
Tearfund Disaster Management Key Learning

Top 20 Learning Points

Last Updated: 05 January 2010

1. Values

Ensure that staff clearly understand what each value does and doesn't mean, in practical terms

Source of Learning:
Darfur/Sudan

Background Information:

We learnt that it was just as important for staff to be clear on what each organisational value doesn't mean in practical terms, as much as what it does mean. Regarding a value such as "courageousness", it could be easy for staff to misunderstand what living out the value meant in practical ways which would contradict health and safety or security management policies. Staff induction therefore included a clear explanation of both what the value does mean and what it doesn't mean in practical terms and a simple handout was developed to help provide clarity.

2. Impartiality & Targeting

Limit the geographical area of intervention that has been targeted in order to ensure a meaningful level of assistance is provided

Source of Learning:
Sahel / West Africa, Bangladesh

Background Information:

In the Sahel response, a key evaluation recommendation was for partners to work in fewer communities in order to increase efficiency and impact of the interventions. The level of need was such that a higher proportion of people within the targeted communities could be justifiably targeted with support.

Similarly, in a Bangladesh evaluation, a key recommendation was to reduce the geographical scope of coverage and provide a more significant assistance package to the targeted beneficiaries. If resources are limited and the available assistance is spread too thin, the support provided to individual beneficiaries may be too small to be meaningful.

3. Accountability

Agree with the community their preferred ways of giving feedback

Source of Learning:

Darfur / Sudan, Liberia, Bangladesh, Other

Background Information:

In some projects complaints boxes have been introduced as it was assumed by the partner or team that these are an important part of a complaints mechanism, although it later came to light that the community didn't really want them in the first place. We have learnt that what is most important is that there is a system of feeding back which the community itself has chosen.

4. Disaster Risk

Include earthquake resilience in building design in any locations vulnerable to seismic activity

Location:

Indonesia, India, Pakistan, DRC, Other

Background Information:

In countries such as Indonesia, India, Pakistan and DRC, we learnt that more could have been done in the early stages of the construction projects to include seismic resilience within the design of buildings. It is important to agree the specifications that are appropriate. It may be that construction laws and codes exist which need to be followed or exceeded, but in their absence, any project needs to consider what is the best technical design, considering strength, cost, appropriateness for culture/climate, etc. It is a simple way to incorporate Disaster Risk Reduction thinking into construction projects.

5. Technical Quality

Water & Sanitation

WASH interventions must be based on an integration of water provision PLUS safe excreta disposal PLUS hygiene promotion

Source of Learning:

Various / Darfur

Background Information:

Clean water alone will not prevent water & sanitation-related disease. This is particularly relevant in relief situations, where close living proximity and shared facilities can easily result in the spread of contaminable diseases. Hygiene education needs to be promoted in a manner that enables beneficiaries to understand the risks, and WASH projects should focus on empowering beneficiaries to alter their hygiene behaviours as necessary. Improvements in sanitation measures, domestic water supplies, and hygiene practices should be fully integrated.

Effective co-ordination is required in programming for WASH. This was evident in Darfur, where the March 2007 evaluation noted the wider awareness and demand raised by the HP programme that could not be matched by the targeted spread of the latrines across the different communities.

Community Health

Plan watsan projects to ensure they fully integrate water provision, safe excreta disposal and hygiene education and that each is adequately resourced

Source of Learning:

Various

Background Information:

Clean water alone will not prevent water & sanitation-related disease. This is particularly relevant in relief situations, where close living proximity and shared facilities can more easily result in the spread of contaminable diseases. We have learnt that hygiene education needs to be promoted in a manner that enables beneficiaries to understand the risks, and then to empower them to alter their hygiene behaviours as necessary. Projects have often faced situations where the demand for latrines, which has resulted from effective hygiene promotion, has far outstripped the budget available for sanitation, or the hygiene promotion has taken place with no water or sanitation activities proposed, leading to frustration amongst beneficiaries that they cannot put into practice the teaching they have received. Projects therefore need to weigh up the coverage that it proposes for each activity – water, sanitation and hygiene education and the demand that will result.

Nutrition

Carefully consider the appropriateness of targeted feeding in locations where there is no general food availability

Source of Learning:

South Sudan, N. Kenya

Background Information:

Significant dilemmas have been faced when carrying out targeted supplementary feeding (targeting malnourished under 5s for example) in the absence of general food availability. In such situations eg. north Kenya, we have learnt that the targeted ration gets shared within the whole household and the recovery rates for the intended beneficiary is very slow. In such instances it is better to lobby for a stronger general food ration and/or take a blanket approach to supplementary feeding rather than a targeted approach, given the high levels of sharing within the household.

