

BUILDING IMPACT



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Evaluating Impact in the Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector

Proceedings of the Global Shelter Cluster Recovery Community of Practice Learning Event,
May 2023



Acknowledgments

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Report Structure

The structure of this report very loosely follows the agenda of the Learning Event, which can be found in [Annex A](#). After an introduction, it addresses the **WHY, WHAT, HOW, WHO** and **WHEN** of evaluating impact. The report ends with some suggested topics to be carried forward for further exploration within the shelter and settlements sector.

Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of this report's compilers. Please get in touch with any corrections or comments.

Contributors

Many people contributed to the Learning Event in May 2023, and to this report. The agenda of the Learning Event itself was developed collaboratively by shelter and settlements and evaluation specialists who came together to discuss how to tackle the topic during an online event. The list below includes those who took an active role in the event, behind the scenes or by making presentations, as well as those who contributed a written piece or advised the organising team in pre-event interviews. Presenters' words and slides have been turned into sections of this report, which attempts to convey the content and spirit of the event itself, along with some background material and further reading.

The views expressed throughout this report do not necessarily reflect the position of the CARE, OBU or Cendep teams on evaluating impact. This report instead attempts to bring together a wide diversity of views on the topic in order to stimulate productive discussion and thought within the shelter and settlements sector on the role of evaluations, data and evidence.

More than 80 people joined the online event - their (anonymous) comments and contributions in virtual breakout room discussions have also been included in this report. Many thanks for all the contributions.

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Terminology

Throughout this report we have preferred the term 'Evaluating Impact' (EI) when referring to the concept of assessing the holistic and wide-ranging effects that good shelter programming can have on well-being and recovery, including short-term and longer-term outcomes or through M&E processes. 'Impact Evaluation' is used when referring to a defined process of measuring the particular impact of a programme with an appropriately identified methodology.

The following useful terms are taken from the 2016 ALNAP [Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide](#):

Evaluation of Humanitarian Action: *The systematic and objective examination of humanitarian action, to determine the worth or significance of an activity, policy or programme, intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability.*

Learning: *The process through which experience and reflection lead to changes in behaviour or the acquisition of new abilities.*

Accountability: *Accountability is the means through which power is used responsibly. It is a process of taking into account the views of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily the people affected by authority or power.*

Inputs: *The financial, human and material resources used in humanitarian action.*

Outputs: *The products, goods and services which result from an intervention.*

Outcomes: *Intended or unintended changes or shifts in conditions due directly or indirectly to an intervention. They can be desired (positive) or unwanted (negative). They can encompass behaviour change (actions, relations, policies, practices) of individuals, groups, communities, organisations, institutions or other social actors.*

Impact: *Looks at the wider effects of the programme – social, economic, technical and environmental – on individuals, gender, age-groups, communities and institutions. Impacts can be intended and unintended, positive and negative, macro (sector) and micro (household, individual), short or long term.*

Attribution: *The ascription of a causal link between observed (or expected to be observed) changes and a specific intervention.*

Contribution: *Analysing contribution in evaluation refers to finding credible ways of showing that an intervention played some part in bringing about results. Contribution analysis is a kind of evaluative analysis that recognises that several causes might contribute to a result, even if individually they may not be necessary or sufficient to create impact.*

Monitoring: *A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing humanitarian intervention with indications of the extent of progress, achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. (Based on OECD-DAC, 2002)*

Impact Evaluation: *An evaluation that focuses on the wider effects of the humanitarian programme, including intended and unintended impact, positive and negative impact, macro (sector) and micro (household, individual) impact.*

Theory of change: *A theory of change is a description of the central mechanism by which change comes about for individuals, groups and communities*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Identifying the problem

The shelter and settlements sector has long recognised the broad impacts adequate shelter can have on people's lives, health, livelihoods, safety and well-being, indeed on affected populations' recovery from disasters and crises. However, while within the sector this is now broadly acknowledged, there remains a need to advocate for this across humanitarian sectors and to a wider variety of external actors.

To what extent are we able to demonstrate that the provision of adequate shelter assistance has a positive impact on these essential aspects of recovery? How might better evidence of the impacts of shelter and settlement assistance lead to improved humanitarian programming?

How the learning event explored this topic

In May 2023, the Global Shelter Cluster's Recovery Community of Practice held an online Learning Event bringing together evaluation specialists with shelter practitioners to explore the WHY, WHAT, HOW, WHO and WHEN of understanding and measuring the impacts of shelter assistance. The event invited a series of presentations by experts and practitioners to discuss what the challenges and possibilities are around improving the use and understanding of evaluating impact in the shelter and settlements sector, and how evidence could subsequently be used.

This event explored what evidence is needed and for what purpose, as well as how it is utilised and who should be involved, and if this could strengthen the implementation of shelter support to populations in need. This report draws on the presentations made during the Learning Event itself, the contributions from event participants, as well as additional contributions and interviews.

Content and conclusions - What will the reader take from this report?

A number of themes and crucial issues emerged from the learning event and this report. These are:

- The **importance of coordination** both within the shelter and settlements sector and across other sectors in order to share and use information more effectively.
- The **need to develop partnerships** between shelter practitioners, evaluators, donors and other actors in order to better understand the wider impacts of shelter programming. In turn, to use these partnerships to advocate for more resource allocation for evidence gathering.
- The importance of **engaging affected communities** in the evaluation process, to not only consult communities but to try and support them to lead and influence the process of evidence gathering directly.
- The **need for further research**, particularly in the area of evaluating impact in conflict settings. Furthermore, to explore whether it is appropriate for the sector to create standardised sector wide indicators for measuring impact in a more cohesive way across organisations.
- The need for **greater support for shelter and settlements project teams**. In particular, to provide MEAL teams and programmatic staff with the time and opportunity to think about evaluation early on and throughout project cycles.

Message from Global Shelter Cluster

Brett Moore, GSC Coordinator on behalf of UNHCR

When many of us started working in the humanitarian system, our understanding of humanitarian shelter was primarily based on intuition. We brought knowledge from various backgrounds, such as architecture, engineering, planning, and the social sciences. However, there was no established pathway or body of evidence and learning within the humanitarian system. We have learned a lot since then, but there is still much more to learn. Events like these address key questions and help us grasp the importance of research.

The cluster strongly supports research, and it is gaining prominence in the development of our new strategy. Research plays a crucial role in understanding the impact of our interventions and improving learning and knowledge management. Partnership between the Global Shelter Cluster, academic organisations and partner agencies involved in research forms a powerful triangle that furthers our understanding and impact.

*Within the cluster, a **baseline study** of the research priorities of humanitarian practitioners conducted in 2022 identified recovery and long-term impact as one of the most crucial research topics. This is essential not only to understand the intrinsic impact of our actions but also to demonstrate our work to stakeholders from different sectors. There is a broad audience for this type of work.*

The nature of crises varies, and discerning their impact and priorities relies on the specific context. Whether it is earthquake recovery, conflict recovery, or other complex situations, a theoretical framework and an inquiry process are essential to understand effective approaches across contexts. This is particularly crucial in conflict settings where social systems are deeply disrupted.

As we face compounded events, or multi-country contexts, understanding the manifestations and implications of shelter and settlements programme design and implementation becomes critical. Examining the impact of our work over different time periods is necessary to capture the longer-term effects and evaluate the success of recovery processes.

This initiative to better understand the impact of shelter and settlement programmes, allows us to move beyond an internal discussion between shelter professionals and encourages multi-sectoral collaboration that can lead to innovative solutions. These evolutionary processes are vital and will greatly benefit our work.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Context

The shelter and settlements sector has long recognised the connections between the adequacy of housing, the modalities of shelter and settlements programming, and their wider (or multiplier) outcomes and impacts on living conditions, people's health, livelihoods, education and protection. However, the 2020 scoping review of the [Wider Impacts of Shelter and Settlements Assistance](#) commissioned by InterAction, and the related 2023 [online training](#), points out that the quality and robustness of evidence of ways in which shelter and humanitarian sheltering are associated with, or even cause, wider positive impacts is limited, often due to the quality of evaluations. This is further supported by the analysis in the 2022 [State of the Humanitarian System](#) Report.

Wider impacts are highlighted as a research priority by the [Global Shelter Cluster](#) and also inform discussions in the [Shelter Projects Working Group](#) and the [Recovery Community of Practice](#).

There are many approaches, tools, guidance and methodologies available for humanitarian and development actors to measure, or evaluate, the impact of their interventions. However, Impact Evaluations are not widely used within the shelter and settlements sector and, as time and resource-hungry processes, greater clarity is needed on the purpose and value of such evaluation efforts, or what other approaches may be more relevant and appropriate to demonstrate impact.

The rationale for the learning event

The online Learning Event "Evaluating Impact in the Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector" took place on 17 May, 2023. It was attended by more than 60 people representing over 20 organisations. The event included presentations from both shelter practitioners and MEAL specialists, as well as group discussions.

The event aimed to explore what evidence is needed and for what purpose, as well as how it is acquired and who should be involved. It therefore followed a structure that considered the **WHY, WHAT, HOW, WHO** and **WHEN** of measuring the impacts of shelter assistance.

The objectives of the Learning Event were:

- to **share experiences and build understanding** and consensus on the **purposes and requirements** of measuring the impacts of shelter and settlements programming;
- to build an **understanding of available approaches and methodologies** to meet different information requirements;
- to explore **the differences and overlaps between Impact Evaluation and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL)** and the role of shelter practitioners in understanding the difference and making the most of both processes;
- to **move forward the conversation**, started through self-recovery approaches, that explores the role of project participants in MEAL and defining and measuring success;
- to **identify gaps in knowledge and capacity**, and to scope opportunities for future research and collaboration.

A range of post-event interviews also took place to follow up on key themes that arose during the Learning Event. This report therefore forms both a record of the proceedings of the day and an analysis of the themes discussed. Additional information, contributions and references are also included.



Previous Global Shelter Cluster's Recovery Community of Practice learning events and publications



Towards Healthier Homes in Humanitarian Settings

The first Learning Event in May 2020 was prompted by the realisation that humanitarian shelter practitioners are routinely prioritising structural safety when aiming to 'build back better'. Everyday health risks, such as indoor air pollution, vector- and water-borne diseases, extremes of temperature and overcrowding are often not considered. The connections between housing and health, well-known in the development sector, are not routinely used to inform humanitarian programming. The event discussed how unhealthy homes have a disproportionate impact on women and children, and emphasised the importance of access to toilets, washing and menstrual health facilities. One of the recommendations in the report, ***Towards Healthier Homes in Humanitarian Settings***, was the need to better understand the mental health aspects of humanitarian sheltering. In addition, it was noted that shelter and WASH specialists should collaborate more effectively.



Mindful Sheltering

The Learning Event in May 2021 included mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) experts. The sessions focused on humanitarian sheltering and mental health, uncovering the impacts of inadequate living conditions and shelter and settlements programming on mental health and well-being. For many participants, the most striking learning point was that:

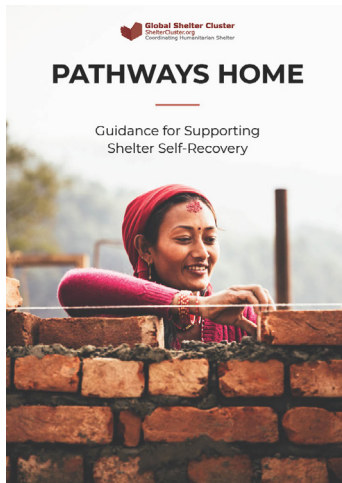
A person's mental health and psychosocial well-being is affected as much—or even more—by their living conditions as it is by their experiences of crisis and disaster. Shelter is a determinant of mental health and well-being in all emergencies; inadequate shelter and poor access to water and sanitation facilities are among the 'daily stressors' that contribute to mental distress for individuals and communities and are detrimental to early recovery and eventual development. (Webb and Weinstein Sheffield, 2021: 7)

It was clear that there was room for exploring further how shelter, WASH, MHPSS and other sectors could work together to improve health and well-being.



