DEPP Evaluation – Summary of Formative Phase Findings

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Overview
An independent evaluation team from Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) was selected to conduct the external evaluation of the DEPP. This first part of the Formative phase report presents the qualitative data from the minimum set of evaluation activities and an analysis of Value for Money (VFM). The Evaluation Questions to be answered by this part of the report cover the criteria Relevance and Validity of Design, as well as Efficiency and VFM. Due to delays in data collection for the intensive set of evaluation activities in some settings, the quantitative and qualitative data from four countries, which includes organizational level data, network analysis and population level data, will be presented in a second part of the Formative phase report.

Methodological approach
As described in the Inception phase report, the external evaluation uses a mixed method design to capture a comprehensive picture of the DEPP’s effectiveness and impact. The evaluation methodology is designed to include a minimum set of evaluation activities that will take place across all ten focus countries. The minimum set of evaluation activities include 1) Secondary Data Analysis and Document Review, as well as 2) Qualitative Data Collection (In-depth Interviews) and 3) Quantitative Data Collection (Online questionnaires).

An intensive set of evaluation activities include more exhaustive and on-site data collection in a subset of the DEPP focus countries. The intensive evaluation activities include: 1) Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Surveys, 2) Organisation Level Data Collection, 3) Community Level Data Collection, 4) Household Level Data Collection, 5) Humanitarian Simulations, 6) Network Data Collection, and 7) Economic Data Collection. Each of these methods generate important evidence, which, brought together and synthesized by the evaluation team, allows for assessment of DEPP’s theory of change and its underlying assumptions, as well as its impact, effectiveness, and relevance, and generates lessons-learned and best practices that will continuously inform DEPP’s implementation.

The Formative Phase Evaluation Process consisted of site visits, refining the methodology and instruments, selecting of in-country research partners, ethical review and institutional review board approval, piloting of evaluation instruments and data collection platform in each country, enumerator training and data collection. In Kenya, Myanmar and the Philippines, evaluation team members visited the field teams and participated in the enumerator training, piloting of instruments and protocols, and oversaw several days of data collection to ensure data quality. Following this the evaluation team members supervised the data collection remotely. In South Sudan, data collection was initially postponed due to increased violence in July 2016, which significantly affected the DEPP projects operating in that country. After discussions with the CDAC and Protection in Practice projects, and monitoring of the security situation in South Sudan, a decision was made in October 2016 to discontinue the in-country data collection planned for South Sudan. Instead, the evaluation team will develop a case study, which will explore how these two projects were affected by the violence and the lessons that can be extracted from this experience. This case study will be included in the second part of the formative phase report.

The data collection for the intensive and minimum set of evaluation activities began in October and November 2016, respectively. It was expected that this staggered approach would allow for the simultaneous conclusion of the formative phase intensive and minimum set data collection. However, unanticipated delays during the in-country field-level data collection for the intensive set of evaluation activities necessitated additional time to maintain the integrity and completeness of these data collection methods. In-depth interviews for the minimum set were conducted during a three-month period from November 2016 – January 2017.

Minimum Set of Evaluation Activities

Sampling: The study population comprised project leadership (UK-based), project leadership in DEPP countries, DEPP programme-level leadership and targeted stakeholders. For the DEPP targeted stakeholders, purposive sampling was applied. Using a list of contacts from the inception and formative phases, targeted stakeholders were invited to participate. In total, 51 individuals participated in qualitative interviews for the minimum set of evaluation activities. Of these 51 study participants were interviewed, 6 DEPP stakeholders, 28 country-level
project leadership, and 17 UK-based project leadership. There were a total of 10 non-respondents, totaling a sample of 61. The overall response rate is 83.6%. Overall, study participants were 37% female and 62% male.

Limitations: Few interviews with programme leadership were held due to staff turnover. Other identified limitations include interviewer bias and social desirability bias, as well as the fact that secondary analysis was dependent on shared project documentation which may or may not be complete. The evaluation team strongly noted the need to use formative phase intensive set data to triangulate findings and generate further evidence based recommendations.

