

REVIEW PROACTIVE AREA MEAL

December 2017

Purpose of the review

- To identify key lessons and recommendations to improve ongoing work and inform future initiatives within Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL). An expected result from the mid-term review is also to develop recommendations on the way forward of the thematic area within the frame of the SRC Humanitarian Strategy 2016-2019. Five evaluation criteria will be assessed:
 - 1. Relevance and appropriateness**
 - 2. Effectiveness**
 - 3. Efficiency**
 - 4. Coverage**
 - 5. Sustainability**

Methodology

- Internally conducted review with limited resources in terms of budget and time. The methods used include:
 - Desk review (PMER advisors)
 - Online survey (Peer NS and PMER counterparts at the IFRC)
 - SWOT analysis workshop on SRC proactive areas (SRC advisors responsible for the proactive areas)
- Process oriented review with focus on the learning from working with a new thematic area in SRC's International Humanitarian Assistance.

Background proactive area MEAL

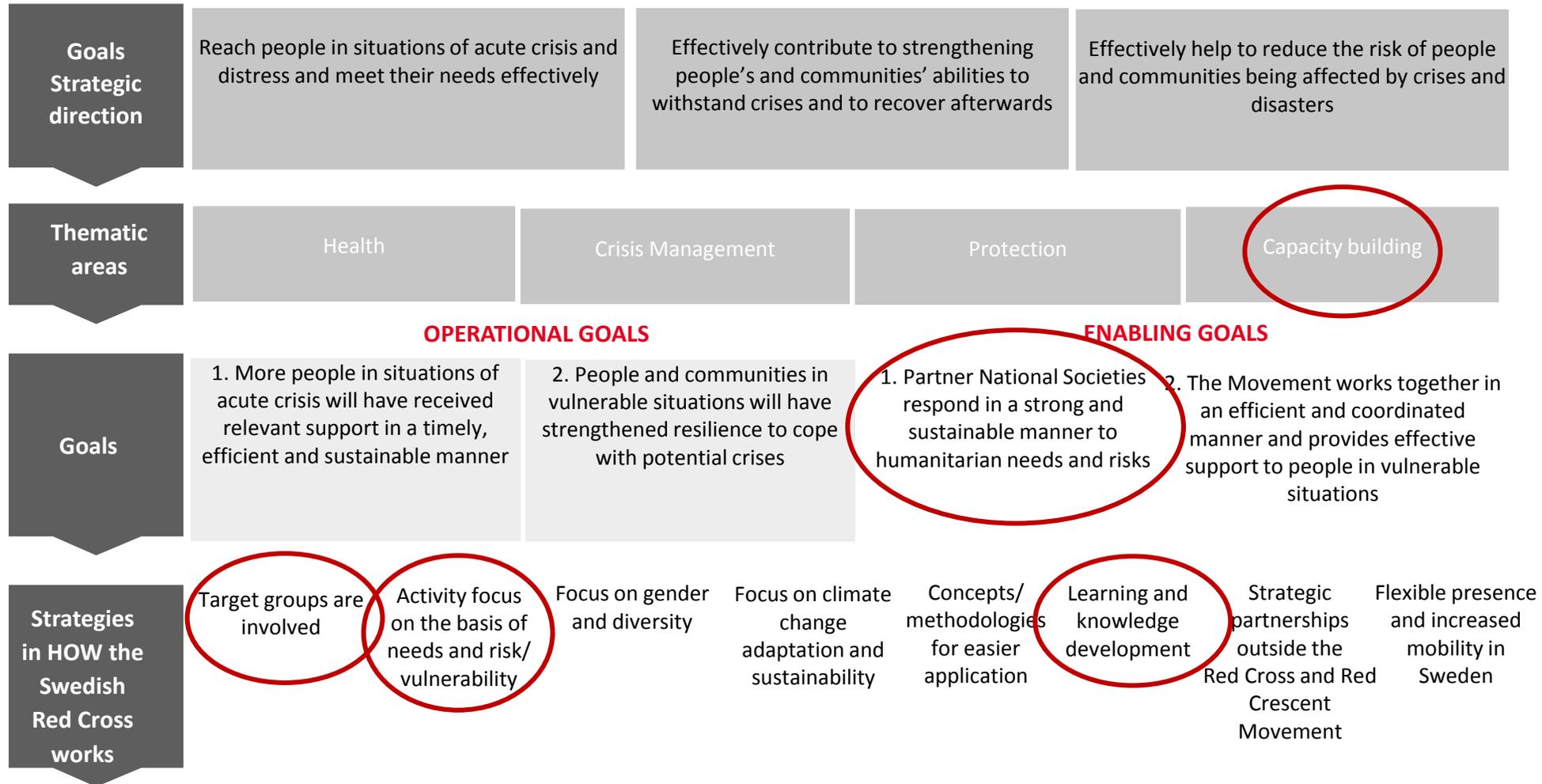
- In June 2013, the SRC board approved four thematic areas for the SRC: Gender, Sanitation in Emergencies (SanE), Volunteering in Emergencies (ViCE), and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL).
- The International department developed three year project plans for each area for 2014-2016.
- MEAL was a new thematic area for the SRC and aimed at improving programme performance as well as accountability to affected populations, with a view to achieve two expected impacts: increased learning and improved participation of people affected by crises. The outcomes included:
 - PMER framework processes started in all partnership countries
 - Demand for PMER support from partner NS
 - SRC promotes/leads joint PMER capacity building pilot projects in selected partner countries
 - SRC leads/participates in joint/partner led/strategic/'own internal' evaluations
 - Accountability to Beneficiaries pilot activities in all partner NS (in programmes or emergency interventions)
 - SRC is HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Project) certified

