

Management Response & Recommendations Action Plan

Evaluation Report Title: Evaluation of the Developing Operational Research Capacity in the Health Sector Project

Response to Evaluation Report (overarching narrative)

Management response

Overall the evaluation report has successfully met the objectives set out in the project Terms of Reference. Reliable and timely evidence has been produced which has informed the next phase of this programme whilst keeping within the project budget. Looking ahead, this model of research training could be expanded beyond health and the evidence from the evaluation could be useful to help progress planning in other sectors.

A key recommendation of the programme's annual review was that an external evaluation of the programme should be carried out for both accountability and lesson learning purposes. In addition to this, the evaluation aimed to provide valuable lessons to the wider research and development community on this approach to capacity building, both within health and to other sectors thus magnifying positive impacts. Importantly, the evaluation was timed to inform decisions on the future direction of this programme.

The evaluation found the research capacity programme to be highly effective, with the relevance and quality of the training high. The report noted that this model of training is an innovative undertaking that may set the standard for other operational research capacity building models. The full evaluation report is published on R4D [here](#).

Key successes of the evaluation included producing reliable findings that have informed the next phase of the programme and keeping within the project budget. This was achieved by collecting appropriate, timely and reliable evidence to inform programming in this area.

Most stages were completed to timetable and the interim and draft reports provided timely findings of use to DFID. Improving the drafting of the final report to publishable standard proved to be a protracted process, with time and effort put in by both DFID and the supplier. Additionally, there were evaluation design challenges as the nature of data collection was self-reporting and the qualitative strand could have involved further exploration of organisations. However, overall, within the time and budget given, this evaluation has produced independent and reliable evidence that has been used to inform programming.

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The evidence generated from the evaluation has ensured that DFID can establish impact and value for money and form a solid basis in which to expand the programme. This has been achieved by working closely with the DFID programme manager and the Union themselves.

Given the very positive overall conclusion about the programme, the evaluation team have presented a number of recommendations for consideration rather than firm recommendations for action. The recommendations from the final report were included in the work plan for the programme expansion and will be formally reviewed in each quarterly technical report.

More widely, the published final report is expected to be of value to the OR community, research capacity building programmes, research funders and others. The evaluation will help to inform planning in other sectors. For example, informing planning in the East Africa Research Hub as to the application of this model to the humanitarian sector.

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Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If “Accepted”, Action plan for Implementation or if “Rejected”, Reason for Rejection
Recommendations in relation to the courses		
A strong country-focused approach to the sourcing of participants is needed to create critical mass and a supportive local network of OR researchers and sustain the course’s achievements with maximum impact. The strategy to date has been to source course participants widely, which worked well to raise visibility in the early years of running the OR courses, but has left some newly trained OR researchers isolated.	Accepted	The programme expansion will include three national level courses in India, Myanmar and Ethiopia. Targeted selection according to geography, organisation and theme has been included in the participant selection process.
Team-based projects rather than individual projects should be considered as these proved effective in the benchmark cases of OR courses. This delivery method creates shared learning and management practices, and potentially nucleates sustainable networks. This delivery method could be particularly useful when course participants come from the same organisation. It is however important to ensure that teams are small enough that members can learn all aspects of OR to a high standard.	Rejected	This has not been included in programme expansion as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -participant selection is linked to individual research proposals -could negatively impact the dynamics of the course (as not all team members are equally interested in learning) -reduces the breadth or research generated by the course -previous experience from India (Bangalore OR Course) indicates that this model has more disadvantages (not all team members are equally interested in learning; not each member feels responsible for meeting milestones; usually one team-member, usually lower in organisational hierarchy, does most of the work while the more senior team member gets credit like being the first-author etc), than advantages (reaching out to more participants: 30-35 instead of usual 12. It does help in advocacy and securing political commitments as one of the team members is usually a senior person capable of taking policy decisions).
The selection of participants and the process of assessment should be made more transparent. An objective scoring system should be established so that potential participants	Accepted	The current selection process is based on numerous factors including individual aptitude and the strength/saliency of research proposal as well as wider factors such as strategic considerations and the need to create a critical mass within an

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are aware of the requirements at the time of application.		<p>organisation. The Union also does not have the capacity to provide individual feedback to unsuccessful participants and this is stated in the application material.</p> <p>However as the programme is scaled up, a more systematic and objective method will be piloted (taking into account the above considerations).</p>
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There is scope for involving the Ministries of Health and national TB programmes in selecting the research topics for projects. This should increase the likelihood of projects being aligned to national and regional priorities as well as increasing the influence and potential uptake of results by policy makers. This appeared to be a practice adopted by benchmark OR training courses.	Accepted	The Union will aim to engage with key stakeholders in the Health Ministries of India, Myanmar and Ethiopia (target countries) through alumni networks and links with the World Health Organisation (WHO). It is practically too difficult to do this for the regional OR Courses.
Research output and its implementation should be better linked through improved dissemination practices (beyond open access publications). An implementation plan should be drawn up and shared with policy makers as an integral part of the project. Access to established networks through, for example, the WHO and MSF is crucial in this regard.	Accepted	<p>Research dissemination and communication has been included in the work plan of the programme extension. A representative from the Union / MSF Communications team is now involved in Module 3 to assist with the messaging and dissemination to the lay audience beyond the scientific paper.</p> <p>The Union will also engage with key stakeholders at an early stage to identify salient health research topics to make sure they are interested in the results of the research. The Union has also suggested including these stakeholders as co-authors to encourage participation and interest.</p>
Introduce short courses for OR consumers to facilitate the uptake (and future funding) of OR in national settings. This type of courses proved effective at benchmark programmes.	Rejected	<p>Standalone research uptake courses for consumers are beyond the scope of the programme but a research uptake and communication lecture and session has been added to the main course (see above).</p> <p>The Union will also seek to engage with other DFID funded programmes, such as BCURE aimed at training research users.</p>

