IDENTIFYING IMPACT: CAPTURING THE OUTCOMES OF HUMANITARIAN CAPACITY-BUILDING

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015 RedR UK carried out a review of the impact of its capacity-building services over the previous four years, in order to better understand and document evidence of the effectiveness, relevance, outcomes and impact of our capacity-building work. In early 2016 RedR UK commissioned the University of Sussex to validate and extend findings from this internal review. The purpose of the research was to explore the relative strengths of different approaches and methodologies for humanitarian training and capacity-building, and to explore how impact measures can be built into the design and delivery of these.

RedR's approach to evaluation is based on Kirkpatrick's four levels, which should be viewed as a causal chain in which each step is reliant on the previous steps having taken place:

1. Reaction – how those who participate in the programme react to it
2. Learning – the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the programme
3. Behaviour – the extent to which change in behaviour has occurred because the participant attended the training programme
4. Results – the final results that occurred because the participants attended the programme

These are referred to throughout the paper, and were used as the basis of data analysis in the research by the University of Sussex.

The review and research have taken place in the context of increasing demand from donors to demonstrate the impact of humanitarian capacity-building on end beneficiaries (one interpretation of level 4 evaluation of results). Difficulties experienced in capturing this data for capacity-building programmes are not unique to RedR and led to an overarching hypothesis that it is not possible to directly attribute the impact of humanitarian capacity-building on the affected populations with whom participants of the capacity-building are working. Only anecdotal illustrations of such an impact exists and the research therefore confirms that within

RedR's existing evaluation and impact measurement practices, it is not possible to measure the impact at level 4, if defined in this way. The research also indicates that the anticipated cost and time required to obtain evidence at this level likely makes it infeasible and impractical.

Note: The practice of capturing level 1 feedback is well documented and well practised by training providers. End of day and end of course evaluations can capture immediate reactions to capacity building interventions and are generally considered sufficient to do so. The measurement of reaction was therefore not a focus of the research.

The research, and this paper, therefore focus on Kirkpatrick's levels 2 and 3.

LEVEL 2, LEARNING
INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO MEASURING LEARNING

The measurement of learning (level 2) is both a degree more complex and perhaps a degree less common than capturing participant reactions. Our research provides recommendations for new and innovative ways in which to incorporate evaluation at level 2 into capacity-building design. While pre- and post- course testing is a known methodological option, the recommendations of the research include alternative, innovative approaches to measuring learning. In addition, these proposed methodologies introduce a second perspective, either of a peer or a facilitator. This can be used alongside self-assessment, which is more traditionally used in the assessment of learning in humanitarian capacity-building. These additional or alternative perspectives can help to counter the strong risk of bias that exists in the use of self-assessment.

Recommendation 1: Use group work to provide evidence of learning

Group work and experiential learning activities are already key components of RedR's training methodology. The suggestion, then, is to build upon these to collect evidence of learning even during the capacity-building event. For example, participants quizzing one another during these exercises could measure the learning that has taken place.

Recommendation 2: Capture practical exercises on video as evidence of learning

Recording participants' performance in practical exercises and providing this for them to watch back could be used as a means to support them to identify their own learning, and areas for continued improvement. This, in turn, can inform the measurement of learning, both through the participants' feedback on their self-reflection, and through the facilitators' feedback on how learning is demonstrated by the participants. The provision of feedback from other training participants could also be considered, to incorporate an element of peer learning, and to decentralise the role of the facilitator in the feedback process.

Recommendation 3: Use simulation exercises and role play to measure prior learning, and acquisition of learning during a capacity building event

Similar in concept to the use of pre- and post-course testing, this suggestion replaces paper-based tests with active role-plays or simulation exercises. One, at the beginning of the capacity-building event, would show prior levels of learning by testing what people would do if an emergency occurred. A comparison with a similar exercise/role play at the end of the event would help participants and trainers/evaluators to see the knowledge and skills the former have acquired during the training event.

LEVEL 3, BEHAVIOUR
BUILDING IMPACT MEASUREMENT INTO PROGRAMME DESIGN

Identifying changes in behaviour (level 3 evaluation) is yet more difficult. Often, the relationship between training provider and participant is not sufficiently long to witness changes in behaviour. Moreover, once a participant returns to work, multiple other factors come into play which can facilitate, or constrain, the use of learning through its implementation in behaviour.

It is therefore no surprise that longer-term learning programmes provide more opportunities for the assessment of behaviour change, not least because these continue the training provider's access to the learner, in order collect data on if, and how, learning is being used.

While traditionally assessment of the outcomes of capacity-building on its participants has been a standalone activity at a defined time period following the main, often face-to-face, intervention, recommendations from our research suggest ways of building behaviour change measurement into the design of the programme itself.

Recommendation 1: Use simulation exercises and role play to measure behavioural change

Building on recommendation three in the section above, the use of role play or simulation exercises pre- and post-course can also begin to assess behaviour change, albeit in a simulated environment. Careful debriefing could be used to draw out positive behaviour changes and reinforce these in participants' thinking before they return to their day to day work.

Recommendation 2: Use coaching sessions for questions about behaviour change, and capture answers in coaches' reports

RedR's ADCAP project developed the skills of eight Inclusion Advisors through a combination of face-to-face training and follow-up coaching. Coaching sessions took place monthly for the 12-month period after the face-to-face training. Sessions were designed to provide a one-to-one forum in which the learners could discuss their progress and challenges in relation to implementing their learning in the workplace.

