



# Insights from Multi-Year Emergency Programming A Desk Review

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IDEAL is an activity funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) that works to support the United States Government's goal of improving food and nutrition security among the world's most vulnerable households and communities. IDEAL addresses knowledge and capacity gaps expressed by the food and nutrition security implementing community to support them in the design and implementation of effective emergency and non-emergency food security activities.

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## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This desk review informs research conducted by IDEAL to identify promising practices and ways to improve future implementation of USAID/BHA multi-year humanitarian activities. Full study findings are captured in the report [\*Insights from USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance Multi-Year Humanitarian Activities\*](#).

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## PHOTO CREDITS

Mercy Corps, BHAKARI, Nepal. Participants in the BHAKARI activity plant and weed alongside an irrigation canal.

## DISCLAIMER

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## ACRONYMS

<b>BHAKARI</b>	Building Hope Along the Karnali River Basin Activity
<b>CERF</b>	United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund
<b>DFID</b>	United Kingdom Department for International Development (now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO))
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>FAO</b>	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>HARP-F</b>	Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MC</b>	Mercy Corps
<b>MERL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning
<b>MYEP</b>	Multi-Year Emergency Programming
<b>MYHRP</b>	Multi-Year Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
<b>WEG</b>	Women's Empowerment Group

# Executive Summary

Given the lack of literature on promising practices in multi-year emergency programming (MYEP), this desk review highlights the most promising practices in MYEP from publicly available reports and studies. MYEP is defined as emergency or humanitarian programming lasting more than 24 months. This desk review focuses on:

- the most promising behaviors, processes, and challenges in MYEP across all phases of programming;
- elements of promising practices that are most critical in specific phases of programming; and
- external and contextual factors, themes, or challenges that impact effectiveness across all phases of programming.

## Elements of Promising Practices

**General principles and types of emergencies:** The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has established guiding principles for MYEP, which include a protracted crisis with a degree of stability, ongoing humanitarian needs, and varying levels of commitment, capacity, and support from leadership, non-humanitarian partners, and donors. MYEP is context-sensitive and can be applied to different types of emergencies—cyclical, protracted, and unforeseen—each of which requires identification of stressors and active monitoring of the situation in coordination with local stakeholders.

**Stakeholder engagement and capacity development:** In-depth knowledge of the local context and a high level of collaboration and consultation with program beneficiaries and local partners are key to maximizing collaboration and program relevance. This may require investment in increasing the capacity of local project staff.

**Adaptability and flexibility:** Adaptability and flexibility need to be prioritized by donors and implementing organizations in all phases, including planning, financial arrangements, and evaluation. Key challenges include balancing conflicting pressures for predictability and flexibility in funding, which can be mitigated through adaptive management, regular evaluations, and earmarked funds for flexible spending.

**Financial planning:** MYEP requires long-term, stable funding while allowing for adjustments in response to changing conditions. The United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) suggests using financial planning strategies such as predetermined maximums for future years and maintaining adaptable operational plans to balance the need for both funding predictability and flexibility.

**Cost effectiveness and efficiency gains:** MYEP can provide better value for money and cost efficiency than short-term approaches. However, without significant advanced planning, the gains are likely to be modest.

**Focus on cross-cutting agency priorities for lasting impact:** Long-term resilience and sustainability should be at the core of MYEP, bringing together humanitarian and development plans for a more comprehensive approach, more effective results, and an easier transition from emergency response to sustainable development.

**Institutional relations:** Effective communication and coordination with multiple stakeholders is essential to align humanitarian and development strategies in emergency response, especially when programmatic priorities are cross-cutting.

## Promising Practices by Phase

### DESIGN

**Achieve stakeholder buy-in and engagement through collaboration:** By consulting with a variety of stakeholders, including local actors and government authorities, before and during the design phase, MYEP implementers can align expectations, develop comprehensive needs assessments, and design flexible and risk-tolerant strategies that are closely linked to community-level needs.

**Prepare and preposition for the (un)expected:** MYEP is often implemented in unpredictable, high-risk environments, so it is critical to understand the political landscape, risk drivers, and sources of resilience from the outset. OCHA advises annual updates to its two- to three-year “most likely” scenarios, developed in collaboration with its Humanitarian Country Team, to account for potential changes and allow for immediate mobilization following a triggering event.

**Plan for financial flexibility:** MYEP financial planning should include annual funding estimates, most detailed for the first year and based on needs and risk projections for subsequent years. These should be updated annually for effective financial tracking, and a mix of funding types (grants, multi-year commitments, and commitment “envelopes”) is recommended for greater adaptability.

**Target and plan for cost-effectiveness opportunities:** To maximize cost-effectiveness, implementing organizations should proactively identify opportunities to reduce costs, such as bulk purchasing and timing purchases when prices are low, while maintaining a focus on program quality and relevance.

**Design an informed and flexible MERL plan at the outset:** A comprehensive multi-year monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) plan should be rooted in a deep understanding of context and needs, and should specify how data will be used for adaptive management, while engaging local actors to gain a more nuanced understanding of the crisis, risks, and needs. MYEP also provides an opportunity for more rigorous long-term monitoring and impact assessment.

### IMPLEMENTATION

**Develop flexibility and data-driven adaptive management:** Financial and operational flexibility and robust monitoring systems to drive adaptive management are critical to the success of MYEP. Striking a balance between flexibility and accountability is key and requires agreements between donors and implementing partners that allow for rapid plan and budget adjustments based on real-time data and trend analysis.

**Continue collaborative stakeholder engagement:** Promising practices for improving stakeholder engagement and collaboration include community consultations, strategic hiring of local community members, and creating mechanisms for regular feedback, all of which contribute to more effective adaptive management, greater community buy-in, and improved long-term project quality and success.