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Recommendations	Accepted or Rejected	If “Accepted”, Action plan for Implementation or if “Rejected”, Reason for Rejection
Recommendations in relation to the fellowship programme		
Develop a clear structure for the fellowship programme and define roles and responsibilities. Support Fellows in their career development by providing access to mentorship, knowledge sharing and skill-development workshops.	Accepted	<p>Fellows already work to a clear set of agreed objectives with clear progression from junior to senior fellow to then completing a PHD. They also received logistical support and technical training</p> <p>However with 5 years of funding the Union is able to build on this structure to carry out more long term and strategic activities to support fellows including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – strategic selection of fellows and alumni – better collaboration and communication between fellows (monthly meetings, online network) – opportunities for fellows to work collaboratively with other fellows on research projects
Encourage Fellows to develop course material relevant to their own region and organise and facilitate OR courses in addition to The Union’s courses. This ‘spill-over effect’ would be a practical way to further spread knowledge regarding OR.	Accepted	<p>Short courses and online material is being developed that the fellows can apply in their own countries</p> <p>A strategic aim in the next five years is to build a critical mass of trained alumni around the OR fellows (even beyond target countries) in the hope that they can obtain adequate resources to run their own national OR courses.</p>
Recommendations in relation to sustainability and value for money		
Build a wider pool of experts and facilitators with knowledge relevant to the diversity of topics apparent in research projects. This could mitigate against some of the risks associated with reliance on a very small number of people at The Union. Thought needs to be given to succession planning in relation to the pioneers of the project in order to ensure its sustainability.	Accepted	<p>This is happening through the programme expansion. A succession plan is inherent and explicit in the five year DFID programme with the deputy director of research moving to director in 2017.</p> <p>Qualitative experts are also being considered as fellows to expand the technical knowledge base.</p>

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Establish 'training the trainers' and other courses in partnership with universities and research organisations that would continue activities without The Union's assistance after set up. These courses could ensure motivated participants and organisations and have been seen at benchmark organisations to work well. If such partnerships are established, there may be opportunities to introduce new, cost-shared models.	Accepted	<p>No plans or resources as yet to specifically "train the trainers". However, one of the important philosophies of Union/MSF OR capacity building is to bring fellows and good alumni to OR courses where they act as facilitators and mentors paired with senior staff. Thus, these targeted individuals learn on the job and several have on their own initiative then run OR courses in their countries and regions. This is monitored on a systematic basis.</p> <p>In addition, well-qualified, senior and interested people from other organizations who want to learn our approach are brought in as 'observers' into the course who could then apply the learning in their own settings. Currently, we have no resources for observers to self-fund their attendance in the courses.</p>
Consider reducing the ratio of facilitators to participants, particularly if team-based projects are introduced. This could increase the value for money but needs to be done with due consideration to maintain the current high quality of course delivery.	Rejected	On the contrary, the Union is planning on increasing this ratio as it is key to ensuring that junior faculty are paired and learn from senior faculty (see above) and have sufficient time to properly mentor new participants. It is estimated that the overall value for money increases with this approach in the long-run as the Union is simultaneously training the course participants and future mentors.
Consider supporting course participants to access further independent funding for future OR projects. Proposal writing and budgeting skills are essential in this respect and can form part of short courses provided by The Union or others.	Accepted	Yes. While it is difficult to incorporate these into an already busy course schedule, plans are in place to inform all alumni at the end of a course about Union IMDP management courses and about course organised and supported through the WHO special programme for training and research in tropical diseases.
Improve community building among past and new OR practitioners with a Community of Practice IT platform so that virtual networking can take place. This could also store questions, answers, issues encountered and solutions.	Accepted	Yes. The "OR Network" is set up with over 100 alumni registered and using the site as of December 2014.
Generalisable lessons		
In the view of the study experts, there is a strong potential for applying The Union's modular training model linked to research projects in other areas of health research and beyond. Therefore it is recommended that DFID considers this training model to support OR development in other	Accepted	<p>The Union have already taken on projects beyond health per se on climate and rainfall, food security and livelihoods and civil vital registration systems.</p> <p>The Union team is also in discussions with other organisations to provide funding to pilot the model in other areas such as tobacco control.</p>

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projects in their portfolio.		DFID will also be considering how this model could be applied to other sectors, drawing on lessons from the programme evaluation and annual reviews.
Sourcing course participants from selected organisations in a given country may enhance cooperation and cost-sharing of training courses. The Union should consider working increasingly at organisational level, as this was a positive lesson learnt from the benchmark programmes.	Accepted	The Union will aim to do this when the country-focus courses start. In India, where they have run national courses for 2-3 years, sourcing participants from the National TB Control Programme and various non-governmental organizations linked to or working closely with this government body.
MSF also has multiple disease areas of interest where OR could be usefully applied. However, additional facilitators would need to be trained as the current Union/MSF pool is relatively specialised on TB and HIV.	Accepted	That is correct but the Union have six years of experience now with working in OR projects in other areas such as tropical diseases, maternal and child health, nutrition, non-communicable diseases and so on. The combined knowledge and experience in these areas is growing.
There is potential for further use of this training model in cooperation with the WHO and their wider programme environment, giving access to networks, policy makers and practitioners, which would widen the model's ability to influence.	Accepted	The Union agrees as in ongoing communication with WHO on this matter.

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