Working Together

A third Learning Event invited Shelter, WASH and MHPSS specialists to discuss how to reduce the stresses of inadequate living conditions and, indeed, stresses of inadequate humanitarian practice. The event acted as a reminder that often-siloed sectors need to strive together to enable adequate living conditions that support recovery.



Pathways Home - Guidance for Supporting Shelter Self-Recovery

Pathways Home, was published by the Recovery Community of Practice in 2022. It was a collaborative effort informed by three learning workshops with input from a broad range of practitioners. It is the first guidance for agencies aiming to produce an enabling environment for self-recovery. It started to explore the opportunities and challenges of 'community-led' monitoring and evaluation processes and identified some tools and approaches to monitoring, evaluation and Impact Evaluation.

Check the summary guide of Pathways Home in English, Arabic, French and Spanish through these links: [**Pathways Home-The Fast Track-Summary Guide**](#), [**Pathways Home Fast Track: Arabic**](#), [**Pathways Home Fast Track: French**](#), [**Pathways Home Fast Track: Spanish**](#).

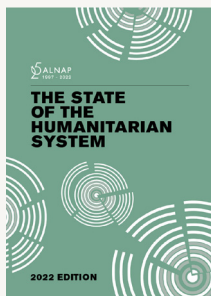
CHAPTER 2

Evaluating Impact: WHY

The first session of the Learning Event explored whether the sector considers evaluating impact to be important and if so, for what purpose. This section begins with **Jennifer Doherty** presenting additional contributions and thoughts around this topic from ALNAP's presentation. Discussions held with **Camilla Wuensch** and **Paul Knox-Clarke** prior to the Learning Event are also reported below. At the end of this section, the breakout discussions on WHY we need evidence of the impacts of shelter and settlements activities are summarised.

The importance of Impact Evaluations

Jennifer Doherty (Research Fellow: Evidence, Accountability and Humanitarian Policy at ALNAP) emphasised the importance of Impact Evaluations with reference to the 2022 **State of the Humanitarian System** report and the successful use of rigorous evaluation of impact to promote the use of cash in humanitarian programming.



The State of the Humanitarian System provides an evidence base on international humanitarian action, spanning nearly 15 years and four editions. The reports assess performance and track changes through research, surveys, financial and demographic analysis, and include a synthesis of evaluations and key literature. Data collected gives us an overview of the state of evidence, the number and types of evaluations across different sectors. This helps us understand where shelter stands in comparison to other sectors and how Impact Evaluations have influenced decision-making in humanitarian efforts, particularly in the context of resource scarcity and prioritisation.

When people refer to Impact Evaluation, they usually mean one of two types. The distinction lies in the methodology used rather than what is being measured. The first type employs experimental or quasi-experimental approaches to isolate the effect of a specific intervention compared to a counterfactual. The second type uses different approaches to explore the wider or longer-term impacts of a project beyond its immediate purpose. For example, evaluating the impact of providing shelter on the education outcomes of children. These evaluations may also consider the sustainability of results over time.

The first type of Impact Evaluation is more prevalent in academic peer-reviewed journals, while the second type is often seen in evaluations conducted by agencies. Although there are exceptions, this generalisation reflects the overall trend.

Within the State of the Humanitarian System report, we gather data from both types of evaluations. Our goal is to understand the effectiveness of different programmes and responses, as well as the long-term impacts of humanitarian action. In our most recent report, we dedicated a chapter to examining whether the system does harm, exploring aspects such as social cohesion, the environment, and dependency.

The evidence base for Impact Evaluations in the education, health, and nutrition sectors has been growing. However, a significant portion of evidence on outcomes in these sectors still comes from standard evaluations without experimental methods. Within the protection and shelter sectors, progress in outcome evidence has been limited, although there are some examples. These sectors do not typically use experimental Impact Evaluations (which are not always appropriate and have significant cost implications) and tend to focus more on measuring activities rather than outcomes. For instance, they may count the number of shelters constructed instead of exploring the effects of providing those shelters on communities.

Why does Impact Evaluation matter? Quasi-experimental approaches can be time-consuming, costly, and require specific statistical skills and conditions for the assumptions of experimental comparison to hold. However, despite challenges, well-conducted Impact Evaluations play a vital role in increasing our confidence in the effectiveness of humanitarian action. Knowing which types of humanitarian action actually work allows us to enhance accountability by investing resources in what works and striving to improve ineffective approaches. This evidence-based approach also ensures greater accountability to the people the system aims to serve and assists donors in making informed decisions.

We have witnessed the power of Impact Evaluations, particularly regarding the use of cash as a modality. Initially, donors were resistant to providing cash to crisis-affected individuals, partly due to concerns about communities' decision-making capabilities and the assumption that in-kind provision sufficed. It took time for this perception to change. However, multiple Impact Evaluations shifted this perspective. Cash and voucher assistance is now mainstream, constituting 20% of funding by 2020. These evaluations demonstrated positive outcomes, such as improved food security, reductions in child marriage and morbidity. Decision-makers placed trust in these rigorous findings and could no longer ignore the evidence that contradicted their previous assumptions.

I would like to share some reflections that may contribute to your discussions. Firstly, there appears to be a gap between the quality of evidence published in academic works and the project evaluations that have greater reach within the humanitarian sector. This gap could be bridged through increased sharing, learning, and collaboration. Secondly, it is essential to consider the range of evidence relevant for different types of decision making in the humanitarian sector. While experimental approaches are valuable for establishing effectiveness, they often focus on quantifiable aspects and may not fully explore how or why change occurred, even in the case of cash assistance. Additional studies are necessary to gain insights into issues such as access for women or people with disabilities, and to understand how markets influence effectiveness in diverse contexts. For shelter initiatives, Impact Evaluations can help understand the effects of specific building techniques, but supplementary evidence is required to address concerns related to property rights, ownership, and other social dynamics. To find the right balance of evidence we should strive for trusted research methods encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Lastly, when considering outcomes and measuring the effects of shelter initiatives, it is vital to recognise that the most significant outcomes for communities may differ from the traditional ones used in the sector.

A discussion with **Camilla Wuensch** (Global Shelter Cluster Roving Information Management Officer with UNHCR) prior to the Learning Event helped to identify some important issues related to evaluating impact that are frequently overlooked. One was the very difficult challenge of measuring the impact of failing to meet shelter needs: the consequence of unmet shelter needs. Camilla identified this as a big gap in the understanding of vulnerability at the time of the crisis, but also of the long-term impact of unmet shelter provision. She also noted that post-distribution monitoring which is routinely completed, may not really capture impact as experienced by programme participants. Does the distribution of assistance really meet people's needs in a timely manner? There are complex and ethical difficulties in asking people very soon after a disaster how they feel about humanitarian assistance. The Global Shelter Cluster is keen to be able to establish the link between needs, interventions and measuring impact.

Evaluating impact and challenges faced by humanitarian actors

Paul Knox Clarke (Independent Consultant and CEO of Adapt initiative) discussed some of the challenges faced by humanitarian actors evaluating impact and outcomes of their work and also explained the opportunities and collaborations that can make such efforts valuable.

Long-term impact assessment requires different funding mechanisms than the standard humanitarian funding. Following up on activities over an extended period necessitates sustained financial support. However, the current funding mechanism does not cater well to this need.

Most of the work in this area is conducted as research rather than evaluation. Moreover, the linkages between research and humanitarian decision-making are weak. The institutions and incentives differ, making it challenging to provide evidence-based insights of impact. Humanitarian donors often discourage looking beyond the immediate scope of saving lives and addressing mortality, morbidity, and livelihoods. Any knowledge or efforts related to broader impacts, such as economic effects of shelter or establishing livelihoods, are often viewed as developmental and deemed outside their scope. However, there are instances where the relationship between humanitarian and development sectors is more collaborative. In such cases, there is greater interest in exploring the broader impacts of humanitarian actions.

However, there is no incentive to measure outcomes. It's not something that can easily be quantified, and when it is, it often involves complex statistical analysis. Donors and agencies want to see the deliverables being produced. If you say you will achieve "N" and you produce "N" it's considered a success. The use of outcome measurement would require a significant increase in budget, the involvement of specialists, and would delve into areas beyond simple counting.

Information is not consistently collected, and, despite attempts to incorporate more outcome measurement into the humanitarian programme cycle, it remains a gap. The essential information decision-makers need in fluid situations to evaluate the effectiveness of actions and determine whether to continue or pivot to different approaches is often lacking. There is limited capacity for collecting information as staff on the ground are often burdened with the task with little orientation on what information they are collecting and for what purpose.

Humanitarian decision-making is reactive, particularly from the donors' perspective. When a bad event occurs, funds are released. If we consider the insightful work done by [Levine and others in 2011](#) regarding the failure of [famine] early warning mechanisms, we realise that the problem lies in the decision-making process. Early warning information had no appropriate place within the system that required a negative event to trigger a response. Evidence of the severity of the event determined the amount of funding released. So, information about outcomes does not fit into this framework. Similarly, information about events that may occur in two, five, or ten years also lacks a place within this decision-making process which undermines the incorporation of outcome information.

*Donors are not the only audience we should consider, although they hold significant power. **Within the technical specialist and shelter specialist communities, there is an appetite for knowledge about outcomes and impact. We can provide information on programme design, technical standards for shelter and settlement, what works, and what doesn't. Engaging with specialists who are invested in positive long-term outcomes rather than just short-term solutions, like tarps, creates a constituency.*** However, meeting the needs of this constituency can be challenging as it may require more expensive approaches than the standard methods.

*Some donors may not be interested in outcomes beyond a 12-month timeframe. However, it's up to the clients, the users of our information, to negotiate and advocate for those longer-term perspectives. This decentralised approach allows for information to be used by different organisations, with different donors, similar to the success of the cash debate. It bypasses central decision-making in Geneva and allows for on-the-ground action and engagement with various country-based donors. The coordination and sharing of information through a centralised platform, like [CALP Network](#), is an excellent model. Additionally, it's important to share this information with potential allies who may not be directly involved in shelter work but have an interest in outcomes and impact, such as those in the adaptive leadership sphere or M&E professionals in the humanitarian programme cycle. **By collaborating and linking up with like-minded individuals across different sectors, we can create a more effective system for driving change.***

The wider impacts of shelter and settlements

Juli King (Program Coordinator, InterAction) discussed InterAction's recent publication "[The Wider Impacts of Shelter and Settlements Assistance](#)" and how their work advocates for a better understanding of the importance of the wider impact and cross-sector nature of shelter and settlement programming.

Advocacy was a key reason for initiating this work. We were aware that other sectors rarely acknowledge the impacts of shelter. For example, the health cluster strategy mentioned sectors like WASH and protection but not shelter.

Additionally, evidence was a key factor: reports focused on anecdotal evidence or the number of shelters provided, lacking rigorous evidence on the wider impacts of shelter on communities and peoples' lives. The objectives of the wider impacts research were to improve understanding of these impacts and promote collaboration across shelter and other sectors.

The report contains more findings on the wider impacts than I have time to share. However, a few key findings include the positive impact of good housing on health, such as reducing air- and water- borne disease. Shelter construction also creates employment opportunities, benefiting livelihoods. Moreover, having shelter increases safety and protection.

The research showed that evidence of these wider impacts was not very rigorous. It also emphasised the importance of longer time frames for measuring wider impacts adequately. One recommendation for practitioners and academics is to upload evaluations to shared repositories like ALNAP or the humanitarian library. Another suggestion is to establish long-term partnerships between academics, donors, governments, practitioners, and recipients to promote collaboration in understanding wider impacts. Additionally, it is recommended to design evaluations during project planning, considering the value of baseline data.

For donors, the report suggests clearly earmarking resources to contribute to a critical body of evidence on the wider impacts of shelter. The [online course](#) offers a couple of additional recommendations, including identifying causal links to demonstrate evidence.

InterAction developed a [Roadmap for Research](#) in 2021, which brings together humanitarian-focused academics and practitioners to identify research gaps and propose critical questions and methodologies for further investigation.