### INTEGRATION & ADAPTATION

**Design integration and adaptation processes intentionally:** Establishing processes from the outset that support the integration of findings and lessons learned into future rounds of funding and programming is critical to MYEP success. Strategies such as hiring a management and learning manager or convening learning sessions with experienced staff can maintain institutional memory and ensure that knowledge is effectively transferred for improved implementation.

**Conduct organizational Pause and Reflect sessions:** By conducting annual Pause and Reflect sessions, project staff can review progress, integrate a holistic understanding of changing needs, and facilitate organizational learning, ultimately resulting in an action plan to improve program performance and adaptive management.

**Prioritize organizational learning:** It is important to build an organizational culture focused on long-term impact and learning, and to hire staff with community engagement and relationship management skills from the outset.

**Develop and update an exit strategy and sustainability plan:** Implementing partners should develop a detailed exit strategy well before the program ends, outlining specific timelines, steps, and tasks for each project activity. This living document should be regularly updated, accessible to staff, and include assessments of partner organizations' current capacities and needs to ensure post-project sustainability.

## EXOGENOUS & CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Design:** National and international politics, misaligned inter-organizational planning and budgeting cycles, and staff turnover can all impede project success. The design phase should include strategies to mitigate these challenges.

**Implementation:** During this phase, strong risk-informed management and leadership capable of setting multi-year objectives and coordinating approaches are critical to success.

**Integration and adaptation:** A willingness to accept change, varying definitions of success, and competing organizational objectives among stakeholders is necessary to integrate lessons learned.

# Introduction

This desk review examines the literature on multi-year emergency programming (MYEP) for promising lessons and practices in the design, implementation, and learning and adaptation phases. Literature on this topic remains scarce, as the outcomes of MYEP to date do not have a large body of literature to provide evidence that can be considered best practices. However, donors such as the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and various United Nations (UN) agencies have some experience implementing such programs and have documented their lessons learned in publicly available project reports and studies that are sufficiently instructive. Drawing on these documents, this desk review aims to contribute to this body of knowledge by distilling available findings to inform MYEP both in general and in specific phases (i.e., design, implementation, and integration and adaptation), guided by the following three research questions:

- 1 What are the behaviors, processes, and challenges common to multi-year activities in emergency contexts in developing countries that reflect promising practices in all phases of programming (i.e., from design to implementation to integration of findings into follow-on projects/future rounds of funding)?
- 2 Are there elements of promising practices for multi-year programming of emergency activities that are critical in specific phases?
- 3 Are there external and contextual factors, themes, or challenges that affect the effectiveness of multi-year emergency programming across all phases?

## Methodology

The methodology for this desk review included the following steps:

**Defining research questions and key terms.** First, research questions were defined to guide the desk review. These questions focused on promising practices in specific phases or all phases of multi-year activities and the impact of contextual factors. "Multi-year emergency programming" was defined as emergency programming that lasted more than 24 months.

**Literature inclusion/exclusion criteria.** The literature search prioritized documents related to "multi-year funding" and "multi-year programming/planning," particularly in emergency contexts. The search was limited to publications from reputable organizations and well-known authors in the humanitarian sector.

**Literature search methods and sources.** The search included academic papers, reports, and internal documents, including a search of databases such as the Food Security and Nutrition Network, the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse, and the UN Digital Library. The search methodology included a total of over 100 documents.

**Evidence quality/strength assessment.** Identified documents were assessed based on three critical areas of multi-year activities: design, implementation, and adaptation. The desk review prioritized documents that were frequently cited or consistently mentioned in the larger body of literature. Reports from other funding entities, such as the World Bank and DFID, were also reviewed.

The in-depth review identified over 22 unique multi-year emergency programs, primarily focused on food security. Themes such as flooding, conflict, and interventions for internally displaced persons and refugees also emerged. Notably, while many programs were based in sub-Saharan Africa, the desk review uncovered case studies from the Middle East, North Asia, and the Caribbean, reflecting broader trends in humanitarian efforts.

This report outlines the recommended promising practices and lessons learned from the desk review.



# Elements of Promising Practices

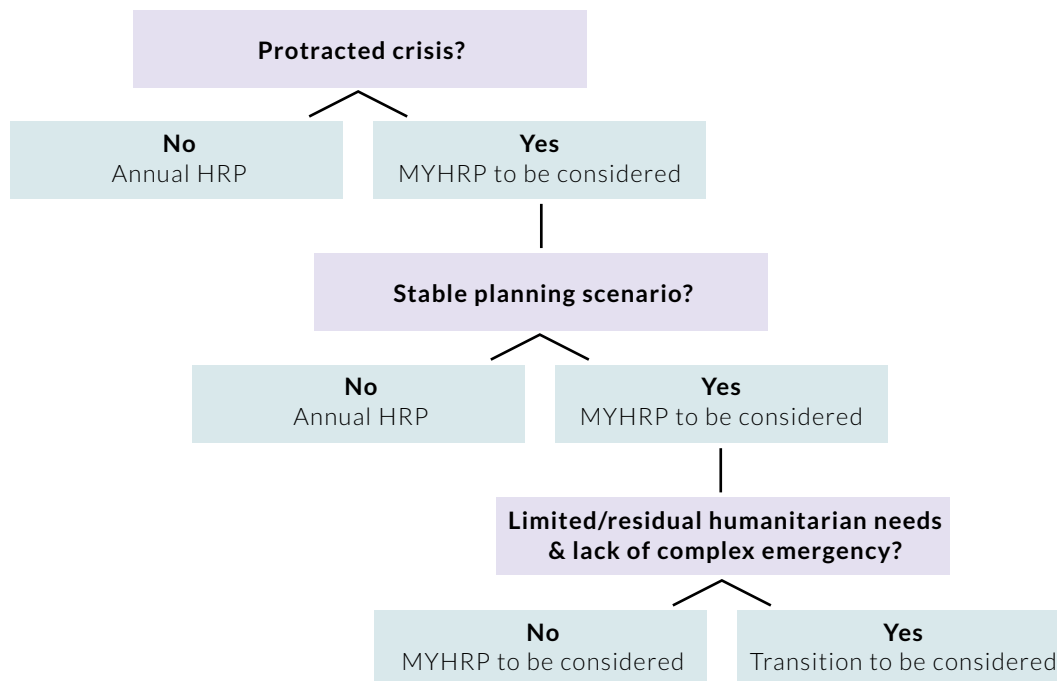
## General Principles & Types of Emergencies