FINDINGS

Relevance & appropriateness

- The aspirational objectives of MEAL allowed an innovative/ exploratory approach to contribute to the achievement of the expected impacts and outcomes, and guided the new areas of work developed in MEAL: PMER capacity building (CB), learning and evaluations, and development of standards for community participation (later Community Engagement and Accountability, CEA). This approach is deemed as relevant, considering that the areas of work were pilot activities.
- MEAL focused mostly on Movement initiatives and partners within PMER CB and CEA while the engagement with external networks and initiatives was limited. There was no specific engagement within the Movement or external partners or initiatives within evaluations and learning. The limited engagement with external initiatives within MEAL is considered a missed opportunity.
- For future action to strengthen learning and knowledge management at SRC it would be important to link the work with the work streams of the Grand Bargain and the World Humanitarian Summit.

Relevance & appropriateness cont.: MEAL in SRC's Humanitarian Strategy 2016-2019



Effectiveness

- The MEAL project goals were not fully achieved. It was challenging to adopt a linear, predictable approach when piloting new areas of work. A more flexible way of working which allowed changes over time was considered more effective.
- SRC's work on PMER CB of other NS is mostly referred to by Movement partners and is a clear added value of MEAL, followed by the support to CEA.
- The initial plan to provide PMER CB and CEA support to all long-term partners of SRC was modified to only include partners with a clear demand of as well as buy-in and support to institutional change processes. The flowchart developed by the SRC on prerequisites when initiating a PMER CB project with a NS is a result of this lesson learned.
- SRC developed the first PMER capacity assessment tool, which was later adopted by the IFRC and developed into a self-assessment tool. SRC piloted this self-assessment tool in Myanmar.
- Towards the end of the project period, SRC developed a theory of change for PMER CB, as well as a mapping of the components included in the PMER CB support.
- Movement partners' support and interest for PMER CB has increased, even though funding for CB still is a challenge.

Effectiveness cont.