The breakout discussions

Breakout discussions with participants discussed WHY it is important to gather evidence on the impact of shelter and settlements assistance. Learning Event participants were asked to discuss WHY do we need to gather information about the impact of shelter and settlements assistance? Why do we need evidence? What do we want to use it for? and What evidence is sufficient for different purposes? The participant's responses were as follows:

Evidence for Practitioners

- To enhance their practices
- To make informed decisions
- Location-specific evidence - to determine what is applicable in a particular context, avoiding reliance on irrelevant data
- To understand the true needs of individuals, and identify trends
- To supports program design and efficiency ensuring recipients receive the best possible assistance.

Evidence for Donors

- To understand the impact of their funding and make informed decisions about continued support.
- Different levels of evidence help stakeholders reassess their needs and contribute to testing them.

Evidence for Empowering Affected Communities

- To empower affected communities to advocate for effective assistance methods aligned with their needs.
- To help understand the long-term impacts of shelter and settlements assistance and allows for flexibility and adjustment of strategies based on evolving needs and capacities.

Evidence for Advocacy and Policy Influence

- To advocate for vulnerable groups, influencing government policies, and driving changes in existing programs.
- To contribute to resource mobilization, increases visibility with local authorities and promotes learning and knowledge sharing within the humanitarian community.

Evidence for Accountability and Learning

- To provide accountability for affected populations and helps identify gaps and best practices in program implementation.
- To support learning, capacity building and future program design and decision-making.
- Accumulating evidence over time improves overall responses and demonstrates the positive impact of increased investment in the sector.

Evidence of Wider Impacts

- There is a need to go beyond counting houses and distribution levels to explore wider impacts and evaluate the processes used to implement shelter solutions.
- To support claims of effectiveness and avoid harm caused by inadequate decision-making.
- To highlight the wider impacts of inadequate housing, such as negative mental health outcomes. Shelter interventions should be seen as part of a continuum, aiming to enhance well-being and fulfil fundamental human needs.

Nexus and Integrated Approaches

- To help demonstrate the linkages and impacts of shelter interventions on other sectors, such as health, livelihoods, and protection.
- To support the advocacy for shelter responses with broader social and economic outcomes.

Applicability and Research

- To assess the applicability of approaches, identify indicators of performance and compile good practices while avoiding strategies that have not worked in the past.
- Multiple Impact Evaluations and research help compare projects and programs to drive sector-wide improvement.

Case study examples

Learning Event participants also provided examples of how they had used or were using evidence of impacts to inform project design, improve MEAL and diversify their donor base, and to draw attention to previously under-considered factors.

Evidence for project design and material selection

One example of evidence driving change was mentioned by a participant:

In the Rohingya camp, the affected communities still rely on plastic tarpaulin, bamboo, and straw for shelter construction. The government imposes restrictions on the construction of concrete structures within the camp's boundaries. However, shelter practitioners have been diligently working to enhance the living conditions despite these limitations. Since 2017, significant progress has been made in improving shelter conditions through thorough assessments and examinations of construction materials.

Innovative efforts have led to the adoption of improved bamboo that offers a longer lifespan and cost reduction. Comprehensive data collection is an integral part of the initiative, encompassing factors such as temperature, living conditions, and the experiences of inhabitants. The project aims to gather one year's worth of data, enabling further improvements and scaling up based on the findings.

Evidence for donors leading to improved programming

This participant spoke of their agency's approach to M&E:

The agency I work for is actively working on diversifying its donor base. A notable trend is the growing interest among donors in understanding the impact of their contributions. By providing insights into the outcomes achieved through their funding, we are able to engage donors on a meaningful journey and secure additional support.

To ensure effective monitoring and evaluation, each project incorporates a MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning) officer. Moreover, a dedicated MEAL team operates to share valuable learnings derived from various projects. Throughout the project cycle data is promptly collected after distributions. This approach enables the organisation to remain adaptable and make real-time adjustments based on the data gathered.

It is important to frame questions with precision and practicality, especially when interacting with individuals who might be experiencing stress and fatigue due to their circumstances. Our agency conducts feedback sessions with local partners during distributions to promptly address any immediate issues that arise. The agency's agility plays a crucial role in facilitating its approach to MEAL allowing the organisation to respond effectively to changing needs and situations.

Evidence for the Vital Role of Aesthetics

Another participant expressed the importance of aesthetics as an essential element of recovery. However, due to lack of evidence, its importance is undervalued.

My research focuses on deliberate beautification of the built environment for individuals who've experienced forced displacement. It's a multi-year research cycle. Gathering evidence and creating benchmarks for practical outcomes of the research and beautification of the built environment is crucial. It challenges assumptions about the types of support individuals and communities need. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often used as a benchmark, but aesthetics, for instance, were not initially considered essential. However, aesthetics play a vital role in the well-being of individuals who have undergone forced displacement. Neglecting aesthetics can lead to the trauma of displacement carrying over to second and third generations. This research expands the understanding of aesthetics, which is often overlooked in sociological, psychological, and economic criteria for displacement shelter. We aim to build evidence to challenge assumptions and prioritise interventions.

CHAPTER 3

Evaluating Impact: WHAT

The second session of the Learning Event examined what is meant by 'Impact Evaluation' in more detail and explored ways of building connections between shelter practitioners and MEAL specialists, by developing understanding of the similarities between shelter project design and evaluation design.

Impact Evaluation

Tom Aston (Independent Consultant in Monitoring Evaluation and Learning) started his session by giving an overview of Impact Evaluation. He aimed to prompt reflection on the reasons for evaluation, the questions the shelter and settlements sector might seek to answer and introduced some methods (see HOW section for more detail on methods). He ended with a word of caution that a costly and time-consuming Impact Evaluation may not always be appropriate.

Evaluation answers a variety of questions: what works for who, in what respects, to what extent, in what context, and how? There are different approaches and methods able to answer each of those questions. It is a wide spectrum.

*The meaning of Impact Evaluation is somewhat disputed. There are two main approaches that are used. One of these is the classic **OECD definition**: Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended (OECD-DAC, 2010).*

The second definition is used for a particular type called experimental Impact Evaluation. This considers the difference with and without an intervention, and typically controls for potential factors that are deemed to have influenced particular outcomes. Both approaches are focused on outcomes. Impacts and outcomes are not necessarily radically different but there are differences in detail. The important takeaway is that there are different approaches that relate to defining and assessing impact.

*In order to assess impact, you first have to articulate what impact means. A good place to start is some form of a theory of change. There are a variety of different ways of using theories of change. In terms of the two different approaches to measuring or assessing impact they have been debated for many years, but in 2012 there was an influential **paper** written for DFID by the editor of the Evaluation Journal, Elliot Stern, and other colleagues, who looked at different ways to assess impact, and how they are appropriate for different contexts. Central to that study was that what you choose depends on your intervention or project or programme. Shelter and settlements might be very simplistic, or they might be highly multi-faceted.*

Secondly, what questions are you trying to answer: what, when, how, for whom, etc. This will guide which approaches and methods and tools are most suitable. Thirdly, as important as the first two, is that it has to be feasible. It may or may not be feasible to have a comparison group. It may or may not be feasible to reach certain areas. There is always some degree of pragmatism that goes into the choices that need to be made. So there is no ideal or perfect evaluation design.

Let's consider the approaches and methods. There are generally four different ways in which people go about doing Impact Evaluation. The first, which is possibly the best known, is a counterfactual one. It's based on comparisons. You usually have a control group and may conduct a randomised control trial. These can be expensive and involved (see [here](#)).

The second type is regularity which is essentially statistics. These are used more in research than an evaluation.

The third type, *configurational*, looks at the presence or absence of particular factors (or conditions), and whether across different parts of the intervention particular combinations can be observed. So, it might be that there support from local actors might be a condition that's present in a successful intervention, but absent in those that are less successful. The fourth is called *theory-based* or *generative*, and this one is generally looking more at 'how' and 'why' questions and less at 'what' questions. These theory-based evaluations align better with the OECD definition and a much broader view of what impact might look like.

Causality Type	Counterfactual	Regularity	Configurational	Theory-Based	Positive & Negative Long-Term Effects Causal Mechanisms (How & Why)
	Depend on the difference between two otherwise identical cases – the inference basis for experimental and quasi experimental approaches to Impact Evaluation.	Depend on the frequency of association between cause and effect - the inference basis for statistical approaches to Impact Evaluation.	Multiple causation that depends on combinations of causes that lead to an effect - the inference basis for 'configurational' approaches to Impact Evaluation.	Generative causation that depends on identifying the 'mechanisms' that explain effects – the inference basis for 'theory based' and 'realist' approaches to Impact Evaluation.	
	Randomised Control Trials (RCT), natural experiments Propensity score matching Regression discontinuity	Statistics	Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)	Realist Evaluation, Process Tracing, Contribution Analysis	

Impact = Y1 – Y0
Comparison
Control Group (possibly random)

Stern et al. 2012, 16-17; Gates and Dyson, 2017; Jenal and Liesner, 2017

To finish with a word of general caution. It is not always necessary to do Impact Evaluation. It's not always the best option and they can be expensive and time-consuming. However, there are occasions when it can be helpful for learning, and to demonstrate that something works or not. It can be useful in attracting funding.

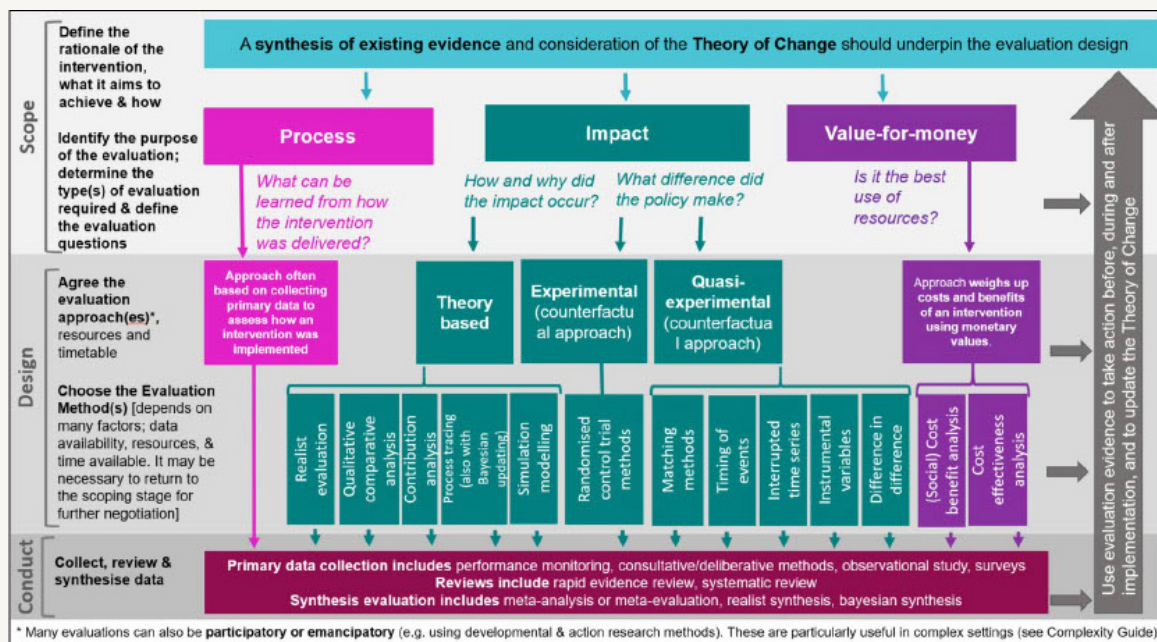
Assistance is to shelter what information is to evaluation

Fiona Kelling (Independent Consultant in Shelter and Settlements) contributed to the WHAT part of the Learning Event from her perspective as a practitioner and a learning and evaluation consultant.

