect, analyse and disseminate information to and from communities and other stakeholders</p> <p>Demonstrate accountability to partners and disaster and conflict affected people and communities</p> <p>Decision making Demonstrate flexibility to adapt plans and make decisions in rapidly changing environments</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of when a decision can be taken and when to involve others</p> <p>Consider the wider impact of the decisions you make in your work to achieve positive results</p> <p>Impact Maintain focus on delivery of timely and appropriate results using available resources</p>	<p>Listening & dialogue Actively listen to different perspectives and experiences of stakeholders</p> <p>Establish and maintain clear communication and dialogue with disaster and conflict affected people and other stakeholders</p> <p>Working with others Contribute positively in the team to achieve programme objectives</p> <p>Share appropriate information and knowledge with colleagues and partners as and when appropriate</p> <p>Actively participate in networks to access and contribute to good practice</p> <p>Challenge decisions and behaviour which breach the ICRC/NGO and individual agency Codes of Conduct</p>	<p>Security context and analysis Identify and communicate risk and threats and minimise these for you and your agency</p> <p>Personal safety & security Build and maintain a reputation in line with humanitarian standards and acceptance for your work</p> <p>Take appropriate, coordinated and consistent action to handle situations of personal risk and situations of risk for others</p> <p>Reduce vulnerability by complying with safety and security protocols set by your organisation and contextualise appropriately to local scenarios</p> <p>Champion the importance of safety and keep the safety of colleagues and team members in mind at all times</p> <p>Minimising risk to communities and partners Take measures to do no harm and to minimise risks for your partners and the communities you work with</p>	<p>Resilience Recognise stress and take steps to reduce it</p> <p>Remain constructive and positive under stress to be able to tolerate difficult and sometimes threatening environments</p> <p>Remain focused on your objectives and goal in a rapidly changing environment</p> <p>Able to adapt to changing situations</p> <p>Keep yourself emotionally stable when helping others</p> <p>Maintaining professionalism Take responsibility for your own work and for the impact of your actions</p> <p>Plan, prioritise and perform tasks well under pressure</p> <p>Maintain ethical and professional behaviour in accordance with relevant codes of conduct</p> <p>Demonstrate personal integrity by using one's position responsibly and fairly</p>	<p>Self-awareness Show awareness of your own strengths and limitations and their impact on others</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of your skills and how they complement those of others to support team effectiveness</p> <p>Seek and reflect on feedback to improve your performance</p> <p>Motivating and influencing others Communicate humanitarian values and motivate others towards them</p> <p>Inspire confidence in others</p> <p>Speak out clearly for organisational beliefs and values</p> <p>Demonstrate active listening to encourage team collaboration</p> <p>Influence others positively to achieve programme goals</p> <p>Critical judgement Analyse and exercise judgment in new situations in the absence of specific guidance.</p> <p>Demonstrate initiative and ingenuity</p>

Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework

Keeping disaster and conflict affected people at the centre of what we do



	<p>Integrate beneficiary accountability principles into your approach</p> <p>Demonstrate an understanding of coordination mechanisms</p>				<p>Be aware of internal and external pressures and how they might impact your effectiveness</p>	<p>Demonstrate tenacity to achieve solutions</p> <p>Address difficult situations and make tough decisions confidently and calmly</p> <p>Suggest creative improvements and different ways of working</p>
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Competencies	<u>Understanding of humanitarian contexts and application of humanitarian principles</u>	<u>Achieving results effectively</u>	<u>Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships</u>	<u>Operating safely and securely in a humanitarian response</u>	<u>Managing yourself in a pressured and changing environment</u>	<u>Leadership in humanitarian response</u>
<p>Additional Behaviours for 1st level line managers* in humanitarian response, informed by skills and knowledge</p> <p>*as defined in report</p>	<p>The humanitarian context Able to assess and analyse key issues in the humanitarian situation and formulate actions around them</p> <p>Applying humanitarian standards / principles Participate in the development of an organisational response based on an understanding of the contexts</p> <p>Actively engage in disaster coordination mechanisms and interagency cooperation from an understanding of your agency's perspective and approach.</p>	<p>Programme Quality Set standards in your work and follow agreed procedures of work</p> <p>Document lessons learned and apply them to future projects</p> <p>Accountability Ensure efficient and transparent use of resources in accordance with internal controls</p> <p>Establish community engagement mechanisms</p> <p>Impact Clarify roles and responsibilities within your team to maximise impact</p> <p>Continuously provide feedback and updates to achieve improved results</p> <p>Coordinate with stakeholders to avoid duplication and maximise resources</p>	<p>Listening & dialogue Ensure beneficiary and partner feedback is incorporated into programme design, planning and learning</p> <p>Working with others Establish clear objectives with teams and individuals and monitor progress and performance</p> <p>Establish agreed ways of working at a distance with partners and staff</p> <p>Work with your team to build trust with partners, communities and stakeholders</p> <p>Foster collaborative, transparent and accountable relationships through partners to formalise and operationalise partnering agreements</p> <p>Use negotiation and conflict resolution skills to support positive outcomes</p>	<p>Security context and analysis Demonstrate an understanding of wider UN/NGO security co-ordination and how your organisation can benefit from, and contribute to, those mechanisms</p> <p>Undertake effective risk assessments and develop contingency plans</p> <p>Personal safety & security Monitor security risks and ensure organisational protocols are consistently followed by staff</p> <p>Take appropriate action and provide appropriate direction and support to team members in the event of a critical incident</p> <p>Minimising risk to communities and partners Undertake effective risk assessments with communities and partners</p>	<p>Resilience Help team members to practise stress management through prioritisation of workloads and modelling of appropriate self care</p> <p>Maintaining professionalism Set realistic deadlines and goals</p> <p>Facilitate others to carry out their roles and responsibilities</p> <p>Make time to learn from experience and feedback, and apply the lessons to a new situation</p>	<p>Motivating and influencing others Inspire others by clearly articulating and demonstrating the values, core purpose and principles that underpin humanitarian work</p> <p>Provide regular and ongoing informal and formal feedback to recognise the contribution of others</p> <p>Adapt leadership approach to the situation</p> <p>Critical judgment Maintain simultaneously a broad strategic perspective and awareness of the detail of a situation</p> <p>Adapt plans quickly in response to emerging situations and changing environments</p> <p>Take calculated risks to improve performance</p> <p>Able to act decisively and quickly</p>

Annex 2: Final Assignment Instructions

Final assignment

Context Core Humanitarian Skills Development Programme

Introduction

To successfully complete the programme, you will need to submit an essay that demonstrates that you have applied in your work what you learnt on the programme. The focus should be on what you managed to achieve during the learning programme and what you learnt from this.

Content: In your learning essay, please describe the following:

1. Applying competencies at work: Select two competencies that you were weak in at the beginning of the programme and in which you have improved (refer to your competency self-assessment). For each of the two competencies:
 - Name the competency
 - Describe what actions you took to improve this competency, and how the Context Programme contributed
 - Please describe a situation in which you applied this competency. First describe the situation or task, then the actions you took, and finally the result of the action.
2. Results:
 - Describe the extent to which you were able to implement your action plan. Say what the key achievements from your action plan were.
 - In addition to what you already described, say what other specific results you can point to in your work that are based on what you learnt. For example – this could be a document you have produced, meetings you have convened, or changes you made in your organisation.
3. Reflection on learning:
 - If your personal learning objectives changed during the programme say how and what factors influenced this.
 - Say how do you plan to continue to learn and develop professionally.

