Real Time Evaluation of Humanitarian Action

What is Humanitarian Action?

Humanitarian action is action intended to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.

The evaluation of Humanitarian Action faces a number of challenges:

- Lack of baselines
- Complex and complicated context
- Constrained access
- Large number of actors
- Short duration of interventions

Humanitarian Evaluation Criteria

In the late 1990s, the OECD/DAC funded a research project to look at suitable criteria for humanitarian action. This suggested a modification of several of the DAC criteria and added two-three new ones.

OECD DAC Criteria for HA
Appropriateness (from Relevance)
Effectiveness
Efficiency
Impact
Connectedness (from Sustainability)
Coverage
Coherence
Coordination

What is Real Time Evaluation (RTE)?

An RTE is a rapid participatory exercise carried out during the early stages of an emergency operation or humanitarian response, and potentially repeated throughout the response.

RTEs are primarily intended to review operations, to provide immediate lesson learning, and to improve ongoing operational decision making.

What's different about RTEs

- Prospective rather than just retrospective
- Learning is the main focus
- Lack of baselines or comparative data
- Timing – happen when things are still chaotic and plans in formation
- Timeframe – Results are effectively reported in the field
- Direct utilisation – implementers are the target

Generic logic model for humanitarian action

The following model represents a general logic model for humanitarian action. The external context and others challenge the assumption of linear causality.

Generic logic model for HA RTE

What's constraining about RTEs

The need to avoid placing large demands on field staff limits both the team size and approaches.

The context, limited access, lack of baselines, timing, timeframe, and need for field credibility constraint the choice of designs and methods. For example, survey research is very difficult in the acute phase as there are usually no good sampling frames etc.

The restricted timeframe means that analysis is limited.

The desire for immediate instrumental use means that the team should have sufficient emergency response experience to be credible to field staff.

Advantages of RTE

Timeliness: undertaken when key operational and policy decisions are being taken. They can flag up important issues that have been overlooked.

Interactivity: RTEs also engage in a sustained dialogue with staff, both in the field and at headquarters, and can provide a channel for communication between field staff and headquarters that bypasses the normal bureaucratic layers.

Perspective: A real-time evaluator is able to approach an emergency from a number of different angles. The team will talk to staff at all levels, in different countries, to the affected population, as well as to partners, and government officials

Design and methods

As with almost all humanitarian evaluations the predominant designs are non-experimental.

The main methods are usually:

- Document review
- Key informant interviews
- Interviews with the affected population
- Observation

Sampling is usually purposive.

Triangulation (researcher, method, source, and analytical) is the key to ensuring the reliability and validity of the evaluation.

History

First use in a humanitarian context was Danida evaluation of the Kosovo crisis in 1999.

Greatest use initially was by UNHCR, but NGOs are now the biggest users.

The Red Cross and other UN agencies also use RTEs.

Further resources

ALNAP Evaluating Humanitarian Action

Google: ALNAP EHA

Real-time Evaluations of Humanitarian Action – An ALNAP Guide

Google: ALNAP RTE