> *Several participants commented that the coaching sessions provided them with a space for reflection on their own work. Such reflection could be used more explicitly for participants to evaluate the impact that the training and the coaching is having in their work. For example, coaching sessions could include a direct question about such impact and the answers could be captured in the coaching reports. In addition, coaches could be asking questions, testing coachees' retention of learning and/or changes that might have resulted from it. (Schwittay and Phelan, 2016:32)*

Recommendation 3: Encourage personal reflection (in diaries for example) about changes in individual professional practice and their relation to the course

RedR's credit-rated courses require participants to complete a reflective journal in the three months following the face-to-face training. In these journals, learners are expected to demonstrate their retention of learning by applying course content to an emergency situation (level 2 evaluation), and/or to demonstrate how they have implemented the course competencies in their work by providing examples of how they have used the learning in practice, and more specifically, how the learning has led to changes in their behaviours (level 3 evaluation).

> *The journals for skills-transfer courses…asked participants to reflect upon and evaluate their own professional practice and learning in relation to the competencies taught. Participants also had to articulate a critical reflection of their own professional practice in relation to theory and ongoing debates. They were asked to demonstrate that they could apply the learning from the course to their particular work situation, for example in drawing up a security matrix and producing action plans. This showed the extent to which they had retained learning from the course and increased their knowledge, leading to individual and organisational behavioural change. (Schwittay and Phelan, 2016:20)*

This method could be further developed by including a measure of pre- and post-course knowledge and skill, in order to highlight the behaviour changes resulting directly from the training programme.

Recommendation 4: Use refresher courses or professional networks for impact measurement

RedR has found that on-going contact between participants following face-to-face learning interventions is often valued by the learners, particularly in contexts of high risk and high complexity.

> *The importance of context should be kept in mind here, as some subjects clearly benefit more from F2F methods than others…In addition, the best timing of F2F methods is also context-dependent (Schwittay and Phelan, 2016:47).*

Building these opportunities into learning programmes by facilitating the development of professional or peer support networks is recommended to enhance the learning experience.

> *Here[1], F2F contact during the training allowed them [the participants] to begin to establish relationships that could be translated into professional networks of particular use after the training, to provide each other with support and information. As this would be the case for the majority of people attending RedR's training, putting in place infrastructures that allow for networking subsequent to training would seem a worthwhile investment, to increase the effectiveness of learning but also for more intangible things like emotional support. (Schwittay and Phelan, 2016:47)*

Networks emerging from training have also proved a valuable source of information on level 3 evaluation. Through follow up with such networks, it is possible to capture concrete examples of the use of learning in practice. For example, RedR's Foundation for Staff Welfare and Critical Incidents training was provided to humanitarian workers in Sudan to help them deal with on-going violence experienced in the context of their work. Training focused on different elements of staff welfare, such as coping with stress, safety training and critical incident management. The training provided active encouragement and a mechanism for networking and set up an infrastructure for participants to stay in touch afterwards through the creation of innovative peer support networks (PSNs). These are run by Sudanese staff and provide networking and other collaboration opportunities for members.

> *PSNs…include regular meetings and refresher training. In this way, PSNs also contributed to continuous learning. The case study showed that the networks were very successful in recruiting members, growing from the original 63 participants in 2011 to 316 in 2013 and members themselves establishing two additional committees. They provided opportunities for members to support each other in stressful and traumatic times, by talking through critical incidences that they had been called on to respond to…Another result was improved response rate to critical incidences by network members, which in some cases led to staff counselled by*

[1] RedR's Foundation for Staff Welfare and Critical Incidents training in Sudan

> *network members being able to return to fieldwork faster or changing their minds about resigning (Schwittay and Phelan, 2016:47).*

Recommendation 5: On-going email follow-up

In order to extend the learning journey and prolong contact between the training provider and the learner, a recommendation emerges to maintain regular contact with learners in the period following the main capacity building intervention. By providing discussion questions, learners will be encouraged to continue engaging with the subject matter, and will receive these prompts while in their usual work context, thereby encouraging them to consider the issues within the specifics of their own work. This engagement should continue at least until the point at which the training provider wishes to measure behaviour change, at which time questions should address how participants have integrated new knowledge into their work, in order to evaluate level 3 and gain examples of changes in behaviour.

> *A more effective way of using the three-month follow up survey might be to stay in touch with participants through weekly emails after course completion, which could extend learning through scenarios or discussion questions. The last email could be in the form of how participants have integrated their new knowledge into their workplace and would measure impact more effectively. The participants who have most engaged with the emails could then be surveyed further, maybe through interviews, and could form the basis for case studies. This could take the place of the general 12-month survey, for which response rates are very low. Instead of targeting all training participants, the focus is on the most engaged ones. This is currently done by InsideNGO, as described in the 2015 Intrac report. (Schwittay and Phelan, 2016:39)*

POINTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

To improve the capture and utility of level 2 and 3 data, a number of points of good practice emerge from the research. These should be utilised broadly in the design of capacity-building evaluation and considered in line with the target audience and context of the learning programme.

Follow-up evaluation – that which is taking place some time later than the main learning intervention – should include questions to establish limiting or enabling factors to the implementation of learning (behaviour change). For example, questions should be asked about senior managers' appetite and support for change and investment in learning, and about the capacity to prioritise the use of new learning over existing work commitments and requirements.

More consideration should be given to community-based assessment methods that would reduce the reliance on questionnaires, engage participants in more creative evaluation methodologies, and enable illiterate people, or those uncomfortable filling out questionnaires, to provide feedback at reaction, learning and behaviour levels. This could be tied to the recommendations on methodologies for building data capture into learning programmes, through coaching, simulation exercises, or follow-up with emerging networks.

In order to increase the response rate to follow-up – be this questionnaire, telephone interviews or other methodologies – the expectation that learners should engage with this exercise in due course should be made clearer during the main learning intervention. If appropriate, this could be tied to the provision of certificates.

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