Harvard Humanitarian Initiative formative phase report – Part 1

Preliminary Findings

1. The Design process was participatory but UK-centric. Main consultations were held with UK-based stakeholders and there was limited involvement of smaller agencies, local stakeholders and beneficiaries and few needs assessments. This limited involvement of local stakeholders during the design contributed to inadequate contextualization of projects which then led to implementation delays. The projects were designed in isolation with limited consideration for alignment at portfolio level. Most projects were designed prior to finalisation of the DEPP Business Case and selection of DEPP countries, which meant that they had to be retrofitted to specific contexts later, and the approval of projects in tranches resulted in staggered timelines. The four Early Warning Early Action projects, approved at a later stage, were designed via a more streamlined, participatory and country-led process that took into account some of the shortfalls of the earlier design process. This ultimately resulted in timely and smoother project implementation. Some respondents felt that certain key countries and priority geographic areas with strong humanitarian need were not included.

Data highlighted that expectations around collaboration were unclear and thus collaboration was interpreted differently by different projects and agencies. Most projects did not incorporate sufficient time and resources for collaboration into the project design which has led to delays and budget challenges. During the design phase, instead of occurring organically around shared interests and values as was intended, some collaborations felt mandated and these collaborations were felt to be of lower quality.

2. Objectives, Resources and Targets: Objectives of the DEPP are clear, but unlikely to be met in the established programme timelines. The five result areas are broad, but mapping activities and outputs of the 14 projects to the results areas shows that all 5 are being targeted. The findings indicated that financial and human resources are inadequate at project level and staff turnover is a major challenge. Financial constraints are felt due to implementation delays and inadequate contingency planning¹.

DEPP targets [right people, right places] are appropriate, however the 14 projects are not well aligned as a portfolio and there is a lack of systems and processes at the programme level including a lack of programme level log frame (which has recently, February, 2017, been approved by DFID). The 3-year time frame for DEPP objectives is felt to be unrealistic to meet the 5 results areas.

¹ VFM analysis explores this further.
3. **Causal Chain: Progress towards four output areas**

Figure 1: Programme Level Theory of Change

**Output 1: Collaboration.** A multi-stakeholder approach is considered by interviewees as the appropriate and preferable approach to building humanitarian capacity, as explained by one interviewee:

"We don’t believe a single agency can provide all the answers to a community that they may be looking for in the aftermath of a disaster."

However, it is felt that multi-stakeholder approaches require extensive time to set up. The consortia approach is also preferable from a donor perspective. The DEPP has challenges with geographic imbalance of collaboration with most occurring at UK level and only slowly trickling down to country level. These imbalances have begun to shift in the right direction through the Learning Project activities such as the DEPP Learning Conference. There is **some evidence of strengthened networks, but this needs to be validated via the network analysis.**

**Output 2: Capacity Building.** Approaches to capacity building vary across projects. Projects are focusing on strengthening individual, organisational, community level and/or governmental capacity. The effect of capacity building efforts can be difficult to measure, and in some cases changes in capacity may require longer follow up periods. Thus far, capacity building successes are variable across project. One notable success that was identified is that individuals trained via the Talent Development project have gone on to lead large humanitarian projects because of their new skills. Findings suggest **preliminary evidence of improved individual capacity but this needs to be confirmed via quantitative surveys.** Evidence related to organizational capacity will be presented in the second apart of the formative phase report.

**Output 3: Generating & Sharing Learning.** Substantial sharing of evidence amongst projects was identified, but concerns were raised that translation into actual learning was not yet occurring. In addition, evidence sharing was noted to be concentrated at UK level, with a slow
trickle to country level. Some examples of cross-project sharing at the country level were acknowledged. Many respondents felt that insufficient mechanisms and systems are in place to document and share learning. The Learning Project (Formerly known as MEL project) is unique in scope, but the approach should be more systematic and comparable, and include DEPP-wide systems to better capture learning. Though the Regional Learning Advisors (RLAs) have been successful in certain settings, and in many cases the countries that have no RLA have had less cross-project sharing. The DEPP Learning Conference in Nairobi stimulated learning and sharing across projects. In general, some evidence of shared learning was recognized, but it needs to focus more at country level.

**Output 4: Early Warning Systems Development.** Several projects focused on this output as it is filling a gap that was identified late in the programme design process. These projects were approved last and thus had a later start. Project implementation is therefore at a very early stage. Nevertheless, findings suggest that progress is being made towards developing early warning systems, and that this progress will accelerate in the future.

**Summary of 4 Output Areas**

Based on the document review and interviews, progress towards achieving the four output areas in the simplified causal chain is being made. Most respondents felt that this progress would accelerate in the future. Activities are being implemented with evidence of some success and quality of activities is high. Fewer activities related to result area 5 (evidence generation) have been conducted, but the progress is expected to accelerate in the future. It is too early within the evaluation to assess progress at the outcome level.

