



The village committee president and local farmer, Gulab, drinks water from the solar water supply system that was installed by IRC. 30th April 2023. Photo Credit: Khaula Jamil for the DEC

2021 DEC Afghanistan Crisis Appeal

External Evaluation Report: Summary Findings

Commissioned by the International Rescue Committee

November 2023

CONTEXT

In mid-September 2023, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) commissioned an independent evaluation of its two-phased [DEC-funded project](#)¹ in three provinces of Afghanistan—Helmand, Badghis, and Bameyan. The evaluation, conducted by an independent consultant and a dedicated team, aimed to assess the overall impact of the two-phased project on client households.

The evaluation team employed robust methodologies, conducting 426 household-level interviews with project clients, ensuring representative findings across the three provinces (aggregated). The evaluation engaged female clients (23%) and beneficiaries with disabilities (3%) in efforts towards inclusivity.² Additionally, 49 key informant interviews (KIIs) in the three provinces (a total of 49 KIIs across the three provinces), KIIs with 7 IRC employees, and a thorough review of project documents added depth to the evaluation.

FINDINGS

The evaluation findings suggest that there was a significant alignment between the project activities and household priority needs, fostering early recovery, and enhancing community resilience. Improved food security and increased income resulting from enhanced crop and livestock production were the visible outcomes. Economic ripple effects stimulated local economies, contributing to sustainable growth and positive impacts on agriculture. **Cash assistance proved versatile**, addressing urgent needs such as food, agriculture, livestock, medical expenses, education, and winterization. This flexibility enhanced the project's efficacy in responding to diverse client requirements. Clients received comprehensive training in agriculture and livestock management, resulting in improved production, market understanding, and agricultural knowledge. This training directly contributed to the project's positive impact on households.

The project performed well in client responsiveness and accountability, providing various feedback channels, including a free hotline system and WhatsApp. The staff demonstrated professionalism, respect, and transparency, contributing to high levels of client satisfaction. Clear communication (by the IRC staff members) on the rights and entitlements of the clients in participation in the project further reinforced accountability.

Active engagement with the community, feedback-seeking initiatives, and community sensitization sessions exemplified the project staff's commitment to transparency and inclusivity. The involvement of both women and men underscored the project's inclusive approach. The project's holistic approach, incorporating community-based disaster risk management and climate-smart agriculture, went beyond immediate relief. Emphasizing inclusivity and community participation, the project addressed both short-term needs and long-term sustainability.

The evaluation concludes that the DEC-funded project had a **positive impact on client households, aligning with global humanitarian standards.** The success of the project, focusing on quality and accountability, contributes valuable lessons to the humanitarian sector.

Highlights of key findings from the evaluation include:

- A total of 92% of respondents stated that the project activities were aligned with their needs and priorities.

¹ The DEC funded project titled "Afghanistan Crisis Appeal" was implemented by the IRC in two phases from 15 December 2021 until 31 December 2023.

² Findings are not representative when disaggregated by gender or disability. Given the nature of the project and the type of targeted populations, the proportions of female beneficiaries and persons with disabilities were generally lower, hence, the sample for this evaluation was relatively skewed towards male clients. The second reason is contextual – the challenges around interviewing women in the current Afghan context was a limiting factor.

- The perspectives and needs of the community members and clients were taken into account during the planning phase.
- Substantial improvement was reported in meeting crucial household priority needs.
- The Project played a positive role in fostering early recovery and community resilience.
- The project increased crop and livestock production, which in turn led to improved food security and additional income.
- The project had positive economic ripple effects, stimulating local economies, especially, through the cash component.
- Cash assistance was reported to be efficiently used by clients to address urgent needs, including food, livestock and agriculture, medical expenses, education, and winterization materials.
- The project created positive economic ripple effects, stimulating local economies, especially, through its cash component.
- The project incorporated community-based disaster risk management and climate-smart agriculture for sustainability.
- Around 92% of the key informants reported that the project selection was carried out by the community members, community shuras, and the project staff together.
- Project document review, and KIs with the IRC staff confirmed that the IRC maintains a complaint response mechanism.
- A total of 48% of the clients were aware of the IRC-led complaint response mechanism.
- Project staff demonstrated accountability, professionalism, and respect.
- A total of 66% of respondents acknowledged that the project staff oriented them on their rights and entitlements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report provides recommendations to enhance the project's effectiveness further, and the effectiveness of similar future interventions. Firstly, although 48% of respondents were aware of the complaint response mechanism, efforts to enhance awareness should be intensified through additional initiatives. Particularly, channels accessible to communities without phone/network access should be strengthened, recognizing the current limitations faced by such individuals. Additionally, the report suggests investigating challenges related to aid redistribution, as 2% of respondents reported negative consequences, specifically instances where community elders sought a share of assistance received.

Furthermore, concerns arise from 9% of respondents who claimed non-receipt of assistance despite being listed as beneficiaries. This discrepancy requires a thorough investigation by the IRC to ascertain whether errors exist in the client list or if respondents provided inaccurate information. The evaluation also underscores the need for adequate time allocation in future evaluations to avoid tight timelines that may compromise the quality of fieldwork and overall assessment. Importantly, the report recommends implementing the successful community engagement practices observed in this project across all future endeavors, whether DEC funded or not. Moreover, cash assistance is praised for its flexibility, prompting the recommendation that the IRC consistently consider the option of providing cash in the design of similar projects. Lastly, the effectiveness of the IRC's complaint response mechanism suggests its replication in all future projects and DEC-supported interventions.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The below management response matrix was completed by Bostan Fahim, Senior MEAL coordinator for IRC Afghanistan, on the 30th January 2024.

