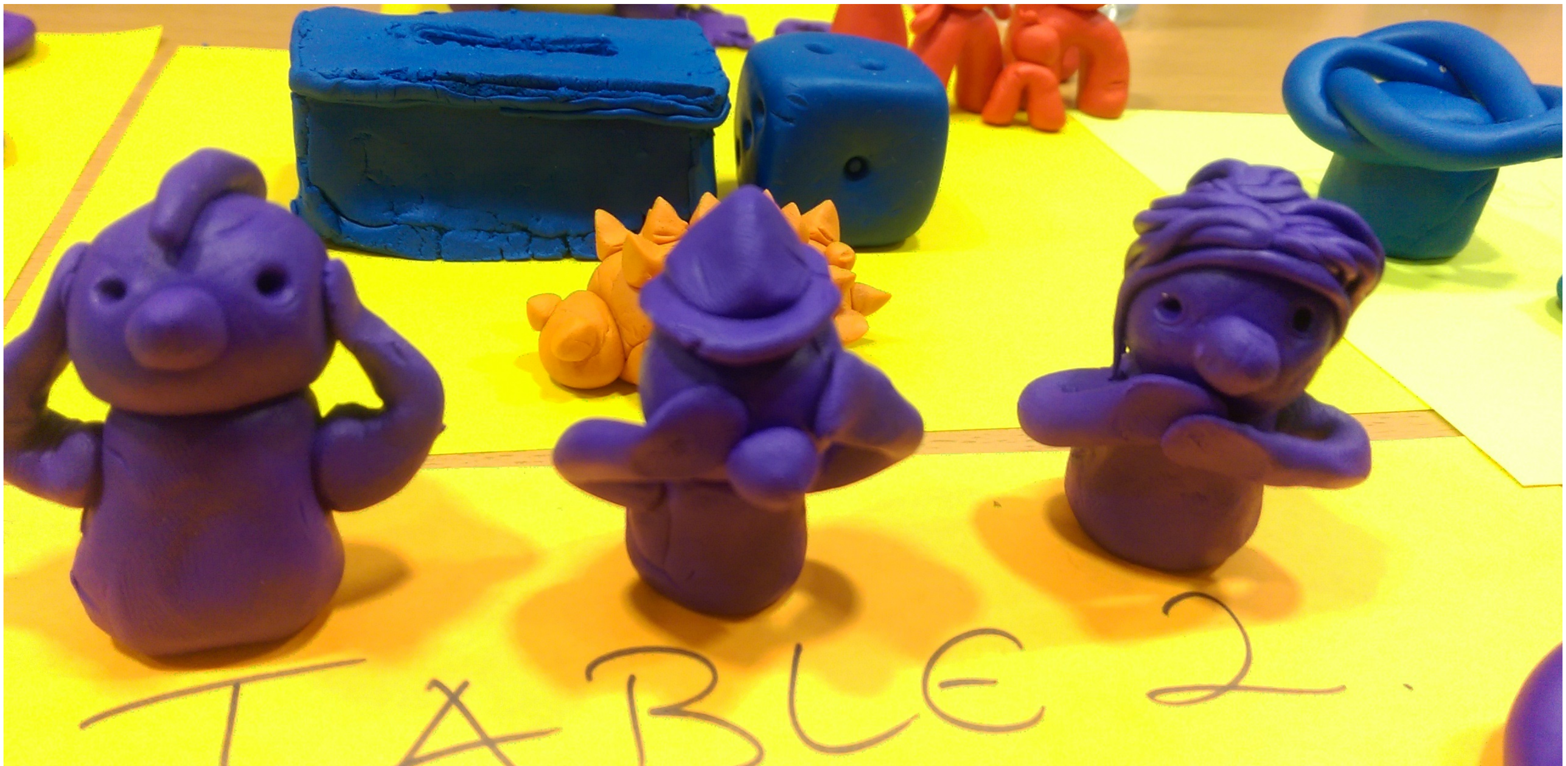


Client-Responsive Humanitarian Action
A Learning Exchange

Event Report
17–18 March 2016
Geneva, Switzerland

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

IRC's Commitment to Client Responsiveness

In 2015, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) launched a bold five-year strategy (IRC2020), which, among other key objectives, commits the organisation to greater responsiveness to its clients. For the IRC, greater responsiveness means ensuring that the wishes, preferences, and perspectives of the people we work to serve inform all programming. Shifting the IRC approach to systematically and deliberately consider client perspectives in programme design and implementation will help the IRC be more responsive and effective, and enable clients to demand accountability for the services delivered.

Within the first phase (mid-2015 to mid-2016) of the IRC's Client Voice and Choice (CVC) initiative, the IRC explored current organisational and sector-wide gaps, identified and tested elements of promising methods, and developed an understanding of the many conditions that inhibit, enable, and incentivise client-responsive practice in humanitarian organisations. The results of this first phase are centred on defining a 'Client Responsiveness Framework' to structure the efforts of the IRC in meeting its strategic ambitions during the remaining three phases of the CVC initiative rollout (2016–2020).

The CVC initiative is helping harness existing good practice, identify and address institutional gaps, and provide a unified approach to client responsiveness to apply systematically and deliberately across the IRC. The IRC received strategic funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in support of CVC's work aimed at achieving these objectives.

Background to and Purpose of the Learning Exchange

The IRC hosted the Client Responsive Humanitarian Action Learning Exchange, bringing together a diverse range of participants in sharing experiences and ideas on how to best deliver humanitarian programming that is more responsive to the needs and perspectives of clients. Participants and speakers at the learning exchange included IRC staff from field programmes and technical and operational support departments, peer implementing agencies, research and policy-focused organisations, and major donors.

The learning exchange took place ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit, at a time when the efforts of the humanitarian community are focused on engaging the people targeted through humanitarian aid for assistance. The IRC structured the event around the two pillars of its Client Responsiveness Framework. Day 1 focused on effectively capturing client feedback, and Day 2 explored enabling and incentivising humanitarian stakeholders to more systematically include client perspectives in program decision-making processes.

The discussions during the learning exchange are reflected here as key highlights and next steps. The broader intention is that these discussions set the stage for further debate and engagement, both within the IRC and amongst the wider humanitarian community invested in positively transforming existing power dynamics between humanitarian actors and their clients to deliver more responsive, accountable, and effective programming.

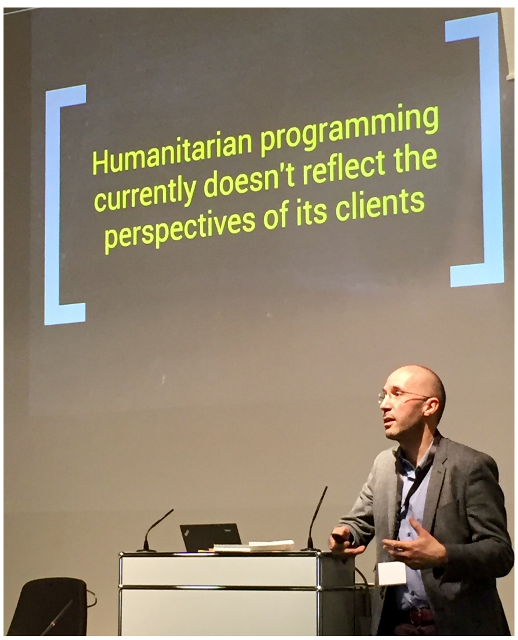
Day 1, Thursday, 17 March 2016
Effectively Capturing Client Voice

Session 1: Framing the State of Play

Purpose of this Session: To present IRC's analysis of the current gaps and opportunities in the way the humanitarian sector currently listens to and responds to the perspectives of its clients; frame the two-day event.
Format of this Session: Presentation and discussion.
Presenter: Alyoscia D'Onofrio (Senior Director, Governance Technical Unit, IRC)

Discussion Highlights

Alyoscia D'Onofrio presented IRC's analysis of the current state of responsiveness in the sector, arguing that humanitarian programming often doesn't reflect the wishes, desires, and perspectives of those people at the heart of the response. This boils down to deficiencies in two key areas: (1) How we collect client perspectives; and (2) How we use client perspectives. The notes below extract highlights from the presentation and plenary discussions.



Collecting Client Perspectives

- Client perspectives are not captured systematically or consistently throughout the programme cycle: often there is a spike at needs assessment and then systematic engagement is infrequent until a mid-term or final evaluation;
- Most feedback mechanisms in use are passive channels for clients voice; we have no control over who is accessing those mechanisms nor over the usability of the information that we obtain from clients;
- Humanitarian organisations are collecting far too much information which they cannot and do not use: we need to de-clutter our approach to capturing client feedback and all sorts of information;
- Within the IRC and other organisations, there is no standardised way to best capture clients' views, and there is little quality assurance over the process and content of the information that is being obtained from clients;
- A cultural change is required in the way we view the validity and utility of client perspectives in the humanitarian sector. We also need to move away from this being a conversation which is held in the narrow confines of the M&E teams and amongst accountability focal points: being client responsive should be a priority topic for everyone.