How to write the learning essay:

We recommend you follow this general advice:

- Be concise in your answers and avoid repetitions
- Be specific about your personal learning objectives based on your competency self-assessment. There is no need to repeat the general learning objectives of the Core skills programme.
- Use your learning journal to gather examples for your essay

Line manager feedback: After writing the essay, please submit the essay to your line manager for feedback. The line manager is requested to write between 100-200 words, to describe whether he/she has observed changes in your competencies, and any achievements observed.

Format: The essay should be written in Microsoft Word, and not exceed 1000 words (excluding attachments). Front size 11 or 12 is recommended. You may use pictures, drawings or graphics to support your essay. You may also support your essay by attaching evidence. For example, if you have integrated the Sphere standards in a recent assessment that you did, attach the assessment report.

Illustrate your learning: For the graduation event, you will be asked to bring an object, photographs, short video clip or a poster that visualises your learning and achievements. For example, this can be a poster on which you draw your learning journey. An example of an object is a resource box for the office with key humanitarian guidelines and manuals, as one previous Context participant created. The poster, video or object will be used at the graduation event to showcase to managers, participants and other stakeholders what has been achieved during the programme.

Submitting the final assignment: It will need to be completed before the [date – 4 weeks before graduation] and sent to [name, email address] before you can receive your certificate.

Marking criteria

The learning essays will be assessed based on a pass/fail basis, using the following criteria. The learning essay:

- Provides evidence of reflection on learning, demonstrates commitment to learning and develops realistic personal development plans.
- Provides evidence of application of learned competencies through concrete examples.
- Provides evidence of implementation of the action plan demonstrated by concrete results.
- Is clearly written and the presentation is logical and coherent.

Retake: In case the final essay does not meet the assessment criteria, you will be allowed to resubmit the essay. You will not receive your certificate unless you have successfully completed the assignment.

Graduation criteria

- Successfully completing the learning essay and illustration
- Attendance of both workshops
- Receiving two coaching sessions
- Active learning in between workshops (evidenced through buddy group engagement, online learning activities, etc.)

Annex 3: Clarification of Coding

The following section provides additional clarification on how the text of the learning essays was coded to the various competencies.

Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact: While many projects and learning can indirectly affect a participant's ability to ensure programme quality and impact, participants were only recorded as learning in this competency if they explicitly mention that their improvement was aimed at ensuring programme quality/impact. For example, working with stakeholders and partner organisations would only be coded as 'Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact' if the participant mentioned that the purpose was to avoid duplication of work and maximize impact, otherwise it was coded as 'Working with others'. Teambuilding, increased communication, and prioritizing of tasks were other subjects that were similarly coded in other competencies unless they specifically discussed their impact on programme quality.

Listening and Creating Dialogue: This competency overlaps with many competencies, including 'Working Accountably' as it discusses listening to affected communities, 'Working with Others' as listening is part of communication, and 'Applying humanitarian standards and principles' as the need to listen to others appears often in standards and principles, such as ICRC's Code of Conduct principle 7 - Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid. Participants were only recorded as learning in this domain if they explicitly mentioned it, if they mentioned "listening", or if they mentioned other stakeholders aside from the affected community.

Minimising Risk to Communities, Partners and Stakeholders: Some learning which fell into other competencies (such as Listening and Creating Dialogue) may overlap with 'Minimising risk to communities, partners and stakeholders' as they both have to do with doing what is best for the crisis-affected populations. However, participants were only coded in this competency if they explicitly mentioned safety/security.

Maintaining Professionalism: This competency can be cross-cutting and therefore overlap with many other competencies. For example, regarding taking responsibility for one's own work, many participants discussed the goal of continuing their professional development through trainings and this was instead incorporated within the Participant Reflections on the Learning Journey & Further Plans section. Regarding being aware of internal and external influences that affect one's performance, this can be better understood through self-awareness and is thus discussed in the 'Demonstrating leadership in humanitarian response' domain. Regarding maintaining ethical and professional behaviour in accordance with relevant codes of conduct, this often overlaps with applying humanitarian standards and principles and is thus discussed in the 'Understanding humanitarian contexts and applying humanitarian principles' competency domain. In the cases of potential overlap, participants were only coded as learning in this competency if the specific learning had the overarching theme of 'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment'.