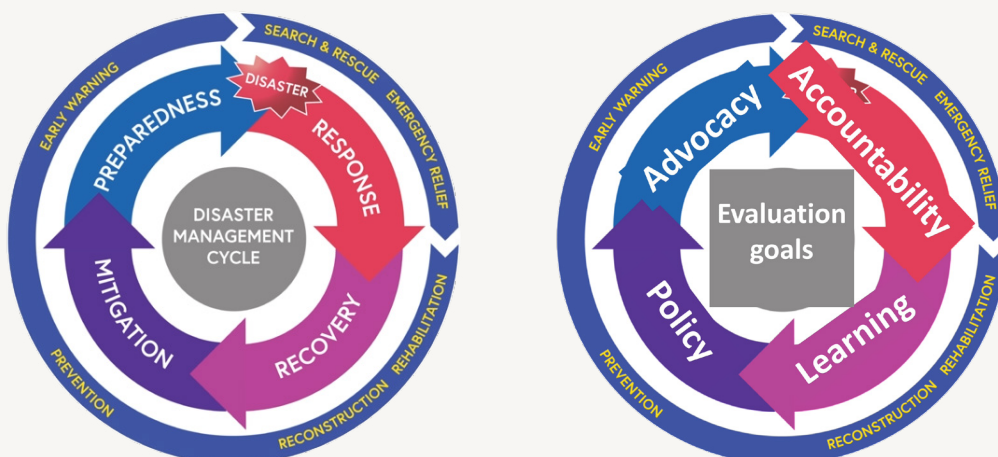
Tom has introduced us to a number of terms and concepts, which can seem unfamiliar or complicated to the average shelter practitioner. My background is in shelter project management and coordination, but in my current work as an independent consultant, I have been engaging in many of these processes in more detail. In particular, I carried out the Wider Impacts research and subsequent reflection on how we produce and use evidence, such as the *What Impact* opinion piece in *Shelter Projects 8th edition*.

I have learnt that both shelter practitioners and evaluators are passionate about their work. My presentation to the Learning Event draws some linkages between shelter project design and evaluation design that can help to increase understanding and connections between them. I posit, that “Assistance is to Shelter What Information is to Evaluation”

The diagram below is taken from the *Magenta* guide and provides an overview of key terms. It is useful to relate the information in this image with diagrams commonly used in the shelter sector, which shelter practitioners are more familiar with.



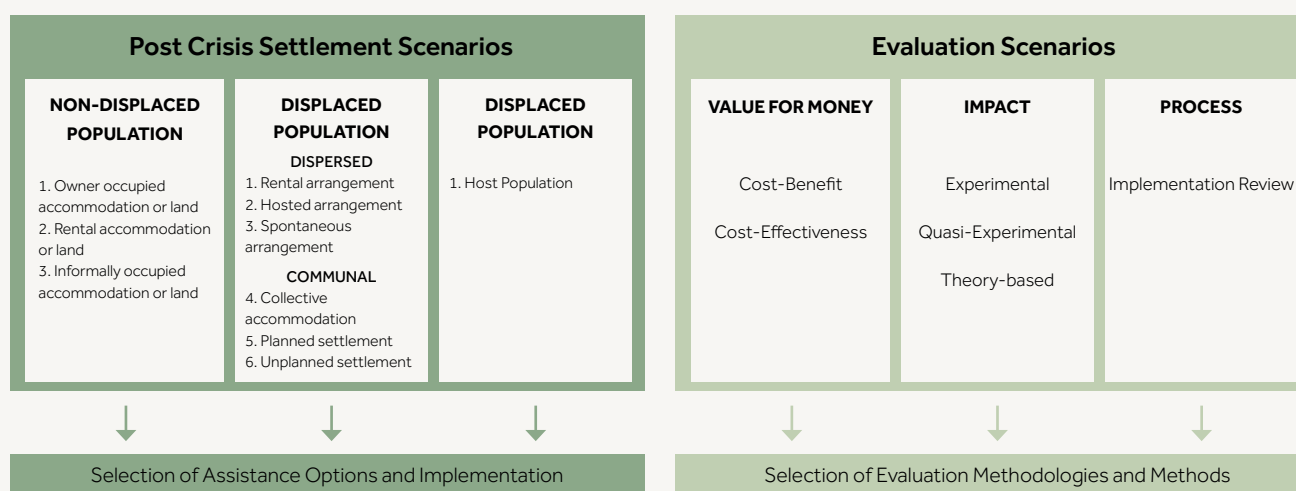
A commonly used diagram in the humanitarian response sector is the disaster cycle, shown below on the left.



Shelter practitioners frequently refer to the emergency phase, recovery phase, and reconstruction phase. They understand that in each of these we are working towards different goals, such as preventing further loss of life, re-establishing stability, or facilitating a sense of permanence. These goals require different timeframes and investment of resources.

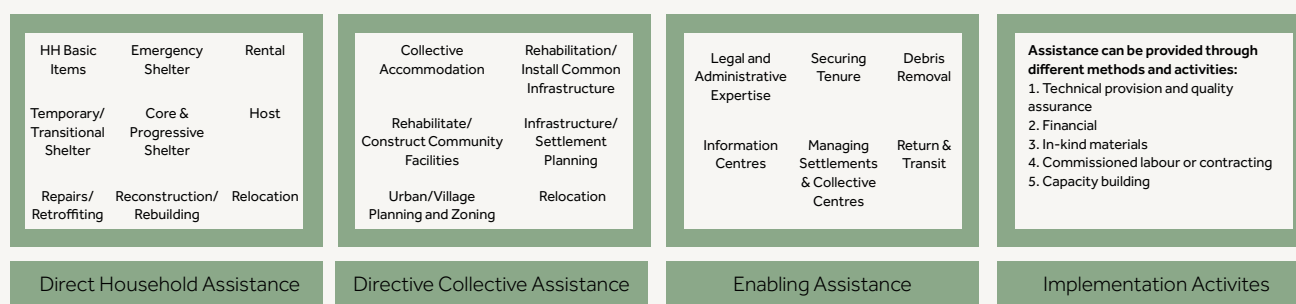
Information is similar. Information can be used to accomplish different goals - such as advocacy or accountability, learning, or decision making. Different amounts of time and resources are required to obtain the information depending on its intended purpose (shown above on the right).

Another diagram we know is below (left), from **Sphere**. We commonly refer to displaced, non-displaced and host populations. The ways in which we assist them might be similar, but the situation they are in requires different considerations.



Likewise, different types of evaluation can be useful to different groups. It is important to identify the intended recipients or users of the information to tailor its relevance to their situation, interests, or needs.

Depending on the population, there are a range of possible assistance options. The diagram below is taken from the InterAction Wider Impacts training, using the **IFRC assistance options** as a reference. The training categorises these into different 'methodologies' that may be more appropriate for certain populations (or purposes) than others.



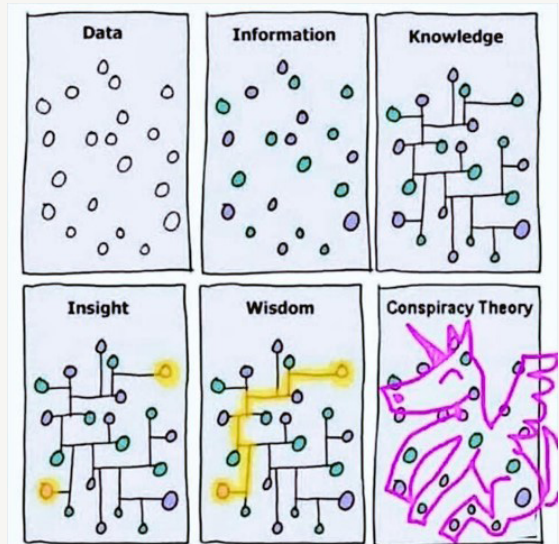
Within Impact Evaluation, there are a number of different categories of evaluation, each with a number of corresponding methodologies. You may be limited as to which are possible according to why and who you are assisting – or providing with information.

Implementation modalities can often be used in, or with, any of the different options. In data collection terms, these are things like interviews, surveys, etc: they are the how, the tools that we use to provide the assistance—or gather the information—that will help us meet the needs identified.

One-Shot Case Study Pretest-Posttest Static Group Comparison	Interrupted Time Series Difference in Difference Instrumental Variables Matching Methods	Contribution Analysis Process Tracing Outcome Mapping Most Significant Change	Document review Surveys Interviews FGDs Observation
Experimental (RCT)	Quasi-Experimental	Theory-Based	Methods

Programming should be driven by what is needed and appropriate, rather than what happens to be available or requested. In the same way, **evaluation is most effective when driven by practical usefulness, influenced by the context, intended audience, and desired outcomes.** Time and resource constraints must also be considered when determining what can realistically be provided.

The ambition is to establish connections and foster collaboration between evaluators and shelter practitioners. The final diagram highlights the relationship between these different terms and reminds us to consider how evidence, or the information discussed, **has a bearing on a particular claim about what is true or real and how it can inform us about its usability and the reliability of the conclusions drawn.**



Revealing three assumptions towards wider impact that underlie humanitarian sheltering and settlement assistance

Eefje Hendriks (Assistant Professor at The University of Twente) and **Andrew Powell** (Doctorate Student at Coventry University), both attendees at the Learning Event, subsequently contributed their perspectives on the assumptions that underlie much shelter and settlements assistance and may compromise positive wider impacts. This piece includes a short example from the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh.

To enhance the impact of humanitarian shelter and settlement assistance, we must reevaluate its underlying assumptions. Our recent workshop and survey among shelter and settlement practitioners have revealed outdated beliefs that no longer align with advancements in communication, behavioural, social, and educational sciences. To achieve assistance that has a broad impact, we need to scrutinise and test these core assumptions and beliefs. While a comprehensive assessment of the historical development of humanitarian practice and its underlying assumptions is beyond the scope of this piece, we highlight three assumptions. Uncovering these assumptions will also enable us to understand limitations in "build back better" and respond to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction that calls for greater resilience building. Do you recognise these assumptions in your own practice?

1. Assuming generalisability of solutions

There remains a lingering temptation in humanitarian practice that prior solutions in one familiar cultural historical context can address problems in another. Disaster science routinely makes broad claims about best practice solutions across different disaster-prone situations, perspectives and frequently overlooks 'other realities'. One of the reasons is that disaster-related research has historically been developed in the Global North, largely influenced by WEIRD societies: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich, 2010). The fundamental ideas that influence humanitarian practice—often implicitly—assume little variation across societies, regions and cultures. However, since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, there has been a growing call for tailoring solutions to local realities, emphasising the importance of community engagement in defining problems and solutions. In order to acknowledge contextual differences and the uniqueness of every disaster setting, there needs to be an analysis of the barriers that influence the impact of technical assistance, such as inequitable access to financial resources, tools, time, manpower, personal and interpersonal motivation. Understanding cultural practices, norms, local language and communication standards is crucial before developing communication and educational materials.

2. Assuming a need to directly intervene

Current sheltering and settlement approaches still often assume interventions and solutions developed by outsiders are necessary for community recovery. This "interventionist" attitude can potentially neglect a cultural and historical process of sheltering and settlements and the importance of fostering resilience within affected communities. Rather, solutions should build upon locally developed solutions connected to local values, beliefs, languages and embedded in local cultural systems. The belief in interventions often assumes an educational deficit (requiring imported knowledge) in affected areas, which isn't always the case and may not be the primary barrier to safer reconstruction. Outsider 'expert' knowledge tends to disregard the value of local wisdom and social ecologies. Reconstruction assistance frequently fails to address social and emotional factors essential for transformative thinking, intention formation, and behavioural adaptation. Facilitation, knowledge exchange, and dialogue should be central to assistance but are frequently overlooked.