While research on the most effective factors of multi-year programming is limited, UN agencies have used this approach extensively and have identified basic elements of MYEP success. As the UN agency responsible for coordinating humanitarian actors to ensure coherent emergency responses, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) established guiding principles for MYEP in 2018, outlining the following requirements for success:

- a protracted crisis with a degree of stability;
- humanitarian needs likely to persist;
- leadership commitment;
- commitment and capacity of non-humanitarian partners; and
- commitment and support of the donor community.<sup>1</sup>

OCHA has developed a Multi-Year Humanitarian Response Plan (MYHRP), a basic decision tree for using MYEP to guide and orient UN emergency response planning.<sup>2</sup>

**FIGURE 1:**  
OCHA's recommended MYEP decision tree



<sup>1</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2018). [Humanitarian Programme Cycle: Multi-Year Humanitarian Planning - Tip Sheet for OCHA Country/Regional Offices](#), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> OCHA, 2018, p. 2.

MYEP is highly context-dependent; no single approach is applicable in every case. Emergencies can be categorized as follows:

**Cyclical crises.** Some crises can be categorized as recurrent or cyclical, slow-onset natural hazards. These are often accompanied by conflict and chronic vulnerability in fragile states and/or states with low government capacity for disaster risk management or response, such as in parts of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.<sup>3</sup> As climate change continues, these cyclical crises are expected to become more frequent and less predictable.<sup>4</sup>

**Protracted crises.** These include (a) states experiencing medium- to high-intensity conflict and high levels of internal and/or external displacement, such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen; and (b) middle-income states with high levels of displacement, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iran, and Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

**Unforeseen crises.** These include unforeseen or unpredictable crises, such as earthquakes in the context of pre-existing vulnerabilities with low state capacity for disaster risk management or response, such as in Haiti.<sup>6</sup> Unforeseen crises may also be expected to increase in frequency.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of the type of emergency, it is necessary to identify potential stressors and actively monitor the situation, coordinating as much as possible with local government and other stakeholders involved in early warning and monitoring systems (e.g., drought).<sup>8</sup>

## Stakeholder Engagement & Capacity Development

Organizations leading implementing consortia should regularly engage in in-depth collaboration and consultation with both program beneficiaries and local partner organizations to cultivate long-term relationships. MYEP is particularly useful in this regard, as the guarantee of continued programming allows implementers to study and become more familiar with the local context and stakeholders, and strengthens stakeholder buy-in and trust, allowing for more participatory approaches and maximizing relevance and cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Specifically, OCHA recommends working with stakeholders to develop a joint needs assessment model, a risk management framework, and a monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) plan that includes short-, medium-, and long-term needs and financial contingency plans.<sup>10</sup> In Nepal, for example, Mercy Corps anticipated potential political unrest and proactively planned mitigation measures for its USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded Building Hope Along the Karnali River Basin (BHAKARI) activity. Before implementation began, the team anticipated potential challenges arising from widespread protests in response to the prime minister's decision to dissolve parliament and call for an early general election in December 2020. Mercy Corps Nepal planned staff and partner training to mitigate political influence on project implementation during this early election.<sup>11</sup>

3 Rodolpho, V., & Lasker, R. (2018). *An end in sight: Multi-year planning to meet and reduce humanitarian needs in protracted crises*. OCHA policy and study series 2015/015. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), p. 5.

4 United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction PreventionWeb. (2021). *Climate change drives disaster risk*. United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), 2021.

5 Rodolpho & Lasker, 2018, p. 16.

7 Ibid.

8 Mercy Corps Nepal. (2021). *BHAKARI Annual Results Report 2021*. United States Department of Aid for International Development (USAID), p. 14.

9 Fabre, C. (2017). *Multi-Year Humanitarian Funding*. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

10 Rodolpho & Lasker, 2018, p. 10.

11 Mercy Corps Nepal. (2020). BHAKARI FY21 Q1 Report. United States Department of Aid for International Development (USAID), p. 5.

As the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) notes, in many cases local organizations are not yet equipped to deliver MYEP. Building local organizational capacity to analyze, plan, respond, and learn requires investment in skills and institutional capacity.<sup>12</sup> As capacity development of project staff is an essential part of MYEP success, donors should ensure that their staff and implementing partners have the resources to invest in their local staff to provide them with sufficient training and knowledge to manage such projects and processes over the long term. This may include dedicating staff time to interacting with partners, conducting context analysis, and defining project outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

## Adaptability & Flexibility

Donors and implementing organizations should practice adaptability and flexibility in all phases of MYEP and integrate them into the programming structure. This requires active management and dynamic, ongoing analysis and planning to respond nimbly to changing needs and conditions.