Food Security & Livelihoods

Agricultural inputs (seeds and tools) must be selected and approved by the end users

Source of Learning:

South Sudan, Other

Background Information:

There have been negative project experiences where project staff and experts made decisions on seed type with inadequate consultation with the farmers. This is especially important when new seed types are being considered for distribution.

Shelter and Basic Infrastructure

Closely monitor the construction work when sub-contracting

Source of Learning:

Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Other

Background Information:

Many projects have experienced difficulties and frustrations when sub-contracting the construction work to a contractor – in terms of slow time frames, not meeting project deadlines and in quality, with the contractor seeking short cuts (eg. quality of concrete). Some teams have preferred to undertake the construction work directly for these reasons, although this requires strong technical capacity. If sub-contracting to others the main lessons learnt are to ensure that contract wording allows for action to be taken if the contractor is failing to deliver, and to monitor the work on site very closely to ensure that no short cuts are taken.

6. Children

Raise concerns about inappropriate relationships between staff and children early

Source of Learning:

Various

Background Information:

Concerns about relationships being formed between staff and beneficiaries (particularly children under the age of 18) are not always being raised early enough as staff are under the impression that they require concrete proof of inappropriate conduct before raising concerns. It is essential that concerns are raised early with line managers in order that these matters can be investigated and resolved quickly and effectively.

7. Gender

Increase the number of female field staff on a project team

Source of Learning:

Sahel / West Africa

Background Information:

In the Sahel evaluation, a key recommendation was to increase the number of female field staff to provide better information and support, and to increase the priority on women to ensure their voice is heard and their needs are met.

8. HIV

Ensure you provide refresher training for staff so that levels of awareness and accurate understanding of HIV is maintained

Source of Learning:

Various

Background Information:

We have learnt that it is essential that staff have a good understanding of HIV and have the correct information in order for them to be able to implement HIV activities amongst communities. This will also help to lessen stigma and discrimination which can often stem from misconceptions of the facts. In a survey of

field staff which looked at their attitudes and understanding of HIV we found that understanding had actually decreased compared to a baseline survey carried out a couple of years before. This highlights the difficulty of retaining knowledge due to staff turnover and the importance of providing continual refresher training so that the desired level of staff understanding is maintained.

9. Conflict

Carefully consider how the organisation's targeting criteria might cause resentment in a community

Source of Learning:

Sierra Leone, South Sudan, DRC, Other

Background Information:

For projects where large scale resettlement is underway, there is a danger that if the focus is exclusively on returnees rather than the existing population (who are often also chronically vulnerable), there may be imbalance in the assistance provided and resentment towards the returnees as well as towards the NGOs. In countries such as Sierra Leone, South Sudan and DRC, we learnt that targeting criteria need to embrace vulnerable residents as well as vulnerable returnees and to take an inclusive approach.

10. Environment

Using burnt bricks for construction needs to be avoided and other more environmentally friendly alternatives found

Source of Learning:

South Sudan, Malawi, Darfur/N.Sudan, Other

Background Information:

In many construction projects (building houses, schools, etc) projects the tradition has been to use burnt bricks (fired clay bricks), despite the huge environmental impact from use of wood when firing the bricks. The alternatives are often limited, based on cost (eg. the use of cement to make concrete blocks), preference (unfamiliar alternative materials) or time limitations (deadlines to complete the work making it difficult to trial alternative approaches). Some projects have tried rammed earth bricks on an experimental basis and the results are promising.

11. Sustainability

Work through existing community leadership or committee structures whenever possible and appropriate

Source of Learning:

Sierra Leone, Liberia

Background Information:

Many projects involve working through a local community committee, which may have a range of responsibilities e.g. agreeing selection criteria, selecting beneficiaries, overseeing a construction project, managing a water source etc. Some projects have established a new committee, created for the purpose of the project. The general lesson learnt has been that these are often not sustainable for the long term once the project has ended, unless there is very strong motivation and ownership. Working through traditional committee structures has proven more sustainable and locally owned, and work particularly well when there is a strong tradition of community committee leadership, and/or these are part of an established national

system encouraged and supported by the government. The cautions however are to ensure that such committees are truly representative of the communities (gender balance may well be a concern), and to ensure that they are truly empowered to act for the community if they are associated with a government structure. If the decision is to create a new committee, consider carefully how to relate to the traditional leadership in order that they are not alienated or seek to disrupt the work of the committee.

12. Advocacy

Include policy issues as an output within the project log frame to ensure advocacy happens

Source of Learning:

Various

Background Information:

We have found that when policy issues are included in the project log frame they will become part of the formal project plan, and progress will be reviewed as part of project monitoring and evaluation. If they are not in the log frame, advocacy work may be dropped because of the pressures on staff to deliver on the project level outputs which are in the log frame.