Challenges in humanitarian programming

1.Accountability

INGOs have committed to comply with the Core Humanitarian Standard commitment on accountability which is: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints – Complaints are welcomed and addressed. Three main channels are used:

- Reactive channels that provide an opportunity for people to share their feedback and lodge complaints when they desire to do so and about what they want. *Examples include*: suggestions boxes, hotlines

- Proactive channels: where we ask people for their feedback. We control who is asked, when, and with what question topics and wording. *Examples* include: post-distribution monitoring, participatory child-friendly feedback consultations, feedback focus group discussions, interviews; health facility exit interviews

- Channels that capture daily interaction and communication between frontline field workers and affected people during programme implementation.

2.Moving cash to deep field locations

One key modality of support provided by humanitarian actors is cash-based assistance. It is challenging but OFTEN more transparent, as it is clear what amounts of cash are given to those in need. It is as well dignifying, as it addresses people's true needs giving them the capacity to decide what they require. Transferring cash to areas in conflict is exposed to risks of aid diversion, which in the first-place donors and their humanitarian implementing partners (including INGOs) want to avoid at all costs. Hence, INGOs have heavy compliance processes in place to minimize risks.

3.Access

Insecurity is a permanent challenge (non-state armed groups) as well as access to Hard 2 Reach places. Institutions such as the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are working with INGOs to improve access to difficult locations in affected countries.

4.Baselines

Projects baselines situations are likely to decline due to the nature of humanitarian actions (eg IDPs, returnees, etc). Over time, baselines situation is changing, hence evaluating humanitarian projects will translate in challenges such as the reliability in progress measures, the evidence of success in interventions, the plausibility of projects' theory of change, even about the generation of knowledge.

5.Learning moments are very limited

Opportunities to generate good practices accruing from monitoring and evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies could be limited due the nature of programming, security issues and implementation priorities. As such being a learning organisation that is skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights remains a recurrent challenge.

6.High staff turnover

Humanitarian projects have tended to be shorter compared to projects in other sectors, such as international development. Staff may not stay very long within a response for numerous reasons (contracts, security, family, etc). So sometimes, finding key informants and resource persons for feedbacks on programming can be challenging.