Using Client Perspectives

- Currently, humanitarian agencies generally are capable of responding to individual pieces of feedback or complaints, but many struggle with meta-synthesis and meta-analysis of client views in order to inform programming decisions on a broader level;
- Client perspectives are often crowded-out by other more privileged information in decision making: evidence, donor requirements, a programme managers' previous experience and preferences;
- Moreover, we often have very little insight into what different sources of information programme managers are taking into consideration when making decisions: the so-called "Black Box of Decision Making";
- Humanitarian actors often lack the incentive to invest the time and energy to change the way they approach their programming towards a more client-responsive approach: too often the tried-and-tested just seems "good enough"; we need to increase the demand from managers for their programme teams to be soliciting the perspectives of their clients;

- There would be much value in seeking to learn from the experiences of other sectors that typically are far more client-responsive than we are in the humanitarian sector: ranging from development practitioners to the UK National Health Service.

Main Findings and Recommendations

Humanitarian practitioners should:

- Find effective, user-friendly ways to collect and aggregate client feedback to improve management-level decision making;
- Identify key points—not only during needs assessment and evaluations—in the programme cycle to invite client views;
- Recognise that mechanisms alone won't change practice; rather, a cultural change is needed to enable truly responsive behaviour;
- Explore lessons learned around client engagement and responsiveness in other sectors beyond humanitarian and development aid.

Session 2 – Data and Process Quality: Towards Common Standards?

Purpose of this Session: To discuss whether any common standards can be found for the collection of client perspectives.
Format of this Session: Presentations and discussion
Presenters: Alyoscia D'Onofrio (Senior Director, Governance Technical Unit, IRC); David Loquercio (Director, CHS Alliance); Sheree Bennett (Research, Evaluation and Learning Advisor, IRC); Nick van Praag (Director, Ground Truth); and, Emma Child (Regional M&E Coordinator – Syria Response Region, IRC)

Discussion Highlights

Approaches to Collecting Client Feedback / Process Quality

- We mustn't lose sight of the reason we're seeking our clients' perspectives in the first place: we must be careful in using terms such as "capture", which may seem overly instrumental, and avoid reducing our clients to mere "data points";
- Humanitarian organisations should accept and welcome negative feedback and dissenting views: we must acknowledge that we can fail in our attempts to deliver assistance and our clients may call us up on that. A change of organisational culture should be ushered in, where we support failure, learn from it and improve on the basis of it;
- We should involve our clients in the data collection process: clients should be able to give informed consent; input into ways that they would like to share their views and what they would like to tell us about; if clients are involved in co-interpreting the data, this may bring additional validity, insights and identifying solutions to challenges. By involving clients in this way we can also better manage expectations about the ability of a humanitarian organisation to act upon a certain piece of feedback: this resonates with standard Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) guidance around information sharing and consent. Clearly, we need to ensure that the ways in which we capture clients' views do not cause any inadvertent harm: involving clients in defining what will be asked and how to ask it is one way to avoid this;
- We should ask our clients for their perspectives routinely and repeatedly: it's far better to solicit less information and ask it often than to undertake a huge rigorous survey which goes out of date by the time we've had a chance to process the information. The methodologies that we choose should be inexpensive and simple, otherwise the incentive of humanitarian staff to use them often will wane;
- Humanitarian organisations should seek the trust of their clients in order that the clients feel comfortable in openly sharing their ideas and opinions. Only through the development of strong and lasting relationships can we understand what our clients are telling us in context: this requires regular interaction with them. This potentially suggests value in humanitarian organisations using their own staff to capture client perspectives rather than bringing in unknown, third party data collectors;
- The capacity of our staff to implement data collection techniques effectively is key: we should invest in developing their skills in engaging and consulting with clients on a range of potentially sensitive issues, and we should make sure that

we learn from our experience of what skills are needed and what works (and what doesn't); sharing that learning with others within and external to our organisation;

- There was strong agreement that we need to better recognise the value and role of our national and front-line staff if we want to be client-responsive. Quite often they hear the preferences and perspectives from our clients in their daily interactions, if questions on that particular issue are not included in a routine survey; managers may otherwise miss important information. Often our national staff comes from the communities in which we work thus playing an instrumental role, their own perspectives may also be used as a proxy. Often decision making does not involve these staff and does not explicitly seek out their valuable insights - this needs to change. One of the ideas that the IRC is looking at is how to strengthen our *Staff* Responsiveness, a goal in itself but also as a necessary step in becoming more client- and partner-responsive;
- Last but not least, we should share the data that we receive with others and coordinate our collection. This point supports the recommendation to collect client perspectives on an inter-agency basis when working in the same geographical area.

<u>On Data Quality</u>

- There was consensus amongst the presenters that one collects different types of information, with different levels of rigour, for different purposes: if we want to collect client perspectives routinely and often, then we must be careful that a desire for perfection doesn't get in the way of staff doing what's practical and possible. We should adopt an iterative approach to data collection, adapting and refining as we go: the time spent in developing a rigorous methodology may undermine "getting things done". In order to improve the rigour of the information we're receiving through capturing client perspectives, we should seek to triangulate the information we receive with other sources of information for the purposes of confident decision making;
- It may seem obvious, but it is important that the information that we solicit from our clients is relevant to the programme and actionable by the project team: this is one of the major failings of most current data collection methods. Obviously we also need to be open to receiving clients perspectives on a whole range of other issues that they may wish to share their thoughts with us on, but this requires a different approach to handling such information;
- Qualitative information is clearly the most helpful to project teams, but managers at different levels of the hierarchy would ideally see it presented quantitatively so that they can judge the level of client satisfaction across programmes and the performance of the programme team in being client responsive, alerting them to areas which need attention. Ideally we would also be able to compare the data that we receive from our clients to be able to track changes in performance;
- Particularly when surveyed often, or when the connection between the client and the humanitarian organisation is weak, many clients may not respond to questions in a way which reflects what they really think: clients may respond in a certain way because they think doing so will reduce the risk of assistance being taken away; because they think that answering in a certain way may increase their likelihood of receiving assistance; or because they simply do not want to seem ungrateful for the aid they are receiving. Humanitarian organisations can only ever know the revealed preferences of those who we speak to, so we will always have an incomplete and inconsistent picture of the totality of our clients' views. We should seek to encourage clients to share their unbiased views; the methodologies we adopt and the way that we interact with our clients will influence this. However, ultimately it is up to our clients to share whatever perspectives with us that they want to. Assuming that there will always be some level of bias, by following client perspectives over time we can nonetheless observe whether the general sentiment is trending in a positive or negative direction. Our responsibility as humanitarian practitioners is to listen and react accordingly to the data;
- Our clients have a range of views on each issue we ask them about, which will differ between clients and will differ for an individual over time, even from one day to the next. When seeking to be client responsive we need to think about whose perspectives we are responding to: we can only be responsive to the revealed perspectives that we hear which are captured at a certain point in time. Our methodologies should seek to capture the diversity of views and to track them as they change over time.

Main Findings and Recommendations

Humanitarian practitioners should:

- Accept failure and negative feedback as a means to improve subsequent programming, and have this communicated across the organisation by senior management;
- Identify simple and quick methodologies to routinely and effectively capture client views—in ways that are both not burdensome and always useful to the programme team—for application at key intervals during the programme life cycle;
- Build better relationships with clients to successfully capture their perspectives, and analyse relationship strengths and weaknesses with the goal of strengthening those relationships;
- Develop skills to better implement the range of methodologies—particularly more 'active' mechanisms like surveys and focus group discussions—for soliciting client feedback;
- Become more 'STAFF RESPONSIVE,' both in recognising the unique role of national staff in enabling more client-responsive organisations, and in placing greater value in listening and responding to the views and experiences of all colleagues (this should inform human resource and management policies and practices);
- Avoid overly rigorous methodologies for capturing client views while recognising that detailed attention to research is important (this should inform tools and guides design);
- 'Think forward' about the data proposed for collection—will it be relevant and actionable?
- Capture and present data in such a way that it enables decision making;
- Recognise the full range of different views on a given issue—clients are not a homogenous group.

Session 3 – Identifying Effective Channels for Client Voice

Purpose of this Session: To discuss the pros and cons of different channels for client voice.
Format of this Session: Presentations and discussion
Presenters: Nick van Praag (Director, Ground Truth), Uwe Korus (Monitoring, Evaluation & Accountability Coordinator, Care International), Anna Wood (Senior Advisor, Accountability to Children and Communities, World Vision), Leah Kimathi (Governance & Rights Coordinator – Kenya, IRC), and Guillaume Labrecque (Technical Advisor – Governance, IRC)

Discussion Highlights

Active Channels

"Active channels" describe those in which humanitarian organisations actively solicit the perspectives of their clients, and have some degree of control over who they target, when they ask them and the topics that they ask them about. Such methodologies include surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews.

- The design of these kinds of channels is key to get the best out of them: What information is of most relevance to the programme team and to the clients to hear and communicate? What is the best way of soliciting information in such a way that it will give programme teams a clear understanding of client views? The team should visualise in advance the information that they anticipate that they might get through implementing the channel: what would they do with it in that form? Would anything be missing or superfluous?
- As with any such channel we should ensure that we continually review and where necessary revise the methodology and the questions being asked to ensure that we are getting the most out of the approach.