3. Assuming 'influenceability' and predictability of behaviour

Assumptions that behaviour is a linear process, which can be easily influenced, underpin many humanitarian interventions. However, behaviour does not occur in a vacuum. It is tied to complex social interactions across a range of social settings, such as within households and settlements, making it necessary for humanitarian efforts to adopt a holistic approach. Current assistance tends to concentrate on the behaviour of individual households, drawing from limited concepts of individual decision-making from psychology and sociology to understand drivers and barriers. However, behaviour in practice is more complex and encompasses broader social, structural, and systemic factors. Using up-to-date behavioural science insights can guide effective risk communication and incentivise risk-reducing interactions. Similarly, there is an assumption that construction processes are predictable and linear, akin to those in developed market-driven

economies. In reality, construction is often a messy, non-engineered and complex endeavour in which self-builders take the lead, sometimes prioritising other needs over safety. Aligning interventions with decisions made during dynamic and complex homeowner-driven construction processes remains an underexplored challenge.

Contemporary humanitarian practice reveals many examples where the affected populations' way of knowing, being and doing is assumed to be the same as those seeking to provide support, or a more critical and reflexive approach is taken. In 2017, the mass displacement of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh required the humanitarian community to challenge its own assumptions to formulate a culturally sensitive and locally appropriate set of sheltering and settlement solutions. The existing settlement was greatly enlarged and a diversity of hybrid solutions, influenced through the interaction of Rohingya community survivors and international community practitioners, were constructed almost completely from a local building material (bamboo). A few years later, in 2020, during the pandemic, an understanding of Rohingya faith-based cultural practices and institutions provided valuable insights that contributed to effective public health communication.

Disaster experiences and definitions vary among individuals and groups. To enhance the impact of disaster management and shelter practice, it is crucial to anticipate and integrate multiple perspectives and practices. This shift invites moving from attempting to "change behaviour" to a more nuanced "behaviour informing" approach. Rather than assuming an expert stance, disaster management institutions can achieve additional and sustained impact by seeking to empower and facilitate shared social learning, fostering a collective understanding of hazard realities. Assistance can go beyond assuming an 'education deficit' and embrace a strength-based approach that acknowledges diverse hazard interpretations and cultural contexts. Building Back Better (BBB) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) learning can be positioned within a process of social meaning-making.

CHAPTER 4

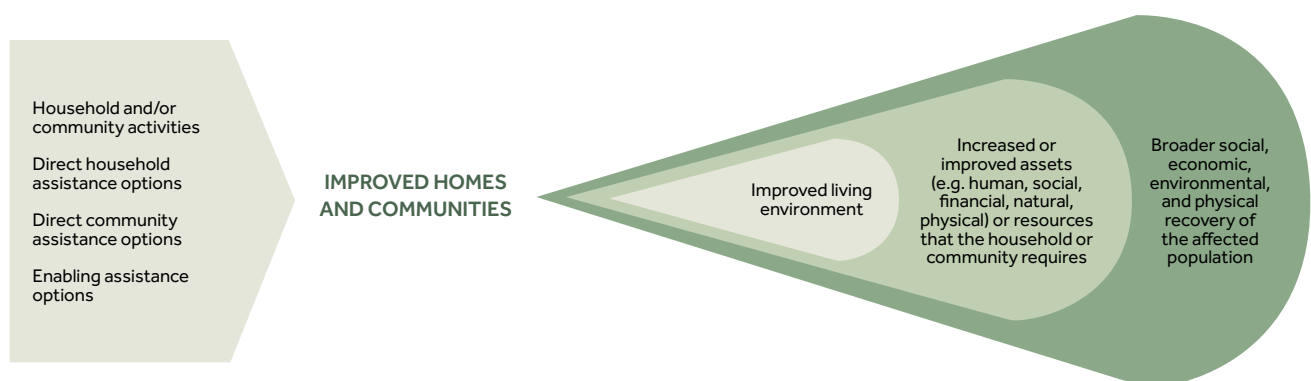
Evaluating Impact: HOW

The third session of the Learning Event looked at HOW organisations have measured their impact and the variety of methods and tools available to support this process. This section draws on the literature review and interviews with key informants as well as presentations and a Mentimeter survey during the Learning Event.

Understanding impact

ALNAP's *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide* gives an overview of various approaches used to frame or articulate impact. Here are some key frameworks the document lays out:

- **Theory of Change:** Refers to the cause and effect linkages between the intervention and the desired outcome of the intervention. ToC can be expressed as a statement, table or diagram and is a useful way of breaking down a process into individual parts in complex environments in order to evaluate the varying parts of the results chain.
- **Logical Framework (Logframe):** Developed in the 1970s a Logframe is one of the most simple forms of a logic model. Logframes establish a direct link between activities and outputs and often use a rigid set of results and indicators as a measurement tool.
- **Conceptual Framework:** Often credited with being the most robust type of logic model due to the fact that it is based on extensive research. The linkages established in conceptual frameworks are established by research already conducted, rather than assumed casual inputs like in other logic models.
- **Results Chain:** A simplified representation of a Theory of Change, it offers a linear view of how inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes are interconnected. Results chains can be useful for straightforward visualisation of progress toward goals and tracking causal links. Such a results chain can be usefully developed into a Theory of Change. The diagram below from *InterAction's Wider Impacts of Shelter and Settlements online training* is an example of a results chain. It articulates how shelter assistance can lead to improved living conditions and therefore have onward benefits. (The online course is free to access and provides an introduction to shelter and settlements assistance and its wider impact for practitioners working in other sectors.)



Measuring impact and types of data

Elizabeth Parker also shed light on the relevance of different evaluation approaches to humanitarian contexts and some of the key considerations.

- **Experimental approaches** are uncommon in humanitarian settings. They rely on quantitative data and random allocation of control or counterfactual groups, raising practical and ethical challenges. Although frequently cited as the gold standard, Randomised Control Trials (RCTs), are often considered inappropriate to the humanitarian sector generally and the shelter and settlements sector specifically. Although reliable and used in other industries, the ethical issues are hard to overcome, and they may not provide narratives or explain underlying causes.
- **Quasi-experimental approaches** differ by not initially allocating randomising groups. Instead, they aim to find similar groups based on demographic or life experiences to assess the impact of interventions versus other factors. This approach can be straightforward, often involving data collection from beneficiaries (and the control group) before, during, and after an intervention. However, it is quantitative and also does not explain why changes occur.
- **Theory-based approaches**, can be useful in humanitarian contexts, employ both quantitative and qualitative data. They rigorously test causal links believed to drive change and assess alternative explanations. A well-defined theory of change is crucial for such evaluations. Methods like Contribution Analysis or Most Significant Change are appropriate here, as they provide clarity on causal links and support evidence-based conclusions. These approaches offer a method to assess the impact of humanitarian interventions while considering ethical and practical constraints.

As remarked prior to the Learning Event by **Paul Knox Clarke**, **Adaptive Management** programme design builds in mechanisms for learning and evidence-based adaptation throughout programme cycles. This style of management links to shelter and settlements and multi-sectoral programming aiming to support self-recovery, as it accounts for shifting contexts and changing priorities for communities, whilst also developing learning about what is working in a particular context and why. Adaptive programmes require flexible budgets, milestones, and targets, along with strong monitoring and learning systems.

Adaptive management excels in situations where change is frequent, complex, or unpredictable. It fosters a culture of learning and adaptation, allowing organisations to respond effectively to emerging issues and challenges. This approach empowers project teams to make informed decisions based on real-time data and stakeholder input, enhancing programme effectiveness and relevance. Inevitably, adaptive management can require more resources, including time and personnel, compared to traditional linear management approaches. It may be less suitable for projects with predefined and rigid plans, as it relies on flexibility and iterative processes. Additionally, not all organisations may have the capacity or willingness to adopt this approach, as it requires an appetite for uncertainty and adaptability.

Longitudinal Studies are research designs used in various fields, including social sciences and medicine, to investigate and understand changes over an extended period. Unlike cross-sectional studies, which gather data from a single point in time, longitudinal studies collect data from the same individuals or groups repeatedly over an extended duration, often spanning years or decades.

Strengths: Longitudinal studies provide valuable insights into the dynamics of change over time, allowing researchers to examine trends and trajectories. Longitudinal data help researchers identify patterns, factors influencing change, and the long-term impacts of interventions or exposures. They can also explore individual differences and the influence of time-related variables.

Limitations: Conducting longitudinal studies will be resource-intensive and time-consuming, as they require sustained data collection and retention of participants over extended periods. Attrition, or loss of participants over time, can lead to biased results. Maintaining consistent research ethics and protocols and data quality over the study's duration is challenging.

Longitudinal studies, after a significant time period such as 10 years, that also consider original baseline and needs assessment studies are rare and could be done more often in the humanitarian sector, given the necessary resources. Understanding the lived experience and exploring the attribution of shelter and settlements programming over time gives valuable insight into peoples' recovery pathways. See the Philippines case study below.

The different approaches to evaluation lead to considerations of the utility of various **types of data**. **Elizabeth Parker** described five general types of data, referring to the framework provided by **NPC**, a UK-based charity and think tank. These are summarised here:

1. **User Data:** This category pertains to demographic information, focusing on the characteristics of the target audience. It helps in understanding the individuals being reached.
2. **Engagement Data:** Engagement data revolves around how individuals interact with a particular initiative, including the frequency and level of activity. It assesses the extent to which people use a service and engage with its offerings. This type of data is particularly relevant in contexts like educational training programmes. These data types are interconnected; collecting user data, for instance, aids in comprehending the demographics of engaged individuals and identifying any gaps or reasons for non-participation. This examination ensures data accuracy.
3. **Feedback Data:** Feedback data is focused on quality and user satisfaction. It answers questions related to the usefulness of the service for beneficiaries. In some ways, it parallels satisfaction surveys in the humanitarian sector but also encompasses project-specific inquiries. For instance, it might inquire if participants could access materials in a training session, whether they were provided in the appropriate language, or if attendees enjoyed the experience and would recommend it to others.
4. **Outcome Data:** This category delves into the long-term effects and transformations resulting from an intervention or initiative.
5. **Impact Data:** This represents the ultimate goals of an intervention, elucidating the significant, lasting changes it brings about.

As a guiding principle, it is advisable to prioritise user, engagement and feedback data. Building a foundation with these initial three data types is crucial before delving into outcomes and impacts. This step by step approach allows for a more comprehensive and informed assessment of an intervention's effectiveness.

From the perspective of donors, narratives alone are often considered insufficient for measuring and demonstrating impact. There is a demand for robust scientific evidence to substantiate the effectiveness of interventions. This need has led to a growth in evaluation measures and the associated infrastructure, as donors require evidence that their investments yield tangible improvements. However, narratives remain essential as they engage individuals and convey the human aspect of the impact. Thus, a balance between narratives and statistical data is valuable. Narratives engage stakeholders and convey the real-world implications, while quantitative data provides the rigour and objectivity needed to meet donor expectations. Many assessments rely heavily on qualitative narrative data, which provides valuable insights even in cases where quantitative data may be limited.

Pathways to evaluate the wider impact of humanitarian shelter and settlement assistance

Eefje Hendriks (Assistant Professor, University of Twente) submitted a written reflection after attending the Learning Event.

Societies are increasingly impacted by natural hazards, requiring adaptation and resilience-building. Rebuilding safer after disasters is crucial because of the number of people at risk, high housing-related damage costs, and the recurring nature of hazards. Only a small percentage of the people affected receive formal reconstruction assistance and, even with assistance, safe houses are not guaranteed. It is unavoidable to rethink the ways to assist. To reach more people in need, I propose three lines of actions to comprehend when assistance is effective. These lines of action can help to prioritise and optimise shelter and settlement assistance.

Holistic exploration of decision-making and resilience should incorporate at least insights from disaster science, governance, sociology, anthropology, psychology, construction engineering, and communication. Let's take a step back because currently, we don't have all the answers that explain the impact, or lack of impact, of assistance. Currently, no framework comprehensively explains the complexities of post-disaster reconstruction decision-making, connecting the factors that contribute to resilience building and enabling holistic assistance design. Such an exploration should account for the complex realities, especially in the Global South, recognising the limited generalisability of Northern-produced science and embracing local variations. Identifying and analysing factors that influence behaviour can challenge assumptions and guide the design of effective assistance. For instance, current approaches often introduce external 'expert' knowledge contrasting with locally developed context-specific knowledge. This potentially undermines conditions for transformative change, social learning and development of the coping mechanisms that many Build Back Better or Safer initiatives seek to achieve.