Annex 4: Differences between Countries and Regions

For this report, analysis was conducted on the learning of 42 participants in the cohorts that took place in Kenya, 30 in Ethiopia, 38 in Jordan, and 32 in Lebanon. As demonstrated in the graph below, there are some minor differences between the four countries where the course took place, but there does not appear to be any concrete trends in the differences. While a larger percentage of participants from one country demonstrate learning in one competency, a small percentage of participants from the same country demonstrate learning in another. It is possible that trends would reveal themselves with a larger sample size. However, this finding is useful in itself as it confirms that trainers must be aware of their audience and the context. For example, perhaps participants in the Kenya cohorts reported learning more in the field of 'Operating Safely and Securely at all Times' due to a particularly insecure context.

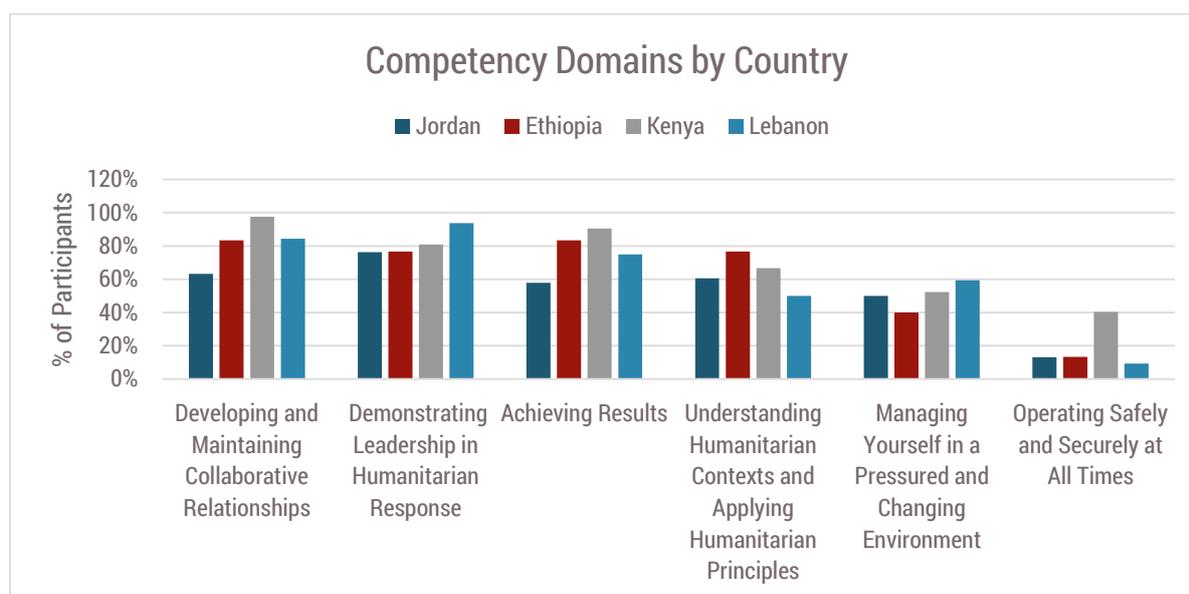


Figure 8: Competency Domains by Country

Core Skills Competency Improvements by Country

This section develops an overview of the results of the core cohorts of Jordan C2, Lebanon C3, Ethiopia C3, and Kenya C4 across the six competency domains. The diagram below provides a visualisation of the results, highlighting a number of findings.