Reactive Channels

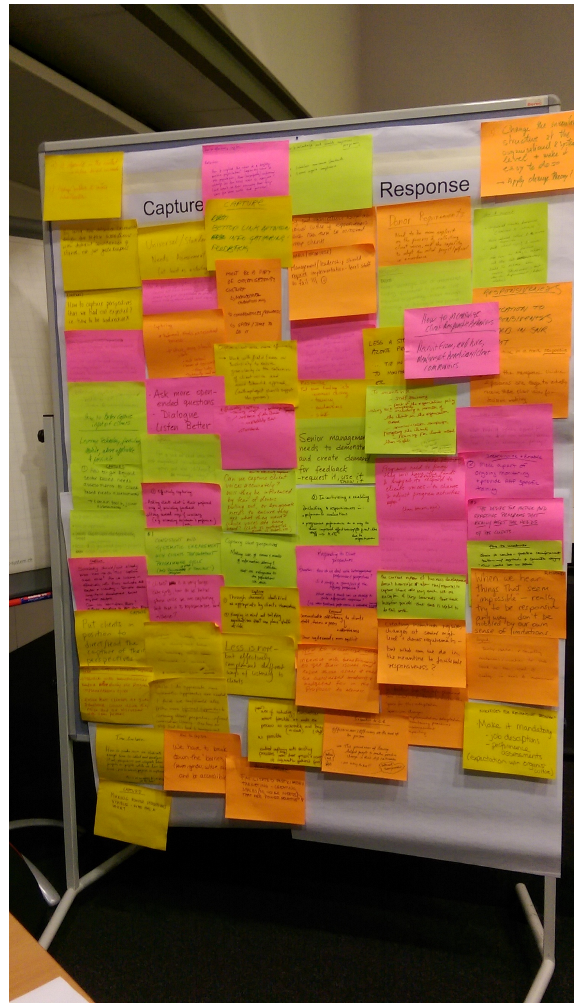
What we have termed "reactive channels" provide an opportunity for clients to share their feedback and lodge complaints as and when they wish on whatever they wish. Such methods include suggestions boxes, hotlines, and drop-in sessions.

- Key with these types of channels is making sure that they are accessible to all clients in a way which maintains confidentiality and their safety, and situated in a place which ensures that all those that want to are able to provide their views. Hotlines need to be free for clients to call and such channels need to be available at times that clients can access them. Different clients will require and may prefer different channels or methodologies through which to communicate with organisations: this should be considered in their design and reviewed through use;
- One also needs to consider – as with all channels of communication – who the person is and what the process is for viewing and interpreting the feedback that comes in to ensure that it is all handled appropriately, transparently and with integrity;
- Community representatives can act as intermediaries between clients and humanitarian organisations, manning help-desks and promoting confidence in the reliability of the channel;
- How can clients' perspectives be solicited in such a way that empowers them to play an active role in identifying what they can do to improve a certain situation either through independent or joint action, or through inputting ideas into a solution for how to respond to a challenge that they have experienced in the delivery of a service?

Open Channels

"Open channels" describe the channels of daily interaction and communication between front-line field workers and clients through programme implementation.

- Many of the communities in which we work as humanitarian organisations are oral communities, who communicate through stories: we need channels which enable us to hear such narrative articulation of their views: we need to develop strong listening skills to enable us to hear them;



- Establishing a relationship based on trust is of utmost importance in order for clients to feel able and willing to share their perspectives with IRC staff through daily interactions. Humanitarian organisations should ask themselves how they can build that relationship of trust: acknowledging that we have received feedback, acting upon it and closing the loop back with communities (reporting back what we heard and how we have acted and why) is key;
- Because of the centrality of the relationships – which are built on individual, person-to-person interactions – if a staff member leaves then that line of communication would need to be built up again from scratch with the new team member;
- One of the challenges of Open Channels of communication is that we have little control over whose voices we hear: there is a risk that the voices of dominant members of the community drown out those of others;
- Often the information we obtain through Open Channels is difficult to process and analyse: it is often not recorded at the time that it is heard, and may be interpreted through the ears of the staff member in a way that another staff member might not. Thus the validity of information may not stand up to scrutiny against other more "robustly" collected data. All qualitative and discursive data, how and where to record this information is also a challenge for humanitarian teams without a specially crafted system;
- Front-line staff often don't feel empowered to channel the information that they hear from clients upwards to decision makers, and to take decisions themselves about how to respond to the perspectives of their clients that they're hearing;
- There are distinct advantages of hearing client feedback on a daily basis as it allows programme teams to adjust programmes on a real-time-basis;
- Being receptive to and open to asking our clients for their views and listening to them through all our interactions with them should be part of the organisational spirit and way of working;
- Often we design our surveys and other active efforts to capture our clients' views in such a way that misses key pieces of information: opening up informal channels of communication means that we can hear unsolicited viewpoints.

<u>Across all Channels</u>

- Organisations working in the same geographic areas should coordinate around data collection to avoid duplication and enhance complementarities of approaches, and should then share the information received;
- How can humanitarian organisations know whether a channel is working well? One sure sign is if we're not receiving any feedback; the level of feedback may decline over time, but it should be a warning sign to us if we're not hearing any at all;
- If we don't close the loop by acknowledging to clients the feedback that we have heard and what we are going to do to act upon it or not and why, then this can have a bearing not only on how our clients view our trustworthiness but also that of other organisations. For if they have had a negative experience with a feedback channel once, they will likely be influenced by that experience next time an organisation asks them for their opinion;
- Humanitarian organisations need to make a collective commitment to seeking out clients' views regularly and systematically: the actions of key actors in the humanitarian system (e.g. such as UNHCR) can have a significant bearing on the behaviour of others.

Main Findings and Recommendations

Humanitarian practitioners should:

- Ideally use a combination of the three channels to capture client perspectives, since active channels provide the most useful type of input most likely to inform programming decisions, reactive channels allow clients greater privacy to share their perspectives and provide the client with more control over the topics they provide their perspectives on, and invaluable information comes from the everyday interactions between staff and clients when no one is overtly asking questions;
- Recognise that the design of the specific channel for client–humanitarian agency communication is key to its success. Methodologies should reflect best practices, and guidance should steer how to best adapt the approach to the context, constraints and opportunities of the programme;
- Consider who is i) able and willing to access channels, ii) receiving the information, iii) analysing and presenting the information, and iv) making decisions about what to do on the basis of the information. In addition, humanitarian practitioners should consider the lines of communication and how smoothly and accurately the information is transmitted. How can we improve those lines of communication and make known who is empowered to take decisions at what level?
- Think about the format to present feedback to best inform effective decision making before client perspectives are collected;
- Coordinate the capturing of client perspectives among organisations that is nuanced to provide programme teams with the detail for decision-making.

Session 4 – Applying Methodologies to our Humanitarian Contexts

Purpose of this Session: To discuss how the different channels for client voice can best be applied at different points in the programme cycle and in different types of humanitarian context.
Format of this Session: Participants were divided into seven groups: two of the groups were invited to discuss a stage in the programme cycle and five of the groups looked at various humanitarian contexts. Groups presented back in plenary.

Discussion Highlights

<u>Project Cycle / Country Strategy Development</u>

- Context analysis *informs* a humanitarian organisation about who they should be talking to amongst their current and prospective clients, whilst also being *informed by* the perspectives of clients;
- This is a key point of the programme cycle, at which to validate whether the proposed country programme strategy is in alignment with the perspectives of clients on what they would most like assistance with, how, when and to whom.
- The process of involving clients is as important as the final product (the content of the strategy). The process of developing the strategy strengthens the perceived legitimacy of the plan and builds wider ownership, trust, and expands transparency;
- Often the strategy development process is a stressful time for country programmes, with a wealth of information to handle and process, numerous stakeholders to consult and often-strict timeframes and formats required by their head offices. Finding a way to consult clients amongst that process in the least burdensome manner possible improves the likelihood of client perspectives finding their way onto the decision making table;
- As to appropriate methodologies: focus group discussions can be helpful to obtain qualitative information. There is often a wealth of information which has been collected by programme teams during prior programme implementation and by other organisations: we should mine that and not seek solely to replicate what is already known.

<u>Project Cycle / Project Assessment and Design</u>

- This is one of the most significant opportunities that humanitarian teams have to bring their clients' perspectives into decisions about what should be done and how: far more can be responded to when captured at the design stage than when captured during ongoing implementation;

- Clients should be given an open slate upon which to define what success looks like to them and how to get there; we should seek to use as many open questions as possible so as to avoid imposing our prejudices or pre-defined ideas upon our clients;
- Clients should be informed of the mandate and constraints in which the humanitarian organisation is operating (funding amounts, durations, locations, sectors etc.) so that their perspectives can be based on all available information.

Context / Transient Populations

- Humanitarian organisations need to consider the speed / pace of movement of the displaced clients: this informs the frequency and duration of the opportunities for interaction that we have with clients' to ask for their perspectives;

- With a client group that is moving rapidly, we may not be able to close the loop with those same clients (to let them know what we have done to respond to their feedback), nor would there be the time for them to observe the action that we have taken. Although, we will build trust by telling them what we have done to act upon the feedback previously received from an earlier group of clients. Further, there often exist lines of communication between clients at different points in the migratory route through which our response may become known;
- Trends in client feedback can still be observed, even if the individual clients are changing: we may be able to observe changes in the socio-economic profile of the client group over time and associated differences in the perspectives that we hear: this can be insightful information for programming;
- Anecdotal, qualitative perspectives can be captured through focus group discussions: during an emergency response we may often have to rely on the quickest methodologies possible to obtain real-time information: referencing the point in Session 2, we need to not get overly hung up on rigour: snippets of information can suffice to give indication of the areas to probe further with clients;
- One recommendation which came up in other sessions is the importance of making sure that front-line staff are empowered and have enough information to do their jobs so that they can respond to feedback and manage expectations *as and when* it is heard: this is particularly important in a fast-paced programming context.

