

MAR Update reports, ICRC comments

Below are the elements of the DFID MAR Update reports that ICRC would like to comment upon.

The feedback follows the structure of the DFID reports and each element of feedback follows a quote from the report, with the point of concern to ICRC underlined.

Summary Report.

- “ICRC willingness to engage with humanitarian partners in country is not consistent and depends in large part on the particular ICRC delegates in country.”

It is correct that ICRC Field Managers are key decision makers in delivery of the ICRC mandate. The authority they hold fits within a framework of institutional policy and is subject to oversight by the hierarchy of the ICRC in Geneva.

It is true that ICRC’s willingness to engage varies. ICRC believes that this variation is explained not by individual preference, but is the result of an analysis of each context, the needs, the political environment, the humanitarian landscape and, in particular, the requirement upon ICRC to adhere to fundamental principles which include Neutrality and Independence.

To present this another way, while the willingness to engage with humanitarian partners is always there, it has to be tempered by the question “what will allow the ICRC most effectively and efficiently to deliver its humanitarian mandate in this context?” ICRC strives to be consistent in this, rather than to have a standardised partnering approach in every context.

- “Increased transparency - new policy forums with donors and willingness to integrate with the wider international humanitarian system.”

While much is being done to increase transparency and engage effectively with the wider humanitarian system, integration is not a goal for ICRC. It believes that it, and the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement as a whole, occupies a particular and important niche in the wider system and that the system benefits from having a range of different types of actor, with distinct mandates and modes of action.

ICRC argues that all the components of the wider humanitarian system, itself included, have an obligation to share information, coordinate and work together for a shared goal - to advance best practices and to bring efficiency in the overall operational response.

MAR Reform Component.

ICRC notes that multi-disciplinary teams were formed in each pilot delegation to lead the sustainable development work in the selected field locations, backed up by a small unit at the Geneva level.

Main Report, Transparency and Accountability Section

21. “ICRC, as an independent humanitarian organisation, will only offer its services if requested by a government or de facto authority.”

ICRC is free to offer its services at any time, based upon the mandate it has been given by States. Authorities are able to refuse such offers however, and indeed ICRC can be asked to leave.

23. "Yes. ICRC continues to involve beneficiaries and community leaders in both pre-intervention assessments and project monitoring. Views are sought to understand what needs exist, what has changed in the community as a result of activities undertaken and any negative consequences of assistance or protection activities implemented. ICRC also includes community feedback into its planning for field operations, with the objective of encouraging communities to maintain their surroundings in a manner that is beneficial to them. However, ICRC has no standardised approach. This issue was also flagged in the MAR." The general principle of beneficiary involvement, throughout the project cycle, is ingrained in ICRC's way of working across its four programme areas, and is particularly relevant for Assistance, Protection and Cooperation. ICRC runs operations in 80 diverse contexts and in a broad range of programming sub-sectors, including health, war surgery, visits to places of detention, water supply, veterinary services, capacity building of National Societies, nutrition and a dozen others. With such a range of work, no one standardised approach is possible across the board. ICRC uses guidelines and sub-sectoral standards to orient its activities, however, in preference to defining top-down requirements, it will maintain its context-specific and needs-driven approach to engaging with beneficiaries.

25. "ICRC has made 25 assessments/evaluations/reviews public between January 2011 and May 2012 but it does not yet have a systematic approach to evaluation. In some cases it is clear that beneficiaries were consulted..."

Please see comments for 26. below. ICRC uses evaluative exercises as tools that can help to understand and address identified issues. Given the scale of ICRC's global programming, and the high cost of professional reviews, there is a limit to the number of such exercises that can be undertaken. ICRC will continue to use assessments, evaluations and reviews in a targeted way.

26. "More widely on evaluation issues, ICRC has taken steps to address the lack of a systematic approach to evaluation and is developing an evaluation framework. A provisional timeframe of end 2012 had been set for the development of the framework. It is not clear at the beginning of 2013 whether this framework is in place, although a list of preliminary findings has been identified and agreed within ICRC."

A decision was taken not to pursue the evaluation framework development, at least until 2014 and the appointment of a new Directorate team. In 2012, the Institutional Performance Management (IPM) unit continued to collect information on needs with regard to evaluative exercises (evaluations and reviews). It also extended its services to commissioning bodies not only for independent evaluations with external consultants and/or global coverage, but also for other evaluative exercises (e.g. internal reviews). Given limited resources, this approach was considered to offer more added-value to the organisation than the development of a new framework and strategy.

27. "Greater transparency around evaluation methodology and approach would be helpful and joint evaluations with other donors would be a positive step to greater understanding."

ICRC shares the results of numerous internal reviews and evaluations with DFID and other important donors, including terms of references and methodologies as appropriate. Today the engagement of a partner, or external consultants, within evaluative teams is common practice for ICRC. 2012 saw the publication of several reports of programme reviews, in which the methodologies were presented in detail, along with the results, both positive and negative, which were obtained.

Given the cost of undertaking thorough, professional reviews, as well as sometimes serious operational constraints in conflict areas, ICRC continues to favour a selective and smart use of such processes, rather than a standardised approach. External, internal and (increasingly) combined teams will conduct evaluative exercises to address specific needs around effectiveness and efficiency in such a way that lessons are learnt and applied to future programming.

28. “Meanwhile, beneficiary satisfaction surveys undertaken by ICRC had an average score of 80% in the five years prior to the MAR. ICRC has undertaken to maintain this score at a minimum but to aim for an increase in overall satisfaction with the assistance it provides by 2014.”

The figure of 80% was derived from only a sample of reports. ICRC is concerned that the averaging of beneficiary satisfaction data from diverse programmes, contexts and methodologies may not give the best indicator of performance.

Establishing the impact of programmes on individual beneficiaries, families and communities is essential and ICRC uses a range of indicators, particularly outcome measures (food consumption patterns, harvest production, income or expenditure levels, asset accumulation, ownership of essential household items etc.) and social data, as well as beneficiary satisfaction per se. ICRC remains particularly conscious of the importance of using objective indicators as a major part of the data collected