Empirical examination of complex decision-making processes is crucial for disaster resilience. What mechanisms enable safety along the timeline from recovery to preparedness and prevention? Assessing the impact of shelter and settlement interventions is challenging due to the variety of conditions influencing outcomes, and limited longitudinal studies. Consequently, most shelter and settlement interventions are not fully evidence-based. To address this gap, a comprehensive database of case studies is required to encompass diverse realities and factors influencing reconstruction decisions. When selecting case studies, it is valuable to compare communities with and without assistance to understand the insights gained from self-recovery processes and how assistance can align with these ongoing efforts.

Design methods for personalised assistance are essential for effective response. While there is a broad consensus that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the challenge lies in the design of personalised assistance, timely addressing individual conditions and barriers. In a recent study, we introduced a method for crafting targeted intervention strategies based on individual decision-making indicators, building upon a behavioural scientific model (Hendriks and Stokmans 2023). However, bridging the gap between scientific understanding of decision-making and the large variety of realities and the design of effective assistance remains challenging. It is essential to empirically test current assistance design approaches for their intended and unintended impacts.

These lines of action go hand in hand. It is essential to take a holistic approach to understand the wider impact of assistance, use longitudinal empirical data to better understand resilience outcomes, and connect these to design approaches. Through these actions, we should be able to design effective shelter and settlement assistance and reach more people in need.

Some considerations for conflict settings

As underlined by **Taylor Raeburn-Gibson** (Shelter and Relief Item Consultant at IOM) conflict contexts are becoming increasingly relevant and deserve specific attention. In a written piece he outlined his initial thoughts on the unique factors that conflict situations present. These have been summarised here.

- *Due to access constraints during conflict, it is difficult to monitor the implementation of projects; similarly, evaluators may not be able to access sites for post-completion evaluations.*
- *Data may need to be collected whenever the situation allows, thus requiring a flexible methodology for evaluation.*
- *Due to the dynamically changing situation during a conflict, affected populations are highly mobile and humanitarian programme activities are often changed and reformulated throughout implementation. This makes data collection more difficult as the beneficiary families may have moved or no longer able to be contacted.*
- *The complexities and various interlinking factors related to the conflict environment make it much harder to assess causal relationships between interventions and results.*
- *Due to the ever-changing context, the perceived impact of a programme could change significantly at any moment, including during or following the evaluation.*
- *The social factors present in conflict situations are more complex and subject to change than in post-disaster scenarios. This means that evaluations have to be well-planned and must accommodate divisions in the communities so that unbiased and comprehensive results are obtained.*
- *Conflicts lead to a breakdown in trust between citizens and forms of authority. Evaluators might therefore face challenges in generating unbiased data due to these issues of trust.*
- *There is a lack of evidence for the impact of aid interventions in conflict situations in general compared to disasters triggered by natural events; therefore, it should be a priority to understand which modalities work well in conflict contexts.*
- *Due to the complexities involved, any evaluation should be done for a specific and well-argued reason, avoiding duplication.*

Methods and Tools

Many different methods and tools related to evaluating impact are available to the sector and some were showcased at the Learning Event as a way to stimulate discussion about the types, purposes and feasibility of different methods in different settings. A **workshop** organised by the Global Shelter Cluster Promoting Safer Building Working Group (now the Recovery Community of Practice) in January 2021 identified and discussed a range of suitable methodologies and tools. Although primarily developed for learning and evaluations in the development sector, they are also appropriate for humanitarian evaluations. Some will be most applicable for conventional MEAL, but many can be adapted for the task of evaluating impact. **INTRAC's M&E Universe** is a comprehensive resource detailing many evaluation methods and tools and provides more detail than given below.

Methods

- **Most Significant Change (MSC)** is a participatory and qualitative evaluation method that focuses on capturing stories of change from a range of project or programme stakeholders. MSC goes beyond mere story collection and reporting; it encourages a learning process from these stories, emphasising the exploration of similarities and differences in values among various groups and individuals. It can be particularly useful in large or complex programmes centred on social change. MSC is well-suited for situations where outcomes are unpredictable, vary widely among beneficiaries, stakeholders have diverse views on what matters most, and interventions involve high levels of participation.

Strengths: MSC's participatory and qualitative nature fosters engagement and learning, making it suitable for complex, socially-focused programmes. It excels in handling unexpected change and provides insights into how and when change occurs, contributing to the development of programme theory as well as collecting diverse stories that may be useful for advocacy.

Limitations: While MSC is valuable for various evaluation needs, it was not developed for humanitarian contexts and its step-by-step intensive process requires substantial time and commitment from stakeholders. MSC, on its own, does not provide comprehensive information about typical experiences but highlights extremes, necessitating privileged access to beneficiaries already familiar with participatory approaches.

- **Outcome Mapping** is a qualitative, theory-based approach for monitoring and evaluating development interventions. Unlike conventional evaluation methods that focus on measuring predefined outcomes, Outcome Mapping places a strong emphasis on understanding the processes and relationships that lead to change. It is primarily used to assess the contribution (rather than causal links or attribution) of interventions to long-term changes, and it aims to capture the progress of initiatives in terms of behaviour changes in individuals, groups, or organisations.

Strengths: Outcome Mapping encourages a nuanced understanding of how interventions influence change by highlighting the behavioural changes among participants. It is well-suited for programmes operating in complex and dynamic environments where traditional attribution is challenging. This approach excels in facilitating learning, adaptive management, and fostering relationships among stakeholders. It promotes a participatory and collaborative evaluation process, ensuring that the perspectives of all relevant actors are considered.

Limitations: Outcome Mapping can be resource-intensive and requires active engagement from various stakeholders, making it potentially time-consuming. It will not provide definitive proof of causality or straightforward numerical data, which can be a limitation for certain evaluative purposes.

- **Outcome Harvesting (OH)** is a participatory and qualitative monitoring and evaluation method focused on collecting evidence of change and retrospectively assessing contributions to that change. It was partly inspired by Outcome Mapping – the two methods are complementary. OH operates in a dynamic, non-linear manner, consisting of six key steps: designing the harvest, reviewing available documentation and drafting observable outcomes, engaging with informants, substantiating findings, analysing and interpreting data, and supporting the use of findings. OH is often used in conjunction with other methodologies and is particularly effective in complex situations where attribution is unclear, making it adept at assessing unintended outcomes. It prioritises a participatory approach involving multiple stakeholders, emphasising collaborative design and learning throughout the evaluation process.

Strengths: OH excels in retrospective evaluations without the need for baseline data or a predefined theory of change. It is adaptable to assess outcomes long after project completion and is well-suited for situations where attribution is uncertain.

Limitations: The participatory nature of OH makes it resource and time-intensive, requiring extensive collaboration and input from various stakeholders. It relies on the availability of clearly observable outcomes or evidence of change from which to work backward.

- **Contribution Analysis** is a qualitative, theory-based Impact Evaluation approach that aims to identify the contribution made by a development (or humanitarian) intervention to a specific change or set of changes. It does not seek to definitively prove attribution but rather aims to reduce uncertainty about an intervention's contribution. Additionally, it can explain how and why changes occurred, offering a step-by-step process to understand a programme's contributions to change. It is often used in conjunction with Theories of Change, which illustrate the pathways connecting activities to outcomes and impact levels.

Strengths: Contribution Analysis promotes a rigorous and transparent assessment of an intervention's contribution to change, making it particularly valuable for organisations working in complex contexts where sole attribution is challenging. It facilitates understanding of how and why changes occurred, supporting the replication of successful practices. Unlike some evaluation methods, it does not require the establishment of a baseline or control group at the beginning of an intervention, allowing for the development of Theories of Change after the fact. See Lebanon case study below, where a 'minimalist contribution analysis' was used.

Limitations: Contribution Analysis is ideally conducted iteratively, involving the repeated collection and analysis of evidence, which can be challenging within limited budgets and fixed timeframes. If carried out in a participatory manner, it may demand a substantial amount of project or programme staff time, potentially posing resource constraints.

- **Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)** is a collection of MEAL methodologies that support people with analysing their own situation, rather than having it analysed by outsiders. Tools, such as community hazard mapping, daily routine diagrams and ranking exercises can be used to determine programme indicators of success at outcome level. PLA approaches emphasise active participation of all groups and recognise that people have different challenges and priorities.

Strengths: PLA promotes inclusivity, empowering communities to actively participate in decision-making processes. It fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among community members, leading to more sustainable and contextually relevant interventions. This approach generates a deeper understanding of local issues, leverages local expertise, and encourages collective action and mutual learning.

Limitations: PLA can be time-intensive and requires skilled facilitators to ensure meaningful engagement. It may face challenges related to power dynamics within communities, as well as potential resistance to change. Additionally, the participatory nature of PLA may not always align with tight project timelines nor donor requirements that prioritise quantitative monitoring or evaluation data.

Choosing the right method: The Bond tool

The Bond tool: **‘Choosing Appropriate Evaluation Methods, Tool for Assessment and Selection’** (developed by Barbara Befani in 2016) was designed to assist in choosing between the different methods of evaluating impact of development programmes. It provides a rationale for determining the most appropriate method for the particular circumstances of the programme, recognising that the type of questions, the intended use of the evaluation, and the process of the evaluation all influence the choice of evaluation method. The tool is available as a spreadsheet, with an accompanying guide explaining how to use the tools and providing further information on the evaluation methods it covers. Although the Bond tool was designed for development actors, it can also aid humanitarian practitioners to understand methods most likely to be appropriate. Qualitative methods such as Most Significant Change and Contribution Analysis (both described above) seem to offer most scope for the Shelter and Settlements sector.

Case study examples

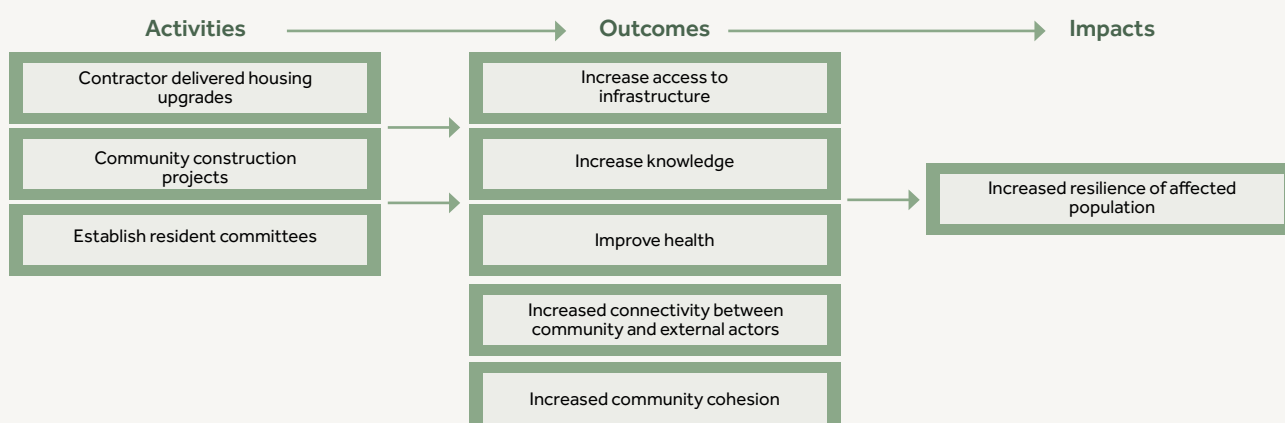
Contribution analysis: A case study from Lebanon

As part of his earlier presentation, Tom Aston referred to this case study from Lebanon to illustrate the use of a pragmatic ‘minimalist’ version of Contribution Analysis by CARE Lebanon in 2018. A full evaluation report by Elizabeth Parker and Victoria Maynard is available [here](#).