Evaluation recommendation	Management response	Responsible individual(s) or unit(s)	Priority level	Key actions	Timeframe
A total of 48% of the respondents were aware of the complaint response mechanism. While the project staff has already put in place considerable efforts to raise awareness (holding various sessions with communities throughout the project implementation), it is strongly recommended that awareness about the available complaint response mechanism is boosted through additional endeavors.	Partially Accept: The MEAL assessments during PDM show that over 90% of individuals were aware of the IRC feedback mechanism. Given that the evaluation covered the entire project period and was conducted years after some responses were provided by the IRC, people might have forgotten to remember these channels which could be a large driver for having a lower ratio in the evaluation.	MEAL team	Medium	Continue conducting community-based Client Responsiveness and Accountability (CRA) sessions.	Ongoing
As it stands, there are limited feedback/complaint channels for those who do not have access to phones/networks as the IRC's major mechanism is a hotline. It is recommended that the IRC also puts in place (and strengthens the existing ones such as community FGDs, community feedback gathering meetings, etc.) channels that are fit for the communities/individuals that do not have access to phones.	Partially Accepted: IRC has both reactive and proactive approaches. The hotline, WhatsApp, and email channels are part of the IRC's CRA reactive channels whereas on the proactive side, CRA staff visit communities and conduct CRA sessions with clients. Both the reactive and proactive channels are functional throughout the project life cycle	MEAL Team	Medium	Continue conducting community based CRA sessions.	Ongoing
Around 2% of respondents mentioned that they faced challenges/negative consequences as a result of the project. These challenges were reported to be cases of aid redistribution where other community members (mostly community elders) asked for a portion of the assistance received by a community member.	Accept: This has been one of the major issues IRC faces in the country. All cases are investigated by the IRC's Ethics and Compliance Unit.	Country Team (Program, ECU, MEAL, Field Coordinators,	High	An accountability framework will be developed to clearly define everyone's role in eliminating/ reducing these types of cases.	March 2024

It is strongly recommended that the IRC investigate any possible cases of aid redistribution and explore effective ways of preventing aid redistribution.		and Access Teams)		IRC MEAL team will continue to deliver key messages on rights during community mobilization, CRA sessions, distribution, and post-distribution monitoring.	
It is recommended that the IRC keeps abreast of complex dynamics within beneficiary communities and strengthen its outreach and sensitization efforts towards community elders in the beginning of such projects to help prevent potential cases of aid re-distribution.	Accepted	Field Coordinators and Access Team	Medium	Both the Field Coordinators and Provincial Access team coordinate with district governors and communities. In some districts, an agreement has been obtained from the Community Elders to ensure that they will not ask beneficiaries to re-distribute the assisted amounts but also report these cases with the organization.	Ongoing
A total of 9% of the overall respondents (whose responses were not included in this analysis detailed in this report) reported that they had not received assistance from the IRC while their names and contact details were included in the beneficiary list provided to the evaluation team. This may be an error in the beneficiary list maintained or it is possible that the respondents may have provided incorrect information in hopes of getting more assistance. In any case, it is strongly recommended that the IRC carefully investigates such cases.	To be confirmed	Program and MEAL team and Compliance team	High	The IRC has requested that the consultant share beneficiary details. Client distribution records will be reviewed and cases will be referred to the IRC's Ethics and Compliance Unit.	March 2024
Limited time was allocated for the evaluation by the IRC. This meant tight timelines for the field work and for other phases of the	Reject: The time for the evaluation was sufficient, however, due to the contextual barriers and recent	MEAL Team	Medium	Considering the changing context, the MEAL team will ensure	N/A

evaluation. It is recommended that the IRC budgets in sufficient time for evaluation exercises as part of the overall project timelines, depending on the scope of the evaluation. It is important to factor in possible delays with fieldwork and securing access, and to factor in sufficient time for the different layers of reviews of the evaluation outputs.	restrictions imposed on INGOs' work in Afghanistan, obtaining the access letters has been a major issue.			to secure more time for future evaluations.	
It is recommended that the IRC use the best practice of close community engagement from this project (such as proactive information sharing and seeking of feedback from communities through community meetings and focus group discussions) and apply it to all other projects – whether these are DEC funded or others.	Accepted: Clients are consulted throughout the project life cycle by the IRC program and MEAL teams through community mobilization sessions, CRA sessions, and regular monitoring of the project.	MEAL and Program Team	Medium	Clients to be to be engaged in project design.	Ongoing
Cash as an assistance modality was found to offer the needed flexibility to beneficiaries to meet their needs in the best way possible – hence, it is recommended that the IRC - in the design of similar projects - always ask the question of “why not provide cash?”	Rejected: the modality of the response is based on the project theory of change which will be informed by context analysis, and analysis of supply-side and demand-side constraints to ensure the best modality for solving the problems faced by the clients.	MEAL, Program	Medium	Evidence from the multi-sectoral needs assessments to be shared by MEAL on time, and the clients feedback to be reviewed while designing projects theory of change	Ongoing
Finally, the IRC-led complaint response mechanism was found to be effective, and well established. The mechanism has successfully managed almost all complaints (except 7 that were being resolved at the time of writing this report). It is recommended that this be replicated for all future projects and for other future DEC supported interventions.	Accepted: These channels will be maintained, and the IRC will continue to consult with clients on their preferred additional feedback channels.	MEAL	Medium	MEAL to further coordinate with relevant departments in following and addressing clients feedback/complaints on time	Ongoing