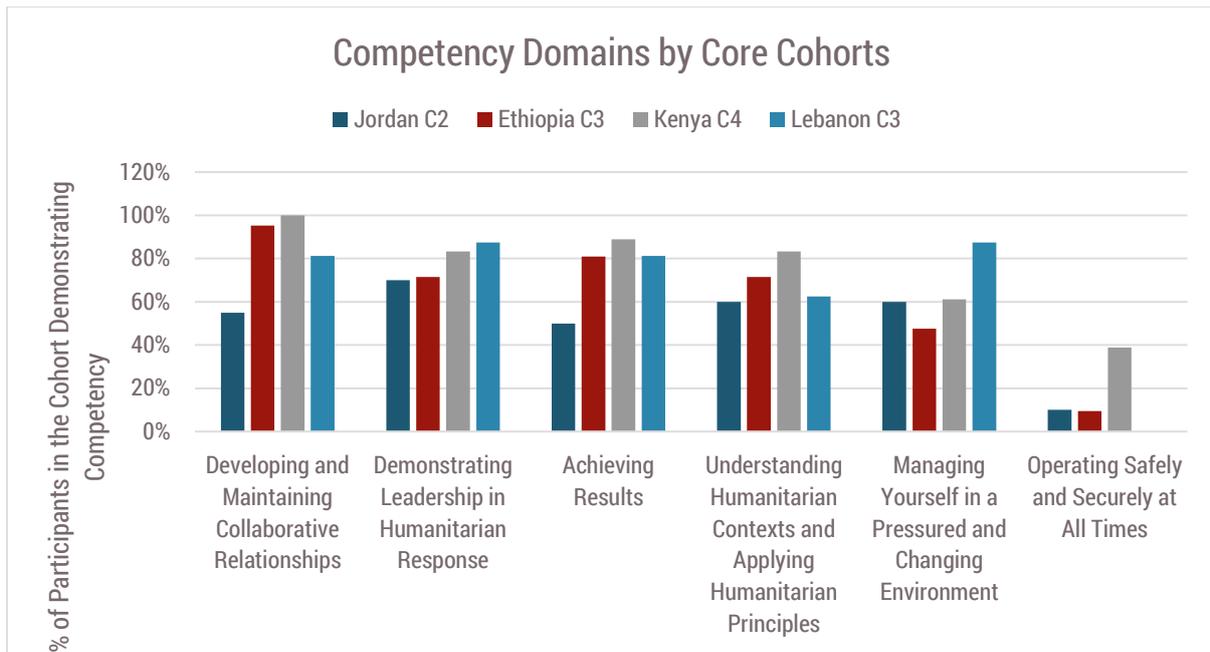


Figure 9: Competency Domains by Core Cohorts

The first finding is that the breakdown of reporting of improvements in relation to different competencies is relatively uniform across cohorts without any significant differences. Additionally, 'Operating Safely and Securely at All Times' is the least reported competency domain across the cohorts, with more participants in the Kenya cohort reporting learning in this competency.

Management & Leadership Competency Improvements by Country

This section provides an overview of each of the 6 competency domains across all the M&L cohorts, as demonstrated in the below chart.