Community-Based Interventions

- There are varying degrees of involvement of our clients in the decision-making process: clients can lead, participate in or be consulted upon: which approach to choose depends on the nature of the programme and its relationship to its clients, and the resources and time available;
- Humanitarian organisations should draw upon their context analysis and knowledge of the local community to map out the power structures: what would be the effect of engaging or soliciting the perspectives of certain individuals or a certain group of people on the inter-community relationship and the relationship between the community and the organisation? It is important to capture a diversity of views, but we also need to be mindful of maintaining a positive relationship with the community in order that the programming can be effective;
- A combination of the three types of channels, articulated in Session 3, would be ideal in operating context: all are feasible and the combination offers the best mix of information to aid decision making.

Implementation through Remote Access

- One of the primary reasons for capturing clients' perspectives in remote-access interventions is to be able to validate our assumptions and other sources of information upon which we have made our decisions, including partner performance;

- Given that our staff cannot access the clients directly, and the ability of anyone to access them may be limited, we should opt for channels which capture a broad range of perspectives (rather than trying to dig too deep); we should aim to obtain information regularly, especially given that some scheduled instances of interaction with clients may have to be adjusted given secure access constraints; channels of information need to be fast and information needs to pass through as few hands as possible (the more layers the more chance that the data is interpreted and reinterpreted beyond what the clients initially intended to say); we need to find a way for clients to be able to feel secure in providing their perspectives; and we should find ways of handling it as confidentially as possible;
- Electronic methodologies can have advantages, but don't work everywhere due to limited phone or internet coverage and access, and also questions over confidentiality of the information;
- Often teams collecting client perspectives will need to have low visibility; this needs to be taken into consideration when defining team size and sample size, as well as the methodology chosen to capture the data.

<u>Urban Crises</u>

- A few key characteristics of the urban context are particularly relevant when defining the most appropriate ways to capture client perspectives: clients are often hard to locate, being dispersed throughout the urban context: humanitarian organisations need to make an extra effort to identify and mobilise clients; the environment may also be more politically charged, and there are far more stakeholders to take into account (such as private sector service providers to our clients) than in rural or camp contexts;
- Inter-agency approaches can work particularly well in urban contexts, where organisations can help mobilise different groups to be consulted for their views;
- Often access to phones and internet is good in more-developed urban contexts: this can be a good way of communicating with clients, especially when clients' ability to move freely due to curfews etc. is limited.

<u>Camp-Based Contexts</u>

- Given the ongoing presence of the humanitarian organisation in the camp context, client perspectives can be easily and routinely solicited. This close interaction can also be an opportunity to manage expectations and communicate the limitations of humanitarian organisations to respond;
- It was recommended that a regular, light touch engagement strategy would work best so as not to overwhelm clients with questions (in camp settings where other organisations are working, clients are very likely bombarded with questions and surveys); further follow up can be done to dig deeper if necessary.

<u>Across all Contexts</u>

- One must consider context and operating conditions when selecting an appropriate channel (or combination of channels), including access to the clients, their literacy, staff capacity and capabilities, the cost of capturing information and security constraints;
- The culture of the client group(s) will also influence the choice of a suitable channel: one should consider that there may be many different cultures represented and languages spoken in a camp and thus the channels chosen shouldn't just work for the largest / most dominant group.

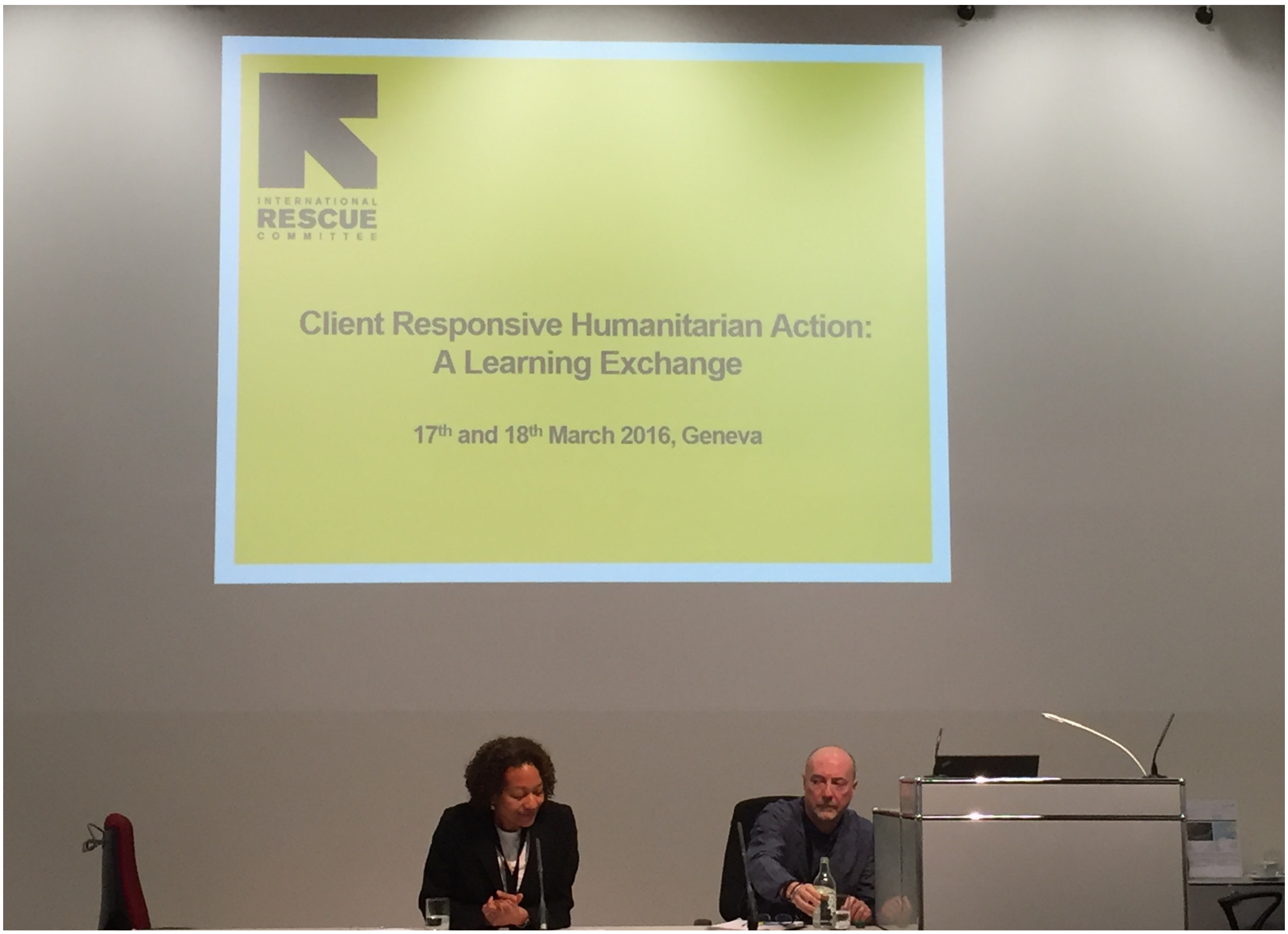
Main Findings and Recommendations

- While best practice guidance for different feedback channels exists, the group work session highlighted the differences in application, which depend on both the point in the programme cycle that client perspectives are captured and the operating context. Guidance for programme teams to consider these different requirements and to help them tailor their chosen methodology—or, more appropriately, a combination of methodologies—is important.

Day 2, Friday, 18 March 2016
Incentivising and Enabling Client-Responsive Programming

Session 5 – How Donors Can Enable Client-Responsive Programming

Purpose of this Session: To understand the requirements and perspectives of key humanitarian donors upon how we can become more client responsive
Format of this Session: Presentations and discussion
Presenters: Andy Wheatley (Humanitarian Adviser: Accountability & Results Monitoring (CHASE, UK Department for International Development) and Katherine Perkins (Deputy Director, Policy and Resource Planning, Bureau or Refugees, Population and Migration, US Department of State)



Discussion Highlights

<u>DFID</u>

- Client perspectives are a good proxy for programme effectiveness: if the client is happy then one can quite safely assume that there are at least some aspects of the programming which are going well;
- DFID's requirements:

  - Activities—1) Provide information to affected communities, 2) Ensure decisions are informed by the views of affected communities, and 3) Assess and comment on agencies' performance;
  - Approaches—1) Maintain a respectful attitude, 2) Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve program policy and practice 3) Ensure that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate, and robust enough to deal with complaints 4) Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision making processes;
- DFID is working at the global level to advocate for systematic changes in support of AAP including common terminology around humanitarian funding. At a field level they are promoting humanitarian team commitment to AAP and the use of common platforms for client voice to be captured and used across the humanitarian sector responding to a particular crisis. They are also great supporters of third party, independent monitoring systems;
- Within DFID, the AAP team is advocating amongst DFID colleagues for more flexible humanitarian funding; to improve capacity to track the qualitative aspects of DFID-funded programmes;
- DFID asks its humanitarian organisation implementing partners to engage their DFID-representatives early and not to be shy of challenging DFID country representatives if they are not supportive of activities which the organisation is proposing which would promote AAP: DFID has committed to supporting it at an organisational level.