**Preliminary findings of downstream effects of DEPP**

Early findings are that:

- There are shifting power dynamics between international and local organisations.
- DEPP is facilitating government buy-in.
- Creating sustainable humanitarian systems.
- Raising awareness of collaboration approaches for capacity building.

**Challenges and Constraints of DEPP Delivery**

A lack of systems and procedures at the programme level, especially with respect to monitoring, evaluation and learning, was identified as a major weakness. Collaboration both within and across projects has also been challenging, and projects have dealt with high staff turnover and violence and insecurity which has impeded DEPP delivery in certain contexts. With regards to monitoring, evaluation and learning there is a lack of a programme wide M&E system to systematically collect data across projects and no set of core indicators that is consistent across projects. At the project level, the approach and rigor of M&E varies substantially between projects. To increase evidence generation and ensure appropriate assessments of project effectiveness, it is essential to strengthen project level M&E.

**Contextual factors**

Respondents were asked to identify and reflect on both internal and external contextual factors that influenced the design and implementation of the DEPP portfolio and individual projects. Table 1 below summarizes the key contextual factors identified.
Table 1: Key contextual factors

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<td>Pre-existing collaborations/relationships</td>
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<td>Organisational capacity</td>
<td>Political environment</td>
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<td>Organisational culture</td>
<td>Staff turnover</td>
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<td>Proposal requirements/incentives</td>
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<td>Administrative processes</td>
<td>Stakeholder engagement/buy-in</td>
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<td>Organisational buy-in</td>
<td>NGO landscape</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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Cross-Cutting Themes

Gender was an important consideration during the design phase of the DEPP. The DEPP Programme Board criteria for project selection required inclusion of a gender statement but did not provide further guidelines with respect to gender inclusion. As such all DEPP projects considered gender in their proposals and outlined their planned approach for gender inclusions in their concept notes but the level of detail provided and the proposed level of inclusion varied substantially across projects. With respect to implementation, the degree to which gender has been emphasized remains dependent on project leadership and differs across projects. It is difficult to adequately assess how well gender is being considered as most projects have not provided a specific, detailed gender inclusion plan. Current evidence suggests that implementation of the proposed gender considerations has been inconsistent.

Despite being a noted cross-cutting theme of the DEPP in the business case, Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) was not included in the design phase, and DEPP activities are for the most part not specifically targeting this area with the exception of a few projects.

Recommendations for current DEPP

Learning Project:
- Include additional focus at the country level to better link in-country projects and share learning. As projects have not adequately budgeted for these activities, additional resources may be required.
- Capture challenges and failures, as well as successes. The Learning Project could support this process by
  - Documenting common problems across projects (staff turnover, lengthy contractual processes, challenges with securing buy-in)
  - Exploring solutions at both the programme and project level

DEPP Projects:
- Strengthen M&E processes at the individual project level.
  - All projects should consider incorporating an evaluation to assess effectiveness.
  - Strengthening these systems may require capacity building sessions for project staff and/or assessments of existing plans by technical experts with tailored guidance and recommendations.
  - If possible, harmonize indicators across projects.
    - There may be an opportunity for projects working on overlapping topics and that are in their earlier stages, such as the early warning projects.
- Strengthen reporting on cross-cutting themes
  - Report on implementation of projects’ gender considerations within the quarterly project reports.
  - Projects should also share their detailed plans for inclusion of gender beyond the gender statement provided within the project proposals.

Next steps / key dates
- Olivia Roberts has left Action Against Hunger UK (ACF) and her successor as the Evaluation Manager is Hannah Wichterich. In addition, Dr Robina Shaheen was hired as the new Head of Global DEPP MEL, who is responsible for the entire delivery of the MEL/Learning project (which includes this evaluation).
• On 02 February 2017, HHI presented the first part of the Formative phase report and the VFM report to the DEPP Evaluation Steering Committee. Based on the written comments received from the Steering Committee and discussions, a revised and compiled Formative phase report containing both parts 1 and 2 and the VFM analysis will be submitted by HHI on 03 May 2017.

• An overview of the Formative Phase Evaluation and Formative Value for Money (VFM) will be presented and discussed with the DEPP Board 23 February 2017.

• The formative phase will be completed by 03 May 2017. The next version of the formative phase report will also include more detailed recommendations and next steps. A more detailed work plan for the remaining phases of this evaluation has been submitted by HHI to ACF for further discussion with the Evaluation Steering Committee.