- The support in PMER and CEA was not integrated with support in other areas relating to National Society Development. This area of work would have benefitted from a more holistic understanding of NS capacities and change processes.
- The dialogue with SRC's geographical units was crucial to deliver on PMER CB and CEA, to ensure a sustained support to NS in these areas.
- Movement partners increasingly engaged in the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) to enhance their work on accountability.
- The work to enhance evaluations and learning was less developed and exclusively focused on the International department and was hence not mentioned by partners.
- SRC increasingly conducted internal reviews of working methods and strategies as well as learning workshops on specific topics. SRC also carried out two joint evaluations during the project period; one on consortia as a cooperation mechanism and one on PMER CB.
- A strategic approach to evaluations and learning was developed by some Movement partners, including how evaluations can contribute to strategy and/ or policy implementation.

Efficiency

- Timeliness is challenging to assess since the implementation of new areas of work in MEAL was not strictly linear. A more flexible approach supported learning from the roll-out of MEAL as the pilot actions and lessons learned were continuously applied.
- The PMER advisor resources to implement MEAL increased, but were divided between work on MEAL and internal support in relation to SRC planning cycle and PMER tools.
- Organisational changes as a result of CB support required more time than initially assumed.
- Collaboration with domestic services on MEAL was not fully achieved during the project period, even though some cooperation was carried out in regard to the SRC response to the unprecedented number of asylum seekers arriving in Sweden in 2015.

Coverage

- Six partner NS main counterparts in PMER CB, foremost PMER departments/ units/ sections and in-country PNS, but NS senior management was also a target group. Additional NS reached through support to IFRC regional PMER programmes in East Africa, Asia Pacific, and West Africa.
- Staff at SRC's International department was the main target group within evaluations and learning.
- Two NS were involved in the SRC CEA support; Myanmar RC and Sudan RC, mainly staff in communications and PMER at the NS. Additional NS reached through support to IFRC regional CEA programmes in East Africa and Asia Pacific.
- SRC increased the number of partner NS considerably between 2014 and 2016, which affected the overall coverage of PMER and CEA CB support.

Sustainability

- The intended collaboration with SRC's domestic services in the proactive area never materialised, SRC's work on learning and accountability in Sweden is still an area for cooperation to be developed.
- Support and ownership of senior management at targeted NS in PMER CB considered a key sustainability factor that gained more importance but is still posing a challenge.
- About half of the planned programme evaluations each year were actually conducted and very few of them were followed by management responses, which indicate a rather low interest for evaluation findings and recommendations. This is considered a missed opportunity for learning at SRC's International department.
- The internal reviews of SRC's working methods and strategies were not been linked to learning needs in relation to the SRC Humanitarian Strategy or other strategies, resulting in a lack of strategic direction on evaluations and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Action points to deliver on the focus on capacity building in the Humanitarian Strategy:**
 - PMER CB to be integrated with other NSD areas. The gathered experience and knowledge on NS long-term change processes and how to sustain them is needed to take the PMER CB processes forward.
 - Increased dialogue with SRC's geographical units on CB support to NS: the importance of NSs' demand, buy-in and support, as well as the time required to achieve institutional changes. Institutional CB support requires long-term partnership with NS.
 - PMER CB project level assessment and support to be developed, need to adapt CB support to SRC's revised framework for cooperation.
 - Develop surge capacity in MEAL; pool of regional MEAL experts and consultants to support NS in PMER.

- **Action points to deliver on the strategy on learning and knowledge development in the Humanitarian Strategy:**
 - Develop an evaluation/ learning strategy for SRC's International department to increase interest for and use of evaluation findings and recommendations.
 - Engagement with external initiatives and networks on evaluations and learning, such as ALNAP, to enhance evaluation practice and skills.

- **Action points to deliver on the strategy on involvement of the target group in the Humanitarian Strategy:**
 - Develop joint MEAL, CEA and G&D trainings further and coordinated NSD within these areas
 - Strengthen CEA core competencies for SRC staff and delegates and support this process for Movement at large
 - Develop position on how to relate to CHS
 - Support strategic CEA positions within Movement (surge and long-term) as well as CEA champions at NS