<u>Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), U.S. Department of State</u>

- PRM Recognises that client responsiveness is the right and smart thing to do, and will improve programming. U.S. Congress has now included language in its appropriation legislation for humanitarian funding that calls for including beneficiary feedback to improve humanitarian responses. PRM has communicated this language to implementing partners, especially about institutionalising the process of capturing and responding to client feedback as a fundamental approach to the design and delivery of programmes;
- PRM has now requested all its implementing partners to share their Accountability Frameworks with them, and partners will have to report quarterly on this;
- These requirements are intended to manifest in better programming. They want to ensure that client preferences are being met and avoid past mistakes. They are hoping for more transparency in discussions between donors and partners;
- Momentum exists now within the international community to make these changes. Humanitarian needs are growing, while resources are not;
- PRM is invested in supporting learning about how we can become more client responsive: they are in the process of contracting a piece of research around how to be more effective in this regard;
- Humanitarian organisations have an imperative to make sure their staff are trained on their own organisational Client Responsiveness / Accountability Framework and the key principles and standards which exist at a global level;
- PRM requests its humanitarian organisation implementing partners to maintain open dialogue with their PRM representatives about their successes and failures and what they are hearing from their clients: transparency is key to dialogue.

Main Findings and Recommendations

- DFID and PRM now require all implementing partners to demonstrate how programmes listen and respond to client perspectives;
- Humanitarian organisations should determine the institutional changes required for organisations to become truly responsive; fragmented, project-by-project approaches no longer suffice;
- DFID and PRM called for implementing partners to become forward-thinking in their discussions with donor funding representatives, reminding them of accountability and responsiveness commitments, and demonstrating how including funding and staff time for systematically listening to clients is of overall benefit to the effectiveness and efficiency of the project.

Session 6 – Standardisation vs. Innovation

Purpose of this Session: To discuss the value of having standardised processes that all country teams and programmes should use for capturing and using client perspectives to inform their programming decisions: what would the benefits of this be? What would be lost if procedures are too rigid that individual teams don't have the space to figure out their own ways of capturing and responding to data?
Format of this Session: Presentations and discussion
Presenters: Alyoscia D'Onofrio (Senior Director, Governance Technical Unit, IRC)**,** David Loquercio (Head of Policy, Advocacy and Learning, CHS Alliance), Andy Wheatley (Humanitarian Advisor, Accountability & Results Monitoring, CHASE, UK Department for International Development), and Christine Knudsen (Director, Sphere Project)

Discussion Highlights

The discussion was proposed to focus on the role of minimum standards (around how we should collect feedback; who we should consult; how often; how client perspectives should be presented; in what format a team should report on what they have done to act upon those perspectives or not) and the benefits and drawbacks that such standards offer to humanitarian organisations. The discussion took a much broader tour around the question of standards, offering many rich and useful insights for humanitarian practitioners in our quest to become more responsive.

<u>Client-Responsive Practices - Standard Operating Procedures</u>

- The added value of standard operating procedures (around each of the stages of collecting and using client feedback) for client responsiveness were undisputed. However, whilst similar standard operating procedures may be found across organisations, their articulation will need to be organisation-specific given the different staffing structures and procedures within each organisation;
- However, because standard practices are identified, it should not mean that programme teams follow them rigidly without questioning and thinking about how they should best be applied to their particular context: teams may do this when they interpret the requirement of the standards too literally and are not empowered to make appropriate adaptations. If staff are empowered, then having the standards in place can give them the confidence that as long as those key principles are observed, they have the freedom to innovate and make decisions about how to collect and use client feedback in their programme management;
- Standards are ideally developed at the top level of the organisation, leaving space for local variation and adaptation. They should thus be light and lend themselves to teams interpreting how they should be applied in their context;
- Can standard operating procedures be successfully introduced about how managers should treat client perspectives? Every individual will interpret standards and the information that they receive from clients differently: how can an organisation ensure consistency in treatment?
- The focus always needs to be on the results that the standards lead to: if we are not seeing the type of changes or quality in practice towards client responsiveness, then perhaps the standards need revisiting. We should be able to demonstrate the added value to the programme and to our client responsiveness ambitions that the standard brings.

<u>Sharing Innovations</u>

- Humanitarian actors shouldn't continue to reinvent the wheel each time an organisation seeks to revisit their accountability practices and the guidance and tools which support them: where other organisations have invested in systems which have been proven to work in capturing / handling client perspectives and which can be used by other organisations, then we should share them for the common good. DFID presented upon a £145 million monitoring system that was developed for Somalia, which was later adopted by other organisations as an example of good practice in sharing tools to promote responsiveness;
- Across the sector we should seek out the tools and methods which are working best, share and use them: this will improve efficiencies as staff move from one organisation to the next and will negate the need for each individual to develop and test their own approaches. It also means clients are exposed to fewer different approaches that they need to negotiate.

CHS Commitments and Sphere Standards

- Standards like Sphere and the CHS Commitments have been usefully applied by many organisations seeking to ensure consistency in quality across their programmes. These can provide organisations with a useful prompt and checklist during design and implementation of their programming. The CHS Commitments in particular include a number of standards which relate directly to the ways in which we engage with our clients in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Many organisations are now using these as benchmarks for their accountability practices;
- The CHS commitments are new: CHS Alliance is asking its partners to self-assess whether their degree of compliance with the commitments correlates with improved client satisfaction: it will be interesting to read these results;
- Humanitarian practitioners may sometimes find that the perspectives of their clients contradict or don't align with the standards. Decision makers should recognise both the standards and clients' perspectives of sources of information which they use to guide their decision making, to which a rational mind-set should be applied to determine the best possible course of action.

Client Responsiveness as Routine Practice

- Another set of discussions took place around how we can make client-responsive practices part of the routine culture of the way humanitarian staff operate. In order for this to happen, we need to stimulate demand for these practices to occur; we need to motivate and incentivise humanitarian coordinators, country directors and others so that they *want* to capture and respond to clients' views. Some of the ways to do this include demonstrating that the layer of management above is interested in it happening; exploring some of the incentivising interventions which are discussed in Session 7; and closing the loop in the feedback process and witness the impact that doing so has on the clients. It's very easy for HQ to be enthusiastic about changes in practice and new standards, but the key is to motivating those people who actually have to implement the practices.

Client-Responsiveness as a Requirement

- We should be careful that client responsiveness doesn't just become another "requirement". There is nothing more demotivating: in the same way we need to be careful about "additionality": this needs to be avoided for the benefit of both staff and of the clients.

Main Findings and Recommendations

- Standard Operating Practices (SOPs) for the collection and use of client feedback are important; every humanitarian organisation should develop and tailor SOPs to the particular agency. SOPs should accompany efforts to empower staff on interpreting and implementing SOPs in different contexts;
- Humanitarian organisations should share good practice and systems to maximise efficiency gains and minimise burdens;
- CHS Alliance commitments provide a useful checklist for programme teams to ensure that they are properly listening to clients. Programme teams should consider how to use the information obtained through these consultations;
- To succeed in changing practices, organisations' headquarters teams need to motivate programme staff to capture and respond to client views to institutionalise it as part of routine practice and work.

Session 7 – Routines and Nudges

Purpose of this Session: To discuss the viability and feasibility of a range of potential interventions which may incentivise changes in practice to become more responsive.
Format of this Session: Presentation, followed by group work. In the group work, participants were split into 6 tables: each of which was tasked with reviewing the potential motivating effect of a specified intervention designed to incentivise humanitarian practitioners into implementing a client-responsive approach to their programming.
Presenters: Isabella Jean (Co-Director of Collaborative Learning, CDA Learning)

Discussion Highlights

<u>Presentation from CDA</u>

- In order to become truly client-responsive, we need to usher in sweeping organisational change: tinkering around the edges will achieve nothing. Too many new doctrines, which receive so much support across the sector rarely materialise into consistent practice changes in the ways we work. Isabella highlighted the "do no harm" concept as an example;
- If we are to affect such change in our organisations, we need to think about how it will be operationalised within our management structures from the top to the bottom (and the other way round), and across all of our programmes and

departments; how will it be brought into action in the major decisions we take and through the everyday activities of humanitarian organisations' staff;

- Communication by senior management of the value placed upon client-responsiveness is extremely important in bringing about wholesale change, and the message must be continually reinforced at multiple levels of the organisation and upon multiple occasions. Managers should be continually asking their staff "what did you hear today, what did you see, what issues were brought up or solved?"
- The change in practice must also take place within each individual. Each individual needs to start thinking differently: organisational inductions should communicate that staff are expected to adopt the client-responsive worldview of the organisation. Staff should be held to account through their performance appraisals and by their managers for abiding by those principles;
- We should recognise as organisational management that opening ourselves up to hearing what clients think and having those thoughts known by our peers and managers can be off-putting to many: Isabella recommended that we adopt a "psychological" approach to understanding and handling feelings of fear and powerlessness, and to be careful in how we communicate the need to collect clients' views.