The programme ‘Integrated Shelter and Protection Improvements for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities’ was implemented by CARE Lebanon and its local partner Akkarouna between 2015 and 2019. The programme in Tripoli operated at multiple scales with an integrated (shelter, water and sanitation, and protection) and community-led approach. The programme was evaluated between phases to ‘provide guidance to CARE Lebanon and its partners in order to learn from experiences, strengthen capacities and identify opportunities for increased integration of sectoral approaches as a pathway towards greater effectiveness and sustainability’. This illustrates the ways that evaluating impact in a timely fashion can guide future programming.

As early phases of the programme had been implemented over several years and with multiple overlapping populations, a clearly defined control group was not possible. Therefore, Contribution Analysis was an appropriate way to identify impacts, to evaluate the way that various programme activities had contributed to those impacts, and allowed the development of a Theory of Change. There were six steps that articulated and tested the impact: set out what the problem is; develop a Theory of Change; gather evidence around that Theory of Change; assess the credibility of that Theory of Change; look for further evidence; and finally revise the Theory of Change.

Primary data in the field was collected through interviews, focus group discussions and direct observation in homes and communities. This data was combined with an extensive literature review in order to triangulate the data and refine the evaluation’s findings.



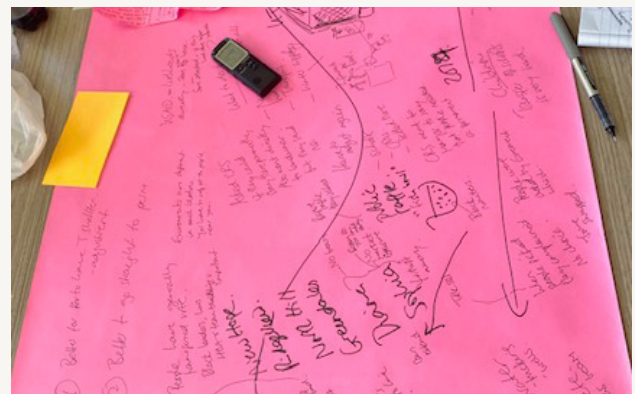
The diagram above from *InterAction's 'Wider Impacts of Shelter and Settlements'* online training summarises how programme activities such as housing upgrades and the establishment of resident committees were understood to lead to outcomes including increased connectivity between community members and external actors, and thence to increased resilience of the affected population. The process was broken down into small sections that assessed the pathways towards resilience—indeed the evaluation team had to unpack what they meant by resilience.

Philippines case study: Evaluating impact 10 years on from Typhoon Haiyan

In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda caused a swathe of destruction through the Visayas region of the Philippines. Ten years on, a research team from CARE International UK carried out a review of the impact of humanitarian shelter assistance implemented post-typhoon. The review focused on the city of Tacloban that had been particularly devastated by Haiyan, and the work two INGOs did there. The main focus was recovery programming which included repairs and the construction of transitional shelters in urban locations.

Objectives of the evaluation were to document, to the extent possible, what the INGOs did and how they did it, as well as try to assess the impact early assistance had had on people's recovery trajectories. The challenges of attempting to assess the impacts of the programming ten years on from the event were multifaceted, including: people's recall of the events many years on; the trauma surrounding the disaster; the challenge of understanding shelter and settlements contributions to recovery; and limited time to conduct the fieldwork.

The research approach to the fieldwork was qualitative and exploratory with data collection methods designed to be participatory in order to avoid being extractive and exploitative. Interviews were conducted with key personnel who were involved in the response. Focus group discussions, co-production of recovery timelines (see picture), household interviews and transect walks all contributed to learning. Using a flexible and iterative approach the team was able to map the diverse pathways towards recovery that individuals and communities had taken. Overall, despite the limitations and challenges, some useful findings emerged from the research which will contribute to future discussions and recommendations for the shelter and settlements sector.



Tools

Some shelter specific tools related to evaluating impacts of programming have been developed. One of these, developed by UN Habitat, was presented at the 13th UK Shelter Forum in **2013**. Oyvind Nordile presented the Shelter and Settlement Impact Evaluation Tool (SSIET). The tool proposed three phases: phase 1 was to assess potential long term impact while the programme was being implemented; phase 2 was to evaluate the impact after the programme was complete; and phase 3 was to integrate the impact data into shelter programming. Data would be gathered in five main areas; physical, financial, social, human and natural, and a scoring matrix would produce a graphic output of the impact. The tool defined characteristics of shelter impact, and proposed shelter impact indicators.

The ASPIRE tool

Another, ASPIRE, was featured during the Learning Event in order to prompt discussion on the challenges and benefits of this type of evaluation, which uses a tool alongside qualitative data collection with communities in order to identify the outcomes and impact of post-disaster housing projects.

Victoria Maynard (Independent Consultant, Stet) described the ASPIRE tool that was developed by ARUP International and Engineers Against Poverty in 2010.

*The **ASPIRE Tool** dates from 2010, but nonetheless the methodology remains relevant as we continue to grapple with similar challenges. It features in a chapter in the Practical Action publication '**Still Standing**'. (The book is also a useful reference as it makes a significant contribution to discussions around what methodologies are useful for evaluating long-term impact).*

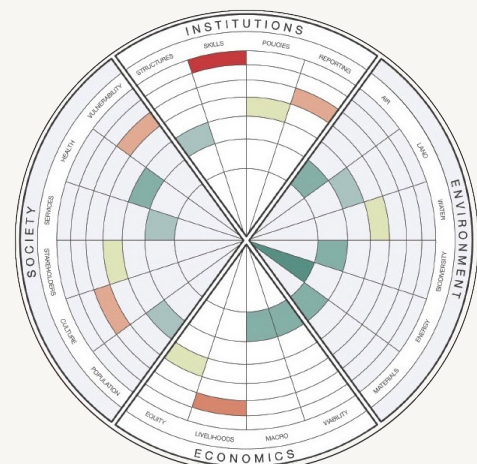
The Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 was a large-scale disaster that affected multiple countries. Millions of people were impacted, livelihoods were lost, and a significant number of new homes were needed in the worst-affected countries: Indonesia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. Habitat for Humanity adapted its [normally developmental] approach to meet the requirements for shelter reconstruction. By 2010, they had assisted over 25,000 families across the four countries, representing around 7% of the total housing need.

Arup's International Development team was tasked with evaluating the long-term impacts of Habitat for Humanity's shelter programmes and this provided the opportunity to assess the utility of the ASPIRE tool recently developed in collaboration with Engineers Against Poverty. Habitat for Humanity was interested not only in evaluating their shelter programs but also in assessing the utility of the ASPIRE tool for evaluating programs across their network.

The ASPIRE tool features four quadrants based on the concept that sustainability necessitates a balance between people and the planet. These quadrants—Institutions, Economics, Society, and Environment—are further divided into 20 themes and 96 indicators.

The ASPIRE tool was used in various ways. We conducted a desktop review of secondary documentation and performed fieldwork in each of the three countries using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, key informant interviews, and household surveys. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, we obtained a comprehensive understanding of the programme and the impacts it was having in each 'quadrant'.

While the ASPIRE software is no longer available, the conceptual framework, themes and indicators are still relevant to evaluating the impact of shelter programmes. It is practical and practitioner-oriented. It was also designed to be used throughout the programme, guiding best practices from the design and review stages to project implementation and evaluation.

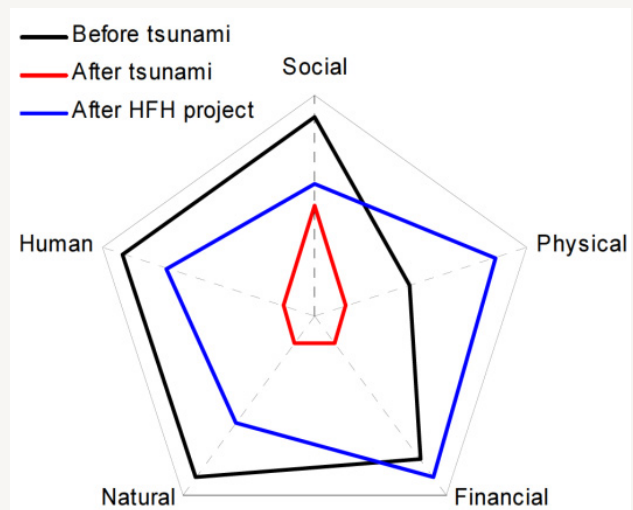


The PRA tool

Victoria Maynard also described a PRA tool which she developed and used as part of the fieldwork for the ASPIRE assessment.

The photo and the diagram below demonstrate one example of how we worked with project participants to understand their perspectives as part of a workshop using PRA techniques. Prior to completing this exercise we got to know the community and their history through using tools such as timelines. We had also completed an exercise where participants self-identified their assets under each of the five asset capitals in the livelihoods framework: social, physical, human, environmental, natural and financial.

In this exercise we asked participants to describe changes in the strength of their assets over time. We started by asking them to draw the black line to describe the strength of their assets before the tsunami (with weak in the centre and strong on the outside of the circle). Then they drew the red line to describe their post-tsunami situation. Finally they drew the blue line to describe the strength of their assets after the Habitat for Humanity project. In some ways the resulting diagram is too visually clear and simple. It doesn't record the qualitative discussions that were shared between researchers/evaluators and community participants, including the reasons behind their scores. Really the diagram was a method of facilitating a focus group, to help participants analyse their own situation and tell their own story in a clear and visual way. Through discussion we were careful to determine if the changes were a result of the project or other concurrent initiatives, as multiple organisations were involved in the tsunami response. Participants were satisfied that the position of the blue line represented changes which had come about as a result of Habitat for Humanity's intervention.



Common indicators for measuring impact

Cross-cutting, integrated approaches, which go beyond shelter-only interventions to include the wider impacts of health, well-being and livelihoods, strengthen the case for a holistic understanding of impact. A previous Learning Event on the integration of shelter and settlements, WASH and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) took a close look at evidencing well-being outcomes. Chapter 5 of the 2022 event's report *Working Together* includes a contribution from IOM on identifying and measuring well-being outcomes of programming. **Heide Rieder**, (MHPSS Officer from IOM) flagged the *IASC Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for MHPSS* which includes some well-being indicators which could be relevant for shelter and settlements programming.

The feasibility of measuring impact through common indicators

Juli King held a Mentimeter survey during the Learning Event on the feasibility of measuring impact through establishing a common set of indicators which could be used across the shelter and settlements sector. Below are some of the questions she posed to the participants in order to stimulate thought around this topic.

InterAction has been contemplating the feasibility of creating minimum sector indicators for measuring impact to enhance understanding and advocate for the wider impacts of shelter and settlements.

What indicators would you want to measure if sector-wide impact indicators were created?

In answer to this question the participants gave a variety of responses. Well-being, including community well-being, was considered important along with other community-centred indicators such as resilience, empowered social cohesion, beneficiary agency and community decision making. Structural safety was mentioned but so were non-sector outcomes such as health. One respondent mentioned the sense of feeling at home. Finally, one participant was not convinced that impact indicators are appropriate for measuring impact; they recognised their importance for outcomes but considered research or evaluation questions to be more appropriate for evaluating impact than rigid and/or narrow indicators.

What would it take to create these indicators?

There were many answers to this question, but several can be grouped around consultation and communication with the affected community to understand the preferred community indicators. In a similar vein, one respondent wanted clarity on who would use these indicators, when and why. Collaboration with other sectors, such as health and WASH and including those outside of the humanitarian sphere, was considered very relevant. Donor engagement is essential. Finally one participant asked the pertinent question: whose indicator is it? This question is also addressed in the WHO section, below.

Who are the partners that would be needed to create these indicators?

Previous answers partially address this question, but the answers given by the participants strongly reinforced the need to partner with communities, affected people, end-users. Beyond this local authorities and decision-makers, donors, cluster representatives, academics, and development actors all featured in the responses.

To conclude, collaboration is an integral aspect of understanding wider impacts. InterAction's Shelter and Settlements Working Group will continue working on this topic, collaborating with colleagues from various sectors and those outside the shelter sector. They welcome support from partners who are interested in joining, brainstorming ideas, and collaborating on future research. Feel free to participate in their monthly meetings and reach out with collaboration suggestions.