At the planning stage, this includes regular assessments and reassessments of humanitarian needs, response progress, and gaps. In addition to planned assessments, triggers for unplanned updates can be built into MYEP planning, ranging from sudden shocks to slow-onset changes.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of financial planning, flexibility is key to reinforcing the benefits of increased funding predictability. Financial arrangements should allow for and prioritize flexibility. In the case of USAID programming, this can be achieved by allowing implementing partners to shift funds within existing approved budgets and programming to avoid the need for contract amendments.

### **DRC: FLEXIBILITY** (USAID ADVANCING NUTRITION, 2019)

In 2019, USAID Advancing Nutrition conducted a study to improve collaboration among USAID's implementing partners to mitigate acute malnutrition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The analysis provided insights into the humanitarian crisis environment and highlighted the importance of flexibility in long-term planning, programming, and coordination.

Partners found that the long-term planning of emergency and development programs is often not aligned with the constantly evolving context in the DRC. This mismatch often results from conflict-induced displacement, which leads to shortages of supplies and services. Such shortages exacerbate malnutrition challenges in long-term programming. Furthermore, in conflict zones, multi-year emergency plans, while resource-intensive, can disrupt local wages and prices, exacerbating local tensions over perceived inequities in assistance.

As USAID and its partners implement multi-year programming in unstable regions, they should ensure that their strategies remain adaptable, especially when addressing emergency nutrition needs in complex environments.

<sup>12</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2017). [Living up to the promise of multi-year humanitarian financing](#), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Fabre, 2017, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

Key recommendations from the study include:

- use midterm evaluations to record partners' contingency strategies, risk assessments, and adaptability to changing situations;
- consider revising grant or agreement terms to allow for rapid adjustments to meet changing local needs. This approach addresses challenges such as geographic access, transportation barriers, and unexpected changes in climate, market dynamics, and migration patterns;
- define expectations for co-location and alignment with partners, taking into account both short- and long-term sustainability objectives;
- work with local infrastructure to explore and test program strategies appropriate to the changing humanitarian context. This process should record both challenges and successes, with an emphasis on local systems;
- advocate for aligned operational budgets to ensure continuity of service delivery. Comprehensive planning and feasibility assessments should be mandatory before any initiative is rolled out; and
- maximize program efficiency through greater involvement of local partners, while considering security implications.

These recommendations are intended to increase flexibility in the context of long-term strategic planning.

A 2017 FAO study notes that donors face conflicting pressures in balancing predictability and flexibility at the global portfolio level.<sup>15</sup> For MYEP to be effective, it must be as flexible as possible to respond to needs as they arise, requiring a high level of trust and confidence that funds will be used appropriately. At the same time, the need for flexibility can conflict with donors' need to report on their spending for accountability purposes. Documenting outcome indicators is useful in this area, but measuring them is more difficult and time- and resource-intensive than output indicators. Adaptive management and programming can mitigate these challenges through regular review and reflection and the use of funds earmarked for flexible spending.<sup>16</sup>

## Financial Planning

By its very nature, MYEP requires longer-term, uninterrupted funding. Whenever possible, it is essential to plan for occasional spikes in funding needs in response to changes in the operating environment.

The United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) notes that while its country operations in protracted crises would benefit from the predictability of multi-year grants, multi-year commitments can make the organization less flexible because some funds would be committed for future years. One way to mitigate this is through financial planning that includes predetermined maximums for successive years. These maximums would be determined by projections of incoming funds, taking into account the possibility of changing needs and conditions, with operational plans treated as living documents that can be adjusted.<sup>17</sup> In other words, plan for the unplannable.

15 FAO, 2017, p. 5.

16 Cabot Venton, C., & Sida, L. (2017). [The Value for Money of Multi-Year Humanitarian Funding: Emerging Findings](#). *Valid Evaluations*. Department for International Development (DFID), p. 7.

17 United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). (2019). [CERF Multi-Year Humanitarian Funding Discussion Note](#), p. 7.

## Cost Effectiveness & Efficiency Gains

Implementing partners of MYEP activities can use the multi-year nature of activities to improve the delivery of assistance and achieve greater cost-effectiveness. In terms of value for money and cost-effectiveness, MYEP has an advantage over short-term approaches. A 2019 thematic evaluation commissioned by DFID of its 2015–2017 MYEP in Sudan, DRC, Ethiopia, and Pakistan found that multi-year programming and funding provided better value for money than annual programming and funding.<sup>18</sup>

MYEP increases value for money for implementing partners through reduced administrative and proposal development costs. The DFID's 2019 study found comparatively modest efficiency gains in administrative costs. In single-year programming, staff must consistently develop proposals to maintain funding. In well-implemented MYEP, however, funding is already guaranteed. As a result, staff can reallocate resources that would otherwise be spent applying for funding to improve program quality (see case study below). MYEP also allows programs to increase staff retention by guaranteeing employment for the full program period, thereby reducing staff turnover. While there may be additional resource efficiencies associated with retaining local staff for multiple years, such as reduced resources needed to recruit, train, and onboard new staff, these efficiencies are difficult to quantify and the evidence is still evolving.<sup>19</sup> The World Food Programme reported modest efficiency gains from its 2015–2017 MYEP in Ethiopia due to reduced proposal writing, but did not find significant savings from reduced recruitment and hiring.<sup>20</sup> A 2017 study by the FAO found that MYEP in and of itself did not generate significant cost savings beyond reduced proposal development and administrative transaction costs.<sup>21</sup>

### **BURMA: INCREASING EFFICIENCY THROUGH MYEP (THE OPERATIONS PARTNERSHIP, 2021)**

Launched in 2016, the Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F) focuses on providing multi-year humanitarian support for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in conflict-related humanitarian crises in Burma. Funded by FCDO, HARP-F has committed over £74.7 million in sterling and operates in eight sectors with 55 partners. As of 2022, interventions are underway in Rakhine, Kachin, and northern Shan states.

