



Consultation on Performance Benchmarks for Australian Aid ICRC feedback

Introduction

The ICRC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on Performance Benchmarks for Australian Aid. Past assessments of the ICRC under the Australian Multilateral Assessment Framework (AMA) have proven useful in directing our efforts to improve effectiveness and efficiency at the level of our Institution.

The consultation paper "Performance Benchmarks for Australian Aid" mentions different levels at which performance benchmarks for the Australian aid program could be developed. In fact, our input focuses mainly on the proposed level III (implementing organisation) and level IV (individual project) performance benchmarks. It also touches upon the suggested level II (program) benchmarks.

In the first section, we address some of the specificities of humanitarian aid and highlight characteristics we believe should be considered when developing benchmarks for humanitarian organisations.

In the second section, we discuss some of the rating dimensions of the existing AMA framework. We believe it is useful to explore concrete measures already in use and discuss their appropriateness for developing new performance benchmarks. Accordingly, our feedback covers dimensions that are particularly relevant for humanitarian organisations as well as dimensions that are perhaps less appropriate for such organisations.

In the last section, we make some comments on other specific issues mentioned in the consultation paper.

Throughout this document, whenever relevant or deemed useful, we make reference to ICRC practice in performance management.

1) The nature of humanitarian work

Some characteristics of humanitarian aid should be considered when benchmarking humanitarian organisations. For the ICRC, these specificities can be drawn directly from its mission:

- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

- The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.
- Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

One important element is the dual nature of the ICRC's work, which developed along two lines. The first of these is operational, i.e. helping victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. The second involves developing and promoting international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. Depending on the nature of specific activities, the challenges of performance management and demonstrating results are quite different.

In the case of activities related to developing and promoting international humanitarian law and principles, related objectives and results tend to be very long term and more difficult to measure. Performance measures are therefore more process-oriented and take the form of progress markers or milestones, as the effects of such activities can only be observed in a more distant future. Tailored program reference frameworks are currently being developed.

ICRC's operational activities aim at swiftly responding to essential assistance and protection needs of people affected by an emergency situation or a protracted crisis. Access to the affected population and the capacity to mobilise necessary resources in a short timeframe are key criteria for the success of such activities. For this type of intervention, the ICRC has developed program reference frameworks that help its teams in the field to define measurable objectives and indicators, allowing for subsequent assessment of results achieved through monitoring, review and evaluation exercises.

Another important element to consider is the type of situations in which humanitarian organisations operate. In armed conflict and other situations of violence, the environment is often fragile, the prevailing security situation volatile and the overall operating environment may change quickly. The delivery of basic public services, often of a life-saving nature, is disrupted or no longer functioning. At the same time, on-going hostilities may exacerbate the difficulties of the affected population, despite the aid provided.

These issues are to be considered when measuring and benchmarking the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid and organisations. This is all the more important because measuring performance drives organisational behaviour and may influence expected behaviour. Focusing exclusively on efficiency and cost effectiveness could lead to aid programmes targeting populations that are easy to reach and providing services that are easy to measure, leaving certain populations behind and certain needs uncovered.

Therefore, cost effectiveness measures should be combined with more qualitative benchmark criteria, which take into account the specific environment in which humanitarian organisations operate. In the case of the ICRC, the fact that it targets the most vulnerable populations as a matter of priority, that it often has access to affected populations in situations where other organisations do not, and that it applies a multi sectorial and "all-victims" approach all contribute to an effective humanitarian response. Other criteria of this type are the ability to rapidly scale up operations as the situation requires, as well as the capacity to prefund a timely response to an unfolding emergency.

2) The Australian Multilateral Assessment (AMA) Framework

This section focuses on some of the rating dimensions of the existing AMA framework that are particularly relevant for humanitarian organisations, as well as dimensions that may be less appropriate for performance benchmarking.

- Demonstrates development or humanitarian results consistent with mandate:

This is equally relevant for both humanitarian and development organisations. Improving its capacity to demonstrate results has been a priority for the ICRC for several years and will lead to the progressive development and use of program reference frameworks as well as upgraded planning and monitoring tools.

- Plays critical role in improving aid effectiveness through results monitoring:

This dimension applies to both humanitarian and development organizations. Assessing progress and measuring results against set objectives is key for improving aid effectiveness.

Where relevant, targets the poorest people and in areas where progress against the MDGs is lagging:

Although the MDGs are not necessarily a primary focus for humanitarian organisations, this measure may still be relevant as conflict often induces or exacerbates poverty, in regions where little or no progress against the MDGs have been made.

Cost and value consciousness:

This is relevant for any type of organisation that strives for optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes.

If costing ratios or similar benchmarks are developed for humanitarian organisations and their services, the design and the application of such measures should take into account the potential adverse effects this might have on organisational behaviour and ultimately on the aid program as a whole.

The ICRC uses its Planning for Results (PfR) process to define measurable objectives based on an all-victims approach, analysing vulnerabilities to ensure that specific needs related to people's circumstances, the risks and violations they are exposed to, and their gender and age are taken into account. Cost considerations are an integral part of this process.

Delivering results on poverty and sustainable development in line with mandate:

For a humanitarian organisation operating in fragile contexts and delivering emergency aid, this measure seems less appropriate, as sustainability may in many cases be out of reach during an emergency or protracted conflict.

When entering the recovery phase, sustainability criteria will become more important. However, performance benchmarks applied to recovery phases should differ from performance benchmarks applied to development programs.

Plays a critical role at global or national level in coordinating development or humanitarian efforts:

Although this rating may not be appropriate for all humanitarian organizations, the ICRC does play an important coordination role, in line with its mandate.

Coordination between actors is essential to avoid duplication and to ensure an effective and efficient humanitarian response.

3) Additional comments on the Consultation Paper

In this section, we provide feedback on some of the other points mentioned in the consultation paper:

Section 5 – At the country program level, performance could be measured against several criteria. These could include: 1) an assessment of the results produced by the resources delivered by the Australian Government.

As indicated previously, demonstrating results in a humanitarian context may not always be possible, if, for instance, an on-going conflict is hampering efforts to support and assist victims. In such situations, it may be necessary to complement result benchmarks with other benchmark criteria before taking a decision to redirect aid.

Section 5 – At the country program level, performance could be measured against several criteria. These could include: 2) an assessment of progress of the partner government or organisation in achieving its obligations towards common development goals.

Development goals are often not part of the mandate and not the primary focus of humanitarian organisations. However, such organisations may indirectly contribute to these goals as they often support and assist the poorest people in countries where little or no progress has been made.

Section 5 – At the country program level, performance could be measured against several criteria. These could include: 2) Mutual obligations could reflect pre-existing commitments by partner governments contained in their national development plans or corporate strategies in the case of implementing organisations.

With respect to corporate strategies, this is an option that most humanitarian organisations would likely welcome as it uses performance measures based on indicators that organisations are already following for internal purposes.

Section 8) – There is potential to revise the existing systems used to assess the performance of the aid program's implementing partners (including international organisations, NGO's and contractors) to ensure that funding is directed to the most effective partners. This could include reviewing the following: 1. The Australian Multilateral Assessment process to ensure that core funding of multilateral organisations is more closely linked to their performance.

With regard to benchmarks requiring specific and important reporting efforts, most implementing organisations would certainly welcome some sort of standardization agreed upon by major donor governments. This would likely contribute to a cost-efficient benchmarking exercise and be in line with the spirit of Good Humanitarian Donorship.

The ICRC appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on this important initiative and looks forward to engaging with its representatives in the common effort to improve aid effectiveness and efficiency.