Strategies for Incentivising Behaviour Change Around the Use of Client Perspectives

<u>Intervention: Internally Publishing Client Perspectives</u>

- In this intervention, client perspectives on a programme would be presented in a dashboard format and reviewed by the programme team at their monthly project management meeting: the programme team would discuss the feedback and identify plans to address them. Applied in this way, programme teams would have a fixed point in their diaries at which they should review their clients' perspectives on the programme. By having all the key programme staff together, they can hold each other to account for decision-making and change;
- When this intervention had been proposed by CVC in the design of the workshop, it was thought that "publishing the data internally" would be interpreted more widely: that is, across programmes; across countries; across regions and across sectors any staff member would be able to view the feedback that had been received and compare it to that which was received by other units of the organisation. This would have the same motivational and "exposing" effect as the project review meeting, but on a larger scale.

<u>Intervention: Fail Fair</u>

- This was not one of the interventions proposed for the group work under the programme, but was suggested by one of the teams in light of the sentiment running throughout the event about the need to embrace failure;
- In this intervention, the country programme would organise an event at which to share failures in a spirit of openness and learning. This would have the effect of communicating to staff that failing – so long as we acknowledge, learn from and change based upon them – is ok, and in fact, it's a good thing.

<u>Intervention: Integrate Client Responsiveness in Organisational Performance Scorecards</u>

- The IRC is exploring the use performance scorecards, against which all country programmes will be required to report on their progress against their country strategy and the organisational strategic commitments. Many other organisations have similar processes in place;
- In the group work, the participants recommended that the scorecard would include such metrics as the "percentage of facilities that have a feedback mechanism in place (and where staff know the mechanism, have training in it and support)"; a "client satisfaction score: two-to-five indicators that look to quality of services, etc." (Note that CVC is in the process of identifying 6-7 common themes of relevance to all programmes against which clients perspectives may be sought); and "percentage of individual pieces of client feedback that require a response and, of those, the percentage that have been responded to". It was proposed that the performance scorecards would be reviewed on a monthly basis. The intervention was proposed to have a motivational effect in that change (whether negative or positive) in clients perspectives are clearly visible for key decision-makers to see at all levels of the organisation. It could also encourage a healthy level of competition between programmes operating within the same sector or country programme.

Intervention: Client Responsiveness as a Staff Performance Requirement

- In this intervention the practices and skills associated with being client responsive would become key competencies that every humanitarian organisation's staff would be expected to fulfil, and against which their performance would be monitored. The group recommended that performance management would be done much more regularly, and not just left to cumbersome annual reviews as the IRC currently does and many other humanitarian organisations do.

Intervention: Donor Requirement for Organisations to Demonstrate Client Responsiveness in Programming

- As highlighted in Session 5, major donors are now requiring their implementing partners to listen to and act upon the perspectives of their clients: to what degree does this have a motivational effect upon humanitarian staff?
- In this intervention, the responsibility of senior management in country to secure funding and maintain positive relationships with their donors will drive their incentive to be responsive: this will then trickle down through the management layers of the country programme.

Intervention: Staff Responsiveness for Client Responsiveness

- A common theme running throughout the event was the need for humanitarian organisations to value the perspectives of their national staff (and generally those in lower ranking positions). This is necessary in order to bring in a culture of responsiveness. This also applies to our interactions with our partners;
- In this intervention, staff would be invited to provide their thoughts on how they would like to provide feedback and have their views solicited (much in the same way that we propose to do with clients): a number of channels could be appropriate, including third party monitoring, feedback boxes and informal listening conversations. Given the power dynamics between staff, it will be important to have some channels where anonymity can be assured. Like with client feedback channels, a regular "temperature check" should be taken using a limited number of indicators, combined with more in depth exploration. A culture of listening and sharing ideas should also be welcomed without fear of repercussions. In this intervention we should foster a culture of inquisitiveness; staff ask themselves why and ask each other why; they muse over ideas and share them.

Intervention: Client Responsiveness Spot-Check / Audit

- In this intervention, spot-checks would be conducted on programmes to check how client responsive they are being and to provide recommendations for improvement. This would ideally be done by peers, but could also be done by other departments within the organisation (but the power dynamics of having HQ and other "senior" departments should be taken into consideration). The group proposed that this intervention would work by holding a workshop to get to know the programme and the way that it currently collects and uses client perspectives to inform its programming; this would be followed by a desk review. The reviewers would then separately meet with the team and the client group to ask for their perspectives on how the programme team is doing: this could be done either on a one-on-one basis or through focus group discussions. An idea proposed was to use a "mystery shopper" approach, where the staff or client doesn't know why the questions are being asked, so their answers are less likely to be influenced by the desire to perform well, but reflect the reality. The act of conducting the peer reviews would be standard practice, but the methodologies that would be applied as part of the review would vary depending on the programme, context and resources;
- It was proposed that the approach would promote healthy competition and learning, as well as innovation and cross-fertilisation of ideas among staff to improve their client responsiveness.

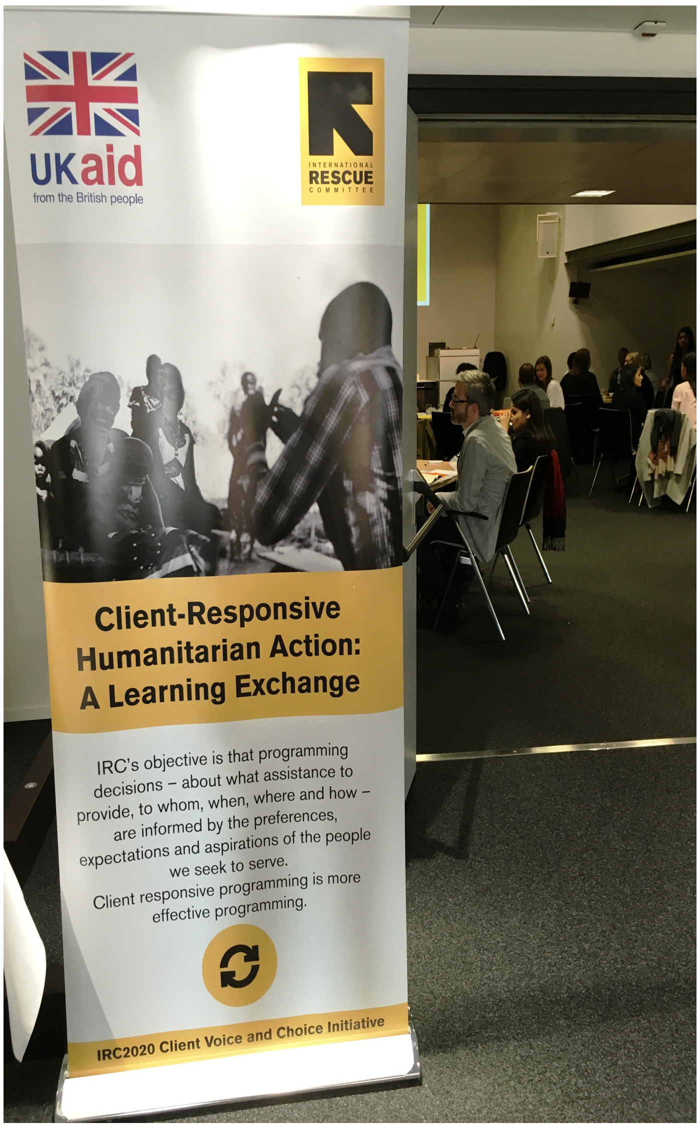
Main Findings and Recommendations

- A number of interventions discussed by the groups had positive potential for incentivising practitioners to develop more client-responsive programmes. Understanding psychological motivations behind such interventions are important for program design. Multiple interventions are also important, since different initiatives will motivate different people depending on their roles within the organisation (senior managers compared to frontline field workers, for example). Some of the most promising strategies include the use of programme performance scorecards and the introduction of "client responsiveness" as a core competency that all humanitarian staff are expected to demonstrate and will be held accountable for through performance management;

Session 8 – Human(itarian) Practitioners

Purpose of this Session: To identify what we need of our staff in order that we may become responsive as humanitarian organisations.
Format of this Session: In this session, the participants were split into 7 groups, each tasked with reviewing the same set of questions around: (1) What skills and capacities do humanitarian organisations need? (2) How might the staffing structure change / be improved? (3) What does the technical assistance and support model look like? (4) How might the performance appraisal model change to incentivise behaviour change? And, (5) How might the recruitment process change?

Discussion Highlights



Capacities of Staff

A range of staff capacities and capabilities were proposed as being necessary in order for our organisations to become more client-responsive. The Senior Director for Talent Management in IRC's HR department urged us to clearly identify what we're asking for by level and job family, with examples. The capacities that are needed by front line workers are obviously very different to those that would be needed by programme coordinators or senior organisational management. There needs to be constant review of how staff are developing and applying those skills, and investment into strengthening them

Collecting Client Perspectives

These included those skills which can be taught as well as aptitudes that are more innate in certain people. Teachable skills included active listening, local languages, and participatory approaches to engaging clients, such as focus group discussions, interview techniques, and conducting surveys. Aptitudes included a diverse range of ideas, including respect and empathy for the clients, where staff should show humility and understanding in the way they interact with clients; interpersonal skills to build trust with the client group; and a sensitivity about ensuring that all client groups are able to share their views in a manner which respects community dynamics;

Analysis

This included both technological capacities to manipulate and manage client feedback in a simple to use and effective system, but also enquiring minds in order to be able to probe the data and its implications;

Decision Making

The groups identified decision-making and negotiation skills, as well as leadership skills to drive organisational commitment to changing practice;

Action

Staff then need the skills to be able to act upon the decisions that have been taken: this means that they need to be able to re-review their project designs, implementation approaches and workplans and revise them to reflect the decisions taken. It also means that staff need to be able to have the skills to negotiate with donors and other stakeholders over the agreement to take those actions. Staff need to be open to acknowledging criticism in the form of client feedback, and – as highlighted throughout the event – to be accepting of failure and an ability to learn from it.