The implementation of HARP-F demonstrates that multi-year funding leads to efficiency in resources and program quality. From 2017 to 2021, approximately 29% of WASH grants in Rakhine and Kachin states were funded for more than 24 months. According to 93% of HARP-F WASH stakeholders interviewed, this longer-term funding increased staff retention, resulting in institutional knowledge retention, programmatic learning, and improved team performance. In addition, long-term funding reduced the administrative burdens often associated with short-term projects, such as proposal writing, procurement, reporting, and staff recruitment and training. These efficiencies were particularly evident in localization and capacity-building efforts. Longer-term funding allowed local staff to be recruited, trained, and supervised over time to meet the required competencies and expected standards.

18 Levine et al. (2019). [Multi-year humanitarian funding: A thematic evaluation](#). Humanitarian Policy Group, p. 1.

19 Levine et al., 2019, p. 12.

20 Levine et al., 2019, p. 1.

21 FAO, 2017, p. 4.

In addition to creating efficiencies in resource allocation, multi-year funding ensured that small and cash-strapped organizations did not face funding gaps while waiting for funding extensions or finding new sources of funding. Committed funding allowed organizations to design programs with longer-term strategies, shifting from short-term objectives to long-term impact. For example, sustained funding enabled HARP-F partners in northern Rakhine to provide programming in remote areas that typically have higher humanitarian needs. This service would not have been possible with short-term funding due to the initial challenges of accessing these remote areas. In addition, interviewees credited HARP-F's intentional requirement that all proposals be designed with a long-term perspective to achieve long-term, high-quality results.

However, as the FAO study shows, value for money does not come automatically. It requires advanced planning on the part of implementing partners. Promising practices for increasing cost-effectiveness in MYEP are discussed in the section titled "Target and Plan for Cost-effectiveness Opportunities."

## Focus on Cross-Cutting Agency Priorities for Lasting Impact

An approach that focuses on building long-term resilience through sustainability, community-centered interventions, and risk considerations is critical and can support the transition of programming from emergency to development activities. While emergency and development assistance are often seen as distinct, there are synergies and complementary objectives between the two. The broader international development community recognizes the importance of resilience in addressing and mitigating vulnerability and risk at the local level. However, a 2017 OCHA study found that resilience is defined and understood inconsistently, with some viewing it from a relief and development perspective and others viewing it as specific to emergency preparedness. This can lead to complications in prioritizing and funding these efforts.<sup>22</sup>

OCHA found that the most stable MYEP efforts were those that combined humanitarian and development planning in a high-level strategic plan, which enabled emergency humanitarian assistance to address the structural causes of development problems.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the USAID Advancing Nutrition study recommended combining or adapting emergency and development activities, for example, development programs could better integrate acute malnutrition service strategies and competencies among their implementing partners.<sup>24</sup>

From a practical perspective, a 2019 DFID study emphasized that support for resilience should focus on long-term agency beyond immediate needs and crises.<sup>25</sup> To this end, Levine et al. recommended that DFID, in consultation with local partners, develop analytical tools to understand resilience and agency in terms of people's entire lives, rather than a narrow focus on replacing lost assets or returning to the status quo.<sup>26</sup> This is an important consideration when designing a MERL framework (see section titled "Design an Informed and Flexible MERL Plan at the Outset").

22 Taylor et al. (2017). [Evaluation of Multi-year Planning, February 2017](#). United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), p. 35.

23 OCHA, 2018, p. 10.

24 USAID Advancing Nutrition. (2019.) [USAID Acute Malnutrition Programming in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Observations, Recommendations, and Learning](#), p. 3.

25 Levine et al., 2019, p. 31.

26 Ibid.

In relatively stable crisis contexts, MYEP can transition to a development response, but this requires considerable long-term planning and coordination. Intentional overlap between emergency and development activities could help bridge this gap. If MYEP can address and mitigate the root causes of development problems, this could facilitate this transition through sustainable solutions.<sup>27</sup> This is an issue worth considering in the formulation of exit strategies and sustainability plans (see section titled “Prioritize Organizational Learning”).

## Institutional Relations

Communication and coordination with other actors in the emergency response ecosystem is critical to achieving complementarity between humanitarian and development systems at the strategic and operational levels. This may include other donors, implementing partners, local organizations, and intergovernmental agencies. For example, OCHA’s MYHRP 2017–2019 for Chad was intentionally aligned with the government’s National Development Plan 2016–2020, the UNDAF 2017–2021, and the World Bank’s Country Partnership Framework 2016–2020, allowing for harmonization of interventions and greater complementarity between humanitarian and development support.<sup>28</sup>

For each of the three main crises affecting the country (food insecurity and malnutrition, displacement, and health emergencies), OCHA’s strategy included cluster operational plans and identified synergies with other ongoing or planned support, including from development partners, government authorities, and other actors outside its own programming.<sup>29</sup>

Communication with agencies such as OCHA allows for the use of existing coordination mechanisms for MYEP. OCHA recommends an annual review of existing humanitarian coordination architecture to ensure its relevance and highlights the opportunity to incorporate capacity building for sustainability, such as strengthening the emergency response capacity of local authorities or organizations.<sup>30</sup>

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27 Levine et al., 2019, p. 21.

28 OCHA, 2018, p. 8.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

# Promising Practices by Phase

The following section describes elements of promising practices that are critical in specific phases of MYEP: (a) design, (b) implementation, and (c) integration and adaptation, i.e., incorporating lessons learned into the next round of funding and programming.