CHAPTER 5

Evaluating Impact: WHO

The final session of the Learning Event used breakout discussions to question who should be involved in the process of evaluating impact, and at what point this would happen (see WHEN section below). This section also begins with a contribution from an additional source, **Paul Knox-Clarke**, who gave his thoughts on actors who need to be brought together in order to create a new, collaborative, approach to evidence and impact in the humanitarian sector.

Who is the evidence for?

Paul Knox Clarke (Independent Consultant and CEO of Adapt initiative) discussed WHO we are producing evidence for, and how evidence might influence WHO we include in programming in future.

The humanitarian world is facing an overwhelming crisis, with needs surpassing available resources, delivery mechanisms, and existing approaches. Localisation, accountability, and international humanitarian law are persistent challenges. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and other factors may double the caseload without a proportional increase in funding. Additionally, development banks are increasingly involved in humanitarian efforts, often overshadowing traditional humanitarian actors. Addressing these complex issues requires a broader perspective that goes beyond traditional humanitarian approaches.

It is interesting how cash, for example, has unexpectedly affected coordination systems and inter-organisational dynamics. Its success has brought new challenges that require addressing with additional changes. The legacy system attempts to contain cash within the cluster system and under a lead agency, but containment doesn't work effectively as so many 'sectoral' and area-based approaches use cash and voucher modalities.

I believe there is value in developing methods and collecting information that may not be immediately useful but can become incredibly valuable in the future. I've observed this in the context of climate change, where initially there was little interest in the information gathered from IPCC reports. However, suddenly, there is a surge in demand.

What is interesting is that the narrative of donors not being supportive of cash interventions is not entirely accurate. Some donors were interested because it aligned with their interests. Cash offered speed, especially when traditional disbursement processes were slow. We must remember that donors are not solely humanitarians. They have other affiliations and priorities, often connected to their respective government departments. Cash resonated with donors both ideologically and practically. However, the existence of that evidence is crucial. They will use and reference the evidence, and for that reason alone the evidence must be there.

Some stakeholders value multisectoral approaches for specific outcomes. These include development banks and those involved in the nexus approach, as well as individuals focused on climate change and climate-related resilience at the individual, household, and community levels. They see the value in investing post-flooding in measures that enhance future flood-proofing and economic resilience.

One of the key lessons from cash programming is that it wasn't tied to a specific sector initially. Cash was neutral and applicable to various sectors like food security, shelter, and more. This reduced the threat perception and competition among professionals and funders. Therefore, establishing this approach in a strategic manner is crucial. Because if it's presented as "the Shelter Cluster wants to do this" it sounds very different from "we are exploring how shelter and settlements, including aspects of WASH and other components, can contribute to resilience. We want to assess what works and what doesn't". The framing of the approach is essential.

The breakout discussions - Who should be involved?

Identifying, measuring and documenting the effects of shelter and settlements programmes can occur at global, national, and organisational levels, each involving different stakeholders and timelines. In practice, it is more likely to occur at a project or programme level, with results potentially collated to assess impacts at 'higher' levels. A collaborative approach, involving various stakeholders with different expertise and priorities, helps ensure a comprehensive analysis and avoids data being overlooked. Breakout room discussions identified a range of stakeholders in the area of evaluating impacts:



The need for community-led indicators

The important issue of the role of the affected community, sometimes referred to as the beneficiaries of humanitarian programming, in evaluating the impact of programming had been raised earlier in the Learning Event in a question posed by a participant to **Jennifer Doherty**:

What about the evidence that communities themselves gather? How can we support them in learning how to collect and utilise their own evidence to promote their interests?

Jennifer acknowledged the vital role that affected populations can and should play in steering evaluations and increasing understanding of project impacts and referred to the latest ALNAP report:

Dialogue with crisis-affected communities is vital not only for gathering their perspectives on project outcomes but also for defining the outcomes of interest from the outset. This approach was undertaken in our latest report, and we found that initial conversations with communities played a crucial role in shaping our research questions, highlighting specific results in the final report, and informing subsequent discussions with decision-makers.

Thought should be given beyond community participation to community-**led** indicators as this can help to empower communities to shape the metrics and criteria used to measure impact in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them.

The importance of collaboration between different actors and bringing together different voices in order to guide evaluations of humanitarian impacts was raised several times during the Learning Event. One of the participants explained how one INGO, CRS, is including many different stakeholders in its efforts to scale and deepen the impacts of its shelter and settlements, known as Homes and Communities, interventions.

The organisational approach in CRS

CRS is actively pursuing a mindset shift in its Shelter and Settlement programme approach. Rather than relying solely on classical direct implementation methods, where appropriate, CRS aims to achieve a more significant impact by fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. This change involves building on targeted interventions to identify and contribute to system change by innovating and collaborating with partners in the government, humanitarian and private sectors.

By working together with these stakeholders, CRS believes it can promote specific activities that have the potential to create a broader, more systemic impact at scale. The organisation seeks to act as a catalyst for positive change within the country's systems, shifting from a narrow focus on quality promotion to a broader, country-wide transformation. This strategic shift emphasises the importance of collective efforts and collaboration to achieve a more profound and far-reaching impact on communities in need.

Evaluating Impact: WHEN

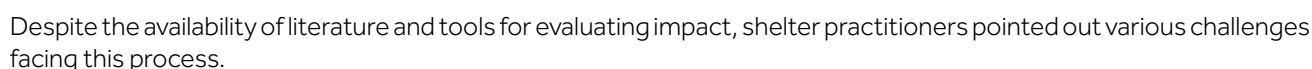
The breakout discussions - When should data collection take place?

Participants in the Learning Event were asked to consider not only WHO should be involved in evaluating impacts but also WHEN; at what stages in project cycles, for example. Many discussions on when data collection should take place focused on conventional MEAL time frames, ranging from baseline assessments through to end of project evaluations.



Evaluating Impact in Shelter and Settlements: Moving Forward

Challenges in evaluating the impact of shelter and settlements programmes



- ## CHAPTER 6

5. **Data collection and analysis:** Gathering extensive data directly from affected communities may be challenging and inappropriate, leading to sparse primary data and reliance on secondary data. The type of shelter programme being evaluated, the context, and the amount of time that has lapsed influence the depth and scope of data collection. As always, community input is crucial, but the level and accuracy of detail may be inconsistent if time has passed.
6. **The risk of recall bias:** If an Impact Evaluation is conducted ten years following an intervention, with little to no data from the time of the intervention, how can the risk of recall bias be mitigated? In other words, how can the impact be evaluated where populations have moved on, data has not been consistently collected and considerable time may have passed since the event?
7. **Process complexity:** The difficulty of evaluating the impact of shelter programmes is compounded by the complexity of causal relationships and the difficulty of determining the degree of contribution and/or attribution. The provision of shelter is likely to be one contribution to the long-term multi-sectoral impacts on health, livelihoods and well-being.
8. **Involvement of communities:** The involvement of development agencies, academia, and government institutions with long-term presence is valuable. However, community participation is essential, but power dynamics and marginalised groups must be considered to avoid bias.
9. **Incentive for involvement:** Why would communities get involved in the evaluation of impact, especially some years after the event? Can the time that people contribute be justified, and how can the process be useful, empowering and not simply extractive?
10. **Continuity and staff turnover:** As time passes, staff from MEAL teams and project staff are likely to have moved on, making it difficult to track changes over time and also to take full advantage of lessons learned for future programming.
11. **Timing of data collection:** Thought should be given to what sort of data to collect from the start of a programme in order to inform Impact Evaluation activities later on.
12. **Findings, dissemination and knowledge sharing:** Effective knowledge sharing and the exchange of good practices are important for the improvement of future programmes. These discussions should not be confined to clusters or headquarters: the conversation needs also to be held at the field level, where implementation occurs. Lengthy reports are intimidating and tend to be overlooked.

Lessons from the learning event and next steps

The online Learning Event concluded with remarks from **Jennifer Doherty**, **Fiona Kelling** and **Bill Flinn**, reflecting on why evaluating impact in the shelter and settlements sector is so important. In a world where one billion people live in informal settlements with insecure tenure and one in five people globally have inadequate housing, we need to find ways to improve people's living conditions, improve people's ability to have and make a home. Habitat for Humanity's recent report *Improving Housing in Informal Settlements* (Frediani et al, 2023), which is part of their Home Equals research, looks at the impact of upgrading housing in informal settlements. The report evidences positive impacts on economic growth, average income, health, and education. Although it focuses on the development context there is much that is also pertinent to humanitarian response.

Bringing all such research and evaluations, being produced by multiple agencies, together into something that people working in the humanitarian shelter and settlements sector can learn from, is an important ambition behind the Learning Event and this report. Considering the questions *what do you want to know?*, *for what purpose?*, and *who is the evidence for?* should inform approaches, and the choice of methodologies and tools for evaluating the impact of interventions.

The topic of who should lead and be involved in evaluating impact is an important one. We need to remember whose stories we are telling, and, ideally, produce evidence of the positive impact that adequate housing has on the well-being and recovery of families and communities that have been subject to disaster and crisis.

The overall sentiment from the Learning Event is that the evaluation of impact leads to informed decision-making, programme improvement, increased accountability, more successful advocacy and greater confidence in the effectiveness of the shelter intervention. While the Learning Event did not result in a list of agreed recommendations, there were a number of issues and themes that emerged and that point the way forward.

1. Coordination:

- Coordinate with shelter information managers to identify useful data; discuss with shelter teams at the start of the response how outcomes will be measured; gather baselines.
- Work with other sectors to identify indicators and baselines.

2. Develop Partnerships

- Establish partnerships between academics, donors, governments, practitioners, and recipients to promote collaboration and the understanding of wider impacts.
- Build connections between evaluators and shelter practitioners.
- Lobby donors to allocate resources that will contribute to a critical body of evidence on the wider impacts of shelter.

3. Engage Affected Communities

- Consider training evaluators and community facilitators; discuss with communities the importance of evaluations for learning and the need for honest feedback.
- Support communities in how best to collect and utilise their own evidence.

4. Further Research

- Develop understanding of evaluating impact in conflict contexts and the particular challenges that that entails.
- Assess whether it is appropriate for the sector to create minimum indicators for measuring impact.

5. Support shelter and settlements project teams

- Recommend suitable evaluation designs for the sector.
- Discuss evaluation designs with programmatic staff during project planning, considering the availability or need for baseline data.
- Provide MEAL teams with the necessary capacity and resources to evaluate impact.

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AGENDA OF THE LEARNING EVENT

17 th May 1000-1500 UK	
Session	WHY?
1.1	Welcome and background of the learning event Susannah Webb (CENDEP), Oxford Brookes University
1.2	Objectives and overview of the event agenda Charles Parrack (CENDEP), Oxford Brookes University
1.3	Opening remarks from ALNAP Jennifer Doherty (ALNAP)
1.4	Breakout discussions WHY do we need to gather information about the impact of shelter and settlements assistance?, All participants
WHAT?	
2.1	Presentations to spark further discussion - What is Impact Evaluation?, Tom Aston (Independent) - Assistance is to shelter what information is to evaluation?, Fiona Kelling (Independent)
2.2	Reflection and summary of morning session Charles Parrack (CENDEP), Oxford Brookes University
BREAK	
HOW?	
3.1	Re-cap and introduction to afternoon session Bill Flinn (CIUK)
3.2	Mentimeter survey How information is used, All participants
3.3	Presentations to spark further discussion - How is information used for accountability and to inform programming?, Victoria Maynard (Independent) - How is information used for learning and advocacy?, Juli King (InterAction)
WHO AND WHEN?	
4.1	Breakout discussions Who should be involved in gathering information on impacts of shelter? What needs to be considered, when? Who defines success?
4.2	Discussion feedback and key takeaways - Bill Flinn (CIUK) - Fiona Kelling (Independent)
4.3	Close and outline of next steps Susannah Webb (CENDEP), Oxford Brookes University



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