Staffing Structure

- Lines of Communication: Currently, the lines of hierarchy and management in many humanitarian organisations often block client feedback from getting to those who take decisions. We should improve processes and a culture of communication across teams and up and down the chain of command;
- Empowerment and Decentralised Decision-Making: Staff should be empowered to be able to take decisions to be responsive to their clients with an appropriate level of authority: humanitarian organisations should look at where they can decentralise decision making processes, whilst getting better at documenting and communicating within the organisation and back to the clients about those decisions. It was suggested that a wider-range of perspectives, that is, staff members from different levels of the hierarchy, be involved in contributing to decision-making processes. We also need to revisit the very sector, project or programme specific silos in which we take decisions: in order to be able to address clients feedback, we may often need to take decisions across teams (about the *way* in which we engage with clients, for example, or on an issue which doesn't relate to or doesn't relate specifically to any one team);
- A Culture of Feedback: Humanitarian organisations should foster a culture of feedback within their teams and across the organisation: this means regular feedback on a day-to-day basis as well as more formalised 360 degree review processes. A culture of feedback means that our staff will need to be able to both accept (and welcome) as well as provide constructive comment.

Technical Assistance / Support

- Accountability / Client-Responsiveness Technical Advisors: The groups advised that technical advisors on accountability and client-responsiveness should provide advice and guidance to field teams, and would be a conduit for sharing of best practices and knowledge, and would be tasked with capacity building of staff in the field as well as local partners. In the case of IRC, it was proposed that these advisors would sit within the Governance Technical Unit. It was recommended that staff in other departments which self-identify as having relevant expertise in this area also become focal points for ongoing assistance within country programmes;
- Guidance Documents and Tools: A number of the groups highlighted the need for documented guidance and tools to assist country programmes on an on-going basis, alongside the support from the technical advisors;
- Information Management: There was a recommendation that humanitarian organisations need to develop and be able to manage better IT systems for capturing, holding, and processing client perspectives. Technical capacity to develop and support the use of these would be needed.

Performance Management

- Staff Performance: It was suggested that client-responsive practices and competencies be included in the job descriptions of all staff members, and should be reviewed routinely. On a periodic basis, 360-degree feedback from staff and clients should be requested.
- Project Performance: Teams should also seek clients' views during project design and request that the clients define what success means to them (what are the outcomes that our clients define as being important?), and use that as a project performance measure.

Recruitment Processes

- HR in the Field: It was suggested that humanitarian organisations should have more HR staff based in the field to be able to conduct recruitment locally and also so that they themselves can have a better sense of programming requirements and of the types of skills needed by humanitarian staff to interact with clients;

- Competency-based Interviews: Humanitarian organisations should move towards competency-based interviews, or at least include more questions relating to competencies (over knowledge), as it are these attitudes and aptitudes which are particularly important when an organisation intends to improve its relationship with its clients and its responsiveness to them;
- Inductions: Humanitarian organisations should strengthen the consistency and content of their inductions, and include within these communication about the organisation's commitment towards client responsiveness and the types of skills that it expects its staff to demonstrate in this area. This should also include the start of an ongoing process of awareness raising and training around client-responsiveness;
- Specialist Positions / Focal Points: There was a suggestion for dedicated staff members to advise and guide others in a country programme on client-responsive practices, as well as a suggestion for there to be focal points of client responsiveness within each programme / sectoral team. Either option seems viable, depending on the resources of the programme and the state of its current practice in engaging with and responding to client feedback;
- Non (Humanitarian)-Traditional / Multiple Skillsets: It was suggested that humanitarian organisations should recruit from a wider-range of backgrounds and disciplines, in order to acquire the skill sets described above;
- International / National Staff Ratio: Picking up on the point running throughout the event, of the need to recognise the role of national staff in enabling an organisation to become more responsive, it was suggested that further investment be made in national staff. This is particularly important to build relationships with clients as these staff are often those out in the field on a daily basis, and typically stay in a country programme for a much longer period of time than the international staff do;
- Contracts: Many humanitarian organisations hire on short-term contracts, which undermines the ability of the organisation to build up the skills of its staff in client-responsive capacities. It was suggested that we should move towards longer-term contracts which offer staff members more job security and over-which period of time we are better able to invest in staff.

Main Findings and Recommendations

- Humanitarian organisations may wish to conduct an internal audit of staff roles and responsibilities, structures and human resource systems, and investments needed to make changes for greater client-responsive.
- The IRC will continue discussions with its Human Resources department and other teams responsible for the operational rollout of the IRC2020 strategy.

On the Use of Terms

- On the use of word "capture" when talking about listening of clients: IRC's intention was to use a word which conveys the proactive initiative that we believe humanitarian organisations should take to seek out the perspectives of their clients. Many of the other terms in use are too passive (such as "listen"); "collect" and "gather" suggest that our clients' views are just lying around ready to be taken. We recognise that all words are imperfect and many imply a value judgement;
- On the use of the word "client" as opposed to beneficiary: The IRC has chosen to use the term "client" given the greater sense of agency that the word carries, as opposed to the more passive recipient of aid which the term beneficiary encompasses. Client is the term most commonly used in the service industry in a market context, where the recipients of a service are able to decide which provider they would like to seek a certain service from and to stop using a certain provider if it doesn't meet their expectations. Recipients of humanitarian aid frequently do not have a choice over the service provider and an ability to "walk away" if the quality of the service is not satisfactory. Our use of the term aims to be deliberately provocative in highlighting the current lack of power that many of our clients have, and our desire to transfer power to them through the practices described above;
- On the use of the word "responsiveness" as opposed to "accountability": Responsiveness is within our control, while it is not self-evident that we can drive accountability. We can put structures in place for people to use to hold us accountable, but that doesn't automatically result in then actually being held accountable. Responsiveness lies within our power:

What Next?

The most frequently made comment made in the event evaluations as to what CVC could have done better concerned a sense of wanting to know more about what was next for the IRC in its work on client responsiveness.

Alyoscia closed the event with a few brief comments regarding this, but we also thought that this would be a good place to address that particular set of feedback!

Internally:

- The IRC is developing a Client Responsiveness Framework that will detail the organisation's approach to accountability to affected populations. This framework will accompany and/or reference a suite of products, including standards, guidance and routines, and tools, that IRC country programmes can use to implement each of the six stages—design, collect, analyse, decide, act, and review—of a client-responsive approach to programming. The IRC will seek to bring together various teams and initiatives working on developing and implementing various aspects of accountability to affected populations practice to provide coherence and benefit from the lessons learned by these teams;
- The IRC will define appropriately situated technical assistance for building capacity and advising country programmes. The IRC will continue to work on transforming the enabling environment. This means working within our organisation to identify the investments to create and sustain the capacities, capabilities, and structures to facilitate client-responsive programming. This requires testing interventions that show promise in incentivising behaviour change;
- The IRC will continue to learn, including through testing the Ground Truth approach active in CVC pilots in Greece, Kenya, South Sudan, and Southern Syria; the varied experiences of IRC country programmes implementing client feedback mechanisms; and further engaging with partners and donors;
- Under the banner of the IRC2020 Responsiveness objective, the IRC will harness the lessons and experience of the CVC initiative, aligning it with the IRC's work on partner responsiveness and context adaptability, and exploring the potential for a new strand of work around *staff* responsiveness (recognising the need to listen and better involve frontline staff).