## Design

### ACHIEVE STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN & ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATION

One of the most important practices for MYEP implementers is achieving stakeholder buy-in through collaboration prior to the design phase. From the outset, programming must be demand-driven and involve collaboration with local actors. The design phase should be preceded by consultation with all other key partners to understand the humanitarian response ecosystem, i.e., the efforts of other organizations or donors to address the crisis in question. This will facilitate collaboration and coherence.<sup>31</sup>

MYEP implementers should work with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a joint needs assessment, a risk management framework, and a MERL plan that includes short-, medium-, and long-term needs, as well as financial contingency plans.<sup>32</sup> To develop its MYEP strategy in collaboration with OCHA in 2017, Chad undertook a comprehensive context analysis that focused not only on humanitarian needs, but also on structural vulnerabilities that limit local capacity to mitigate and cope with recurrent shocks and crises. With input from local development partners and public sector institutions, the analysis considered multiple systemic factors (e.g., access to services, livelihood opportunities, poverty and inequality) and clearly defined the impact of these factors on the country's most pressing crises.<sup>33</sup> The same stakeholders also developed a risk assessment framework to further underpin their preparedness and flexibility to respond to changing conditions (see INFORM case study on page 14).

Implementing partners should consider how affected communities and other local actors can continue to contribute meaningfully to the design and implementation of projects to further maximize their relevance to local needs. MYEP can lead to greater impact and long-term results when donors and implementing partners have strong links with local institutions. The international community's support for Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami strengthened the agency to the point that humanitarian assistance is rarely requested for the numerous seismic and hydrological disasters that occur in Indonesia each year.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, donors should consult and inform government authorities about MYEP plans and identify potential synergies with government programs. MYEP has a greater chance of success if these actors are risk-tolerant and flexible.<sup>35</sup>

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31 OCHA, 2018, p. 3.

32 Rodolpho & Lasker, 2018, p. 10.

33 OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

34 Rodolpho & Lasker, 2018, p. 20.

35 Taylor et al., 2017, p. 17.



## PREPARE & PREPOSITION FOR THE (UN)EXPECTED

Implementing MYEP means carrying out long-term programming in high-risk and unpredictable environments. To increase the likelihood of success, implementers should invest in understanding the political economy, drivers of risk, and sources of resilience at the beginning of the design phase.<sup>36</sup> Implementing partners should use the findings to assess how programming can be adjusted to address the most likely scenarios.

In planning its multi-year programming, OCHA incorporates projections of the number of people in need. This requires forecasting possible events and the resulting needs. OCHA works with its Humanitarian Country Team to develop a “most likely” scenario spanning 2 to 3 years, taking into account potential shocks and events and the needs that are likely to follow, as well as any changes in local capacity to respond. OCHA recommends that such projections be updated annually or when significant changes in the operating environment occur.<sup>37</sup> Whenever possible, actors should plan for pre-positioning so that programming can be mobilized immediately after a “triggering event.” This depends on successful stakeholder collaboration, particularly on risk assessments, which are essential in multi-year efforts.

### CHAD: RISK ASSESSMENT USING THE INFORM INDEX (OCHA, 2018)

INFORM, a collaboration between the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and the European Commission, drew on input from humanitarian, development, and governance partners to assess risk in Chad. INFORM aimed to support the humanitarian-development nexus and strengthen risk analysis and diagnostics to better plan humanitarian, development, and government programming.

For the 2017–2019 MYHRP, the INFORM tool identified a country’s vulnerability to humanitarian emergencies and disasters. The index helped answer the following questions:

- Which countries are approaching a humanitarian crisis?
- What factors lead to these crises?
- How do these risks change over time?

The index was constructed using the following dimensions:

- Hazards and exposure (events that could occur and exposure to them)
- Vulnerability (the susceptibility of communities to these hazards)
- Lack of coping capacity (lack of resources available to mitigate impacts)

For Chad, the INFORM Index highlighted major infrastructure risks, particularly in the areas of communications, physical structures, and access to health systems, as well as exposure to human-made hazards, including current and projected conflict intensity. It also highlighted institutional vulnerabilities, such as the need for governance and disaster risk reduction measures.

<sup>36</sup> FAO, 2017, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

## PLAN FOR FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY

As noted above, a promising practice in MYEP implementation is the flexible use of funds for spikes in support needs, including contingency funds where possible, as the success of MYEP depends on them. OCHA recommends annual funding estimates for the duration of the MYEP, with the first year's estimates being the most detailed and subsequent years' estimates based on needs and risk projections and planned operations.<sup>38</sup> These funding requirements should be updated each year, with annual breakdowns to allow for effective financial tracking.<sup>39</sup>

The FAO has documented existing types of multi-year funding:<sup>40</sup>

- Grants provide fixed amounts with a set disbursement schedule and predetermined duration.
- Multi-year commitments have a fixed duration and scope of activities, but the amount of funding is negotiated, often annually, depending on the proposed activities and availability of funds.
- Commitment “envelopes” are earmarked for specific crises. These envelopes may consist of both multi-year and shorter-term funding, allowing donors to maintain flexibility within a multi-year commitment.

These funding mechanisms provide a mix of specificity, flexibility, and predictability to address different needs and circumstances. Implementing partners should seek to use different types of funding for MYEP, where possible, to provide a greater degree of flexibility and predictability.

## TARGET & PLAN FOR COST-EFFECTIVENESS OPPORTUNITIES

Implementing organizations should take advantage of the multi-year nature of activities to increase the cost-effectiveness and value for money of programming. However, these benefits are not automatic (see section titled “Cost Effectiveness and Efficiency Gains”).