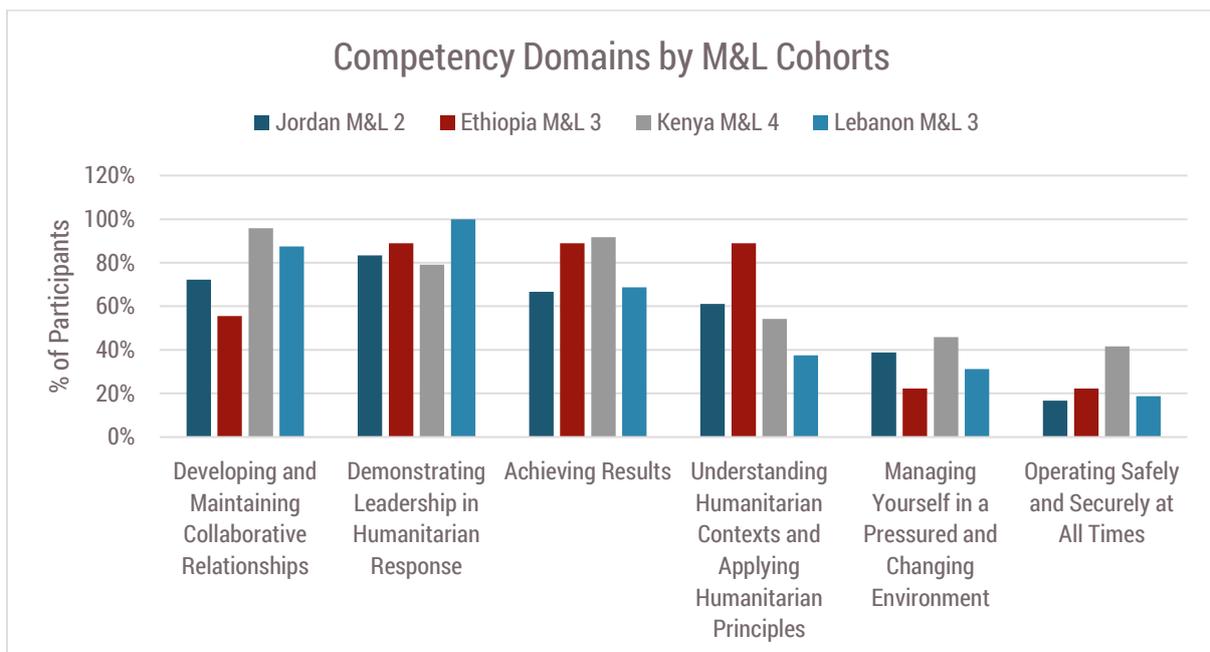


Figure 10: Competency Domains by M&L Cohorts

The findings regarding the M&L cohorts are similar to those in the Core cohorts. Here, too, the distribution of reporting of improvement across the various competency domains appears to be relatively uniform throughout different cohorts in the four countries, with slight variations.

Arabic Language Cohorts

Information was collected regarding two training cohorts which were conducted in Arabic: Jordan C4 (18 participants) and M&L 5 (13 participants). As the learning essays for these cohorts were in Arabic and received later, they were not able to be fully incorporated into the above analysis and findings. Therefore, the following section briefly examines these two cohorts in order to determine any trends. The analysis of this data was conducted in Nvivo based on an Excel file summarizing the learning projects/activities of the participants and coding of three essays written originally in English.

The below table shows the competency domains that were coded for these two cohorts:

Competency Domain	Core	M&L
Understanding Humanitarian Contexts and Applying Humanitarian Principles	1	1
Understanding the Humanitarian Context	1	0
Applying Humanitarian Standards and Principles	0	1
Achieving Results	3	2
Ensuring Programme Quality and Impact	2	0
Working Accountability	1	2
Making Decisions	0	0
Developing and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships	10	8
Listening and Creating Dialogue	1	0
Working with Others	9	8
Operating Safely and Securely at All Times	0	1
Minimising Risk to Communities, Partners and Stakeholders	0	0
Managing Personal Safety and Security	0	1
Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment	12	1
Adapting and Coping	5	0
Maintaining Professionalism	10	1
Demonstrating Leadership in Humanitarian Response	3	8
Self - Awareness	0	2
Motivating and Influencing Others	2	6
Critical Judgement	1	0

There are a few key findings from this analysis. Firstly, both groups showed a focus on the 'Developing and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships' competency domain, specifically the competency of 'Working with Others'. This is mainly due to participants focusing on communication skills, including skills in negotiating, presenting, and holding meetings. This follows the trend of the other 8 cohorts discussed above.

However, one notable difference between these two cohorts was that many participants in the Core training focused on the 'Managing Yourself in a Pressured and Changing Environment' competency domain, while this was not a focus for the Management and Leadership participants. Participants of the Core training often discussed improving their skills in time management and stress management. This domain was therefore more often discussed in the Arabic cohorts than the other 8 cohorts discussed above.