Within the Wider Humanitarian Industry:

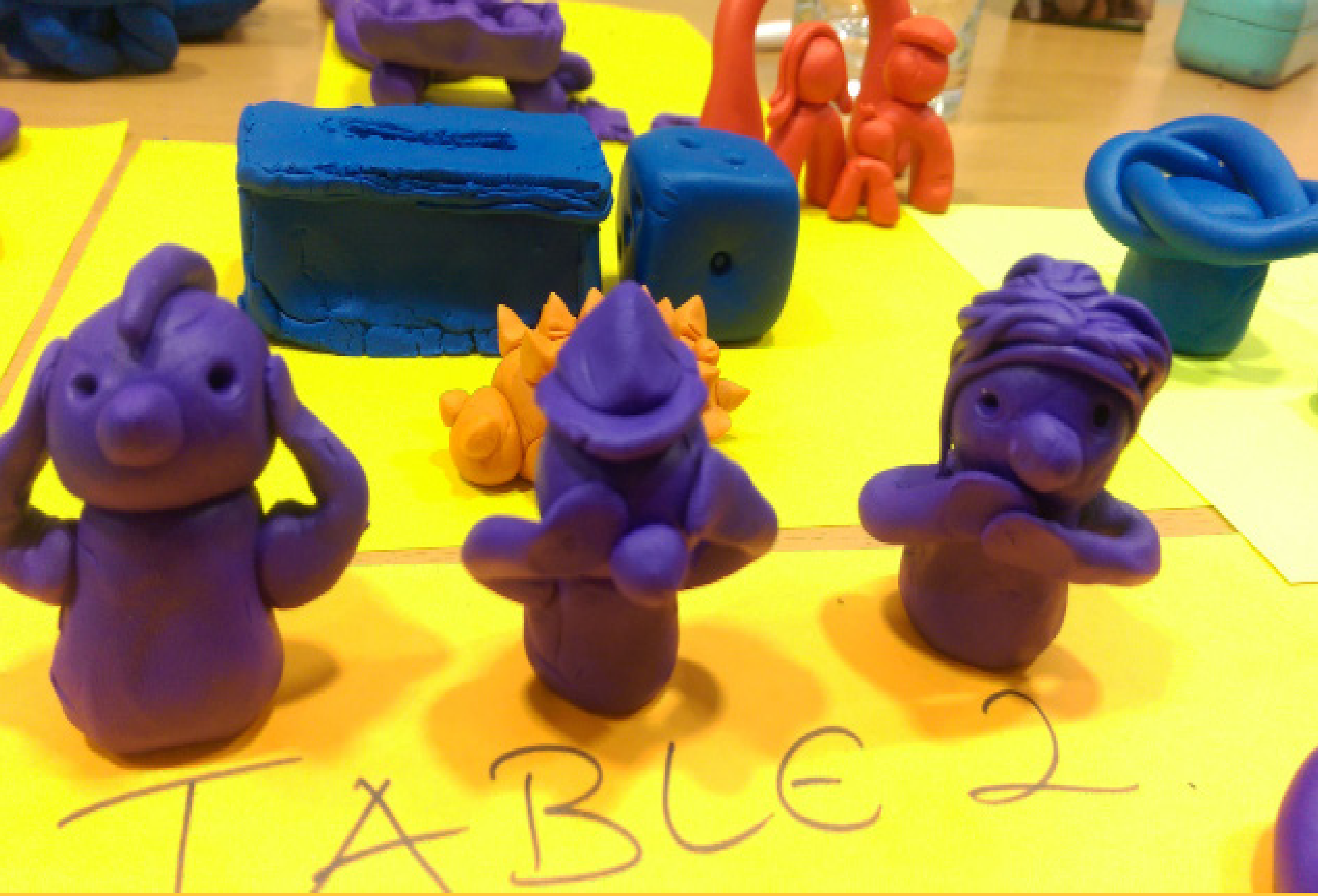
- The IRC are committed to playing a leading role in shaping the debate around client responsiveness and accountability to affected populations;
- The IRC will continue to partner and collaborate with peer humanitarian organisations and specialist research and policy-focused organisations to develop greater understanding and shift policies and practices in support of investments demonstrated to have a positive effect on client-responsive practices;
- The IRC will continue to publish—in the form of blogs, videos, and longer articles—on themes relating to client responsiveness, highlighting current deficiencies in the system and ways for the humanitarian community to work together to address those deficiencies;
- The IRC remains committed to transparency about what IRC clients think, and will identify ways to publicly publish this information, hoping this will motivate other organisations to do the same.

Keep in Touch

- **IRC2020:** For IRC staff, visit CVC on IRC2020, where you can read a summary of our strategy and plans, and where our resources will be made available: https://irc2020.rescue.org/initiatives/international/client-voice-choice
- **Client Responsiveness Video:** Watch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ick9ajqaRc
- **Medium**: Follow the International Rescue Committee on Medium, where CVC post blogs on themes relating to client responsiveness and the work that we are doing: https://medium.com/@theIRC
- **Chloe Whitley, IRC Senior Coordinator - Client Responsiveness:** Chloe.Whitley@rescue.org
- **Alyoscia D'Onofrio, IRC Senior Director - Governance:** Alyoscia.D'Onofrio@rescue.org

This work was conducted by the CVC initiative at the IRC, and funded with UK aid from the UK government.

UKaid from the British people



Client-Responsive Humanitarian Action

A Learning Exchange

Report Annex

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Overall Score

Would you recommend this Learning Exchange to a friend?
28 Respondents
0 = No Way and 10 = Definitely
Average response: 8.14

All comments provided by learning exchange participants in response to the event evaluations are included verbatim below.

Content

- The event did an extraordinary job of covering all the bases in an atmosphere of collegiality and learning.
- [The event allowed for] a lot of thinking outside of the box—the box of your organisation, your systems, and what you know and believe about how to do things. [It was] beneficial to learn how others do it and the role that you as an individual can pay in an organisation to move the AAP agenda forward
- [The workshop presented] thoughtful topics.
- A case study or two on the results of receiving client feedback and the course correction that followed, both positive and negative, would have been a good addition.
- I feel I have learned a lot about different approaches and I am coming out of [the learning exchange] with renewed motivation and ideas for my work.
- I gave 9 rather than 10 as I was left wanting on what would be the next steps, but that is very minor.
- Day 2 was particularly relevant and with actionable outputs.
- [The learning exchange] was useful to understand client responsiveness as related to quality service delivery.
- [The learning exchange] generated some really good ideas and insights.
- The event provided a lot of insights into how we can better interface with clients through feedback.
- The event provided insight into how we can internally generate and sustain productive dialogues.
- It was a true learning and practice exchange!
- Lots of ideas, but would have liked the event to be more concrete.
- It would have been nice to hear more about the IRC/Ground Truth pilots that have been happening in South Sudan, Kenya, Jordan, etc.
- There were some interesting updates from different organisations and departments.
- [The learning exchange was] very helpful to engage for an extended period of time on this; great to speak with colleagues who have similar interests.
- Perhaps more practical examples of case studies from country programmes and more from other organisations would have made it even more valuable.
- It was a very useful event in terms of learning about client responsiveness, what IRC is doing, and what some of the challenges are.
- Some sessions were more useful from a donor perspective and some more useful for staff.
- [The learning exchange provided] great content.
- [The learning exchange provided] great ideas, not shallow.
- Maybe one session on individual versus/and collective approaches to accountability to move away

from agency-centred discussions: put ourselves in the shoes of communities who are served by multiple stakeholders.

- [The learning exchange had an] awesome group of brains/ideas.
- [It was] very helpful to have space to discuss issues bigger than one organisation, which we're all struggling with/thinking about.
- [The learning exchange] turned to IRC's internal focus more than expected, but good learning.
- [The learning exchange provided] richness of the discussion
- [The learning exchange provided] practical advice and lessons learned being shared.
- I have learned a lot and I am taking away concrete ideas/actions that my organisation needs to put in place in order to strengthen AAP implementation
- I think it would have been great to have had an extra day to discuss the way forward or hear from other donors and senior management about the steps that will be taken as a result of the workshop.
- Overall, there were some really interesting ideas that came out and it would be great to go from theory to practical implementation.
- I left feeling a little unclear about the intended outcome of the workshop: I would have liked to understand more about what the IRC is doing now on client responsiveness and to have seen more national staff working directly with clients.
- The choice of topics was great.
- It connects a lot with the work that we do and the phases involved.

Structure and Facilitation

- [The learning exchange was] well organised.
- Energy and engagement was maintained throughout the two days.
- The sessions were well thought through in terms of themes, representation, and expertise level.
- There were some great practical exercises and brainstorming opportunities.
- [The learning exchange was the] first workshop where I have enjoyed the panels/speakers more than I have enjoyed the group work!
- [The learning exchange was] not too long.
- [The learning exchange was] very interactive.
- The agenda was well structured and balanced.
- [The learning exchange had] good panels and moderation.
- I think it would have been helpful to have more group work or small group discussions vs. panels.
- Panel discussions were good format.
- Break lengths allows for important networking time.
- It would have been good to have had more varied activities, to get up and move around more.
- [The learning exchange was a] very well thought through and organised event.
- [The learning exchange had] long enough breaks combined with a good mix of panel discussions and interactive work.
- [The learning exchange had] good networking opportunities.

Participants

- There was a good rapport between participants.
- [The learning exchange had a] good mixture of programme, M&E, and operational departments.
- [The learning exchange had a] good mix of people, internal and external.
- The participant list was one of the strengths of the event: a refreshingly different mix of people.
- It was a great mix of IRC and non-IRC colleagues, which brought diversity, creativity, and fresh ideas and perspectives.
- There were a great variety of participants.
- [The learning exchange had] a good cross-section of engaged and informed experts.
- [The learning exchange had] great participation from a cross section of stakeholders (field, donor, UN, other NGOs, researchers).
- Really liked the broad mix of positions/organisations involved. I would look forward to wider groups in the future, i.e. private sector and other donors.
- [The learning exchange had] a strong group.
- [The learning exchange] was useful because of the mix of participants, internal and external. It offered the opportunity to hear from multiple perspectives. More conferences should incorporate this idea.
- [It] would have been nice to have more participants from other NGOs.
- Great to hear the different perspectives.
- I thought the involvement of other agencies/external partners/donors worked really well and added an interesting dimension.
- There was a lot to learn from the wide and diverse combination of participants.

General Sentiments

- Hope there will be another learning exchange.
- Overall well done.
- Well done!
- Very good.
- Thank you!
- DFID in particular were brilliant!
- This was a great workshop that met all my expectations.
- Excellent event!

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