To reap the full monetary benefits of multi-year programming, it is imperative that implementing organizations proactively identify and pursue opportunities to reduce costs, including by negotiating better prices when purchasing goods in bulk. For example, UNHCR in Ethiopia found that the predictability of funding provided by MYEP allowed them to frontload investments in shelter and water, resulting in cost savings in the medium term.<sup>41</sup>

Another option for implementing partners to consider is planning to procure inputs when prices are expected to be at their lowest. MYEP allows for an annual procurement plan for in-kind food assistance, as food prices vary seasonally and in response to drought and other climate-related factors. A 2016 analysis of DFID's programming in Ethiopia found that purchasing food at the lowest price point (i.e., minimizing combined purchasing and storage costs) would have resulted in cost savings of between 20% and 30% compared to purchasing at the height of the drought emergency caused by El Niño in 2016.<sup>42</sup> Implementing partners can also use longer contracts to negotiate more favorable terms when procuring services.

Successful MYEP activities use proven cost efficiencies to improve aid delivery. Ultimately, however, the best measure of cost-effectiveness is the quality and relevance of programming: this value comes from meeting the needs of people in crisis. Timely responses to crises and reaching people before they are in distress are more valuable than late or poorly planned responses.<sup>43</sup>

38 OCHA, 2018, p. 13.

39 Ibid.

40 FAO, 2017, p. 10.

41 Levine et al., 2019, p. 2.

42 Cabot-Venton, Courtney. (2016). *The Economic Case for Early Humanitarian Response to the Ethiopia 2015 - 2016 Drought*. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), p. 19.

43 Levine et al., 2019, p. 9.

## DESIGN AN INFORMED & FLEXIBLE MERL PLAN AT THE OUTSET

A multi-year project provides an opportunity for high-quality data collection and learning. With the ability to take the long view, donors and implementers should plan for more rigorous, long-term monitoring and robust impact measurement, which is typically limited to outcomes in short-term approaches. The longer timeframe of MYEP provides an opportunity to establish monitoring for systemic issues, such as investigating gross violations of children's rights and gender-based violence.<sup>44</sup> In addition, there is growing recognition of the utility and feasibility of conducting impact evaluations and other quasi-experimental designs to assess program impact in humanitarian contexts.<sup>45</sup>

In order to adequately monitor conditions and capitalize on learning opportunities, implementing partners must develop a multi-year MERL plan based on a deep understanding of the context and current needs. At a minimum, this consists of a comprehensive context analysis and needs assessment and should include an examination of the underlying and structural causes of persistent humanitarian needs, including: (a) contextual factors such as an ongoing conflict or recent disaster; (b) systemic vulnerabilities such as poverty, inequality, and state fragility; and (c) specific constraints such as freedom of movement, for example, refugee settlements.<sup>46</sup> The BHAKARI activity learned the importance of identifying and monitoring potential stressors, especially those not typically prioritized by local stakeholders, as part of its MERL plan.<sup>47</sup> During the project, drought conditions developed in the implementation area, with implications for potential food shortages.<sup>48</sup> These conditions caught project staff by surprise, as there were no visible changes and no warnings from local stakeholders.<sup>49</sup> This highlighted the need for the project to establish early warning and weather detection systems to continuously monitor this potential stressor.

It is also critical to understand who or what institutions can facilitate or hinder data collection, and what information a particular stakeholder is willing or able to provide. This requires an analysis of priority needs across sectors by population groups and geographic areas.<sup>50</sup> Where possible, it is beneficial to include input from local actors in the analysis to build a shared understanding of the crisis, risks, and needs.<sup>51</sup>

A MERL framework in the context of MYEP must also consider how to identify emerging outcomes, how needs are likely to evolve, and how implementation will take this into account and adjust in response.<sup>52</sup> To take advantage of these findings, the MERL plan should specify how data will be monitored, disseminated, and applied on an ongoing basis. The MERL plan should also include annual Pause and Reflect sessions during the design phase (see section titled "Design Integration and Adaptation Processes Intentionally"), as well as protocols for (a) adaptive management during implementation and (b) integration into subsequent funding cycles during the evaluation phase.

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44 OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

45 USAID, IDEAL, HAEC. (2022). [Humanitarian Assistance Evidence Cycle](#), p. 1.

46 OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

47 Mercy Corps Nepal, 2021, p. 23.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 OCHA, 2018, p. 15.

51 Ibid.

52 OCHA, 2018, p. 15; The Operations Partnership. (2021). [HARP-F multi-year WASH funding review](#). Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility. Crown Agents, p. 32.

# Implementation

## Develop Flexibility & Data-Driven Adaptive Management

A key focus of MYEP is flexibility, both financially and operationally. To operate successfully in a protracted emergency, implementing partners must invest in adaptive management, using data to drive change as needed.

MYEP requires a focus on continuity, sustainability, and overall long-term impact. At a minimum, this requires adequate monitoring processes to collect the kind of data needed to nimbly adjust implementation. Internal systems and tools must be designed to accommodate multi-year activities and financial flows.<sup>53</sup>

Through its experience, OCHA has found that MYEP requires a robust monitoring system that consistently tracks both project results and evolving humanitarian needs.<sup>54</sup> Data collected through this monitoring system should inform a plan for responding to unexpected developments, including periodic ad hoc assessments as well as regular assessments from monitoring sites or routine data collection.<sup>55</sup> Best and promising practices for adaptive management run concurrently with those for MERL. MYEP requires advanced planning to use monitoring data to inform adaptive management.

OCHA recommends incorporating trend analysis to, among other things, provide insight into patterns and trends in humanitarian needs from year to year and a basis for forecasting needs and events.<sup>56</sup>

Successful MYEP must strike the necessary balance between flexibility and accountability. On the financial and contractual side, adaptive management requires an agreement between donors and implementing partners on how to adjust project plans based on incoming data. This means an agreement that allows for shifts in implementation without time-consuming contract and budget amendments.<sup>57</sup> In implementing Acute Malnutrition Programming in the DRC, USAID learned that the agency needs to adjust MYEP grants, agreements, and/or sub-award terms to allow for rapid program adaptation in changing contexts and to ensure that contingency plans are used when needed; this requires budget line item flexibility with justification.<sup>58</sup> Implementing partners can support donor understanding by aligning perspectives at the outset and proactively engaging partners throughout the life of the project.

## Continue Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement

Achieving stakeholder buy-in and engagement through collaborative practices greatly increases the chances of MYEP success. Implementing partners should maintain this engagement and collaboration throughout implementation, creating opportunities for affected communities and other local actors to meaningfully contribute and provide regular feedback to the project during implementation.

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53 Taylor et al., 2017, p. 13.

54 OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 The Operations Partnership, 2021, p. 32.

58 USAID, Advancing Nutrition, 2019, p. 3.

For example, as part of the kickoff of the Maharo resilience food security activity in southeastern Madagascar, implementers conducted community consultations—meetings facilitated over 3 days in which community members were divided into discussion groups based on age and marginalization—and discussed community issues and assets in order to prioritize, plan, monitor, and adapt Maharo interventions in their area.<sup>59</sup> It was seen as a “success in and of itself,” and participants described how “the real needs of the community come out from this....”<sup>60</sup> Community consultations strongly supported community buy-in, and locals were excited about the start of the Maharo program.<sup>61</sup> Cultivating collaboration builds trust and stakeholder buy-in, and serves to improve program quality.

MYEP can achieve greater impact and long-term results when the donor and implementing partners are closely connected to what is happening at the community level. Other promising practices for cultivating stakeholder support during implementation include strategic staffing (i.e., recruiting project staff from these communities) and designing community accountability mechanisms that solicit regular feedback and risk/needs assessments.<sup>62</sup> Integrating feedback from affected communities is essential for effective adaptive management. Accordingly, project monitoring plans should enable affected communities to actively participate in the response using specific indicators.<sup>63</sup> MYEP has a greater chance of success when local actors are engaged and able to participate in programming on an ongoing basis.

## Integration & Adaptation

### DESIGN INTEGRATION & ADAPTATION PROCESSES INTENTIONALLY

The continued success of MYEP requires that lessons learned be integrated into successive rounds of funding and programming. Implementing partners must establish a process for capitalizing on findings and lessons learned at the outset. This stage can easily get lost in the shuffle of planning for the next program.

To this end, it is important for implementing partners to develop processes in the design phase that support institutional memory and/or knowledge transfer. The BHA-funded BHAKARI activity hired a management and learning manager to ensure that lessons learned were fully incorporated into programming.<sup>64</sup> During the proposal phase, the implementing partner, Mercy Corps, invited experienced staff from the previous awardee organizations to collaborate on the proposal and to incorporate lessons learned from planning and implementation after the award. These “learning sessions” helped a wide range of stakeholders understand what had worked and what had not in previous activities and come to a shared understanding of how to improve implementation.<sup>65</sup>

59 IMPEL. (2022). [Process Evaluation of the Maharo Resilience Food Security Activity in Madagascar](#). The Implementer-Led Evaluation & Learning Associate Award, p. 17.

60 IMPEL, 2022, p. 17.

61 Ibid.

62 The Operations Partnership, 2021, p. 18.

63 OCHA, 2018, p. 5.

64 Sharma, S., & Karki, S. (2020). [Pre-Implementation Learning Sessions for Institutional Memory: Lessons from the Kickoff of BHAKARI](#). United States Department of Aid for International Development (USAID), p. 3.

65 Sharma & Shristi, 2020, p. 1.

## CONDUCT ORGANIZATIONAL PAUSE & REFLECT SESSIONS

Conducting annual Pause and Reflect sessions is an established promising practice for partners implementing MYEP, allowing for meaningful reflection on lessons learned to create an actionable plan to improve programming. With support from USAID's IDEAL activity, Mercy Corps created a Food for Thought toolkit in 2022 specifically for use by Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP) teams. This toolkit emphasizes the importance of in-person Pause and Reflect sessions to devote time to reviewing performance and programmatic context, identifying key lessons learned, and creating an action plan to improve programming and implementation.<sup>66</sup> The toolkit recommends holding full-day sessions annually, with abbreviated sessions midway through the program cycle. The three objectives of these meetings are:

- 1 "To take time for thoughtful, collective review of progress and reflection on the performance, and to identify, document and apply lessons learned."<sup>67</sup>
- 2 To create a learning environment where programs can "more effectively integrate a holistic view and a stronger understanding of the changing context and needs."<sup>68</sup>
- 3 To lead to "wider organizational and sectoral learning, allowing feedback to flow within the various sections of implementing partners to strengthen systems, identify effective practices, and leverage learning across multiple programs and partners as well."<sup>69</sup>

With a focus on engaging the right data, questions, and people, the outcome of these sessions is an action plan to adapt and improve future planning. An additional goal of this process is to increase the capacity of program staff to work with data sources to better understand program performance and adaptive management.<sup>70</sup>

## PRIORITIZE ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Organizational culture and leadership are critical to the success of MYEP. An organizational culture focused on speed and results will not facilitate successful long-term implementation and impact. Implementing partners should set expectations for organizational learning (e.g., commitment to Pause and Reflect sessions) at the beginning of the project, which can further serve to ensure that lessons learned are integrated, not only in terms of implementation, but also internally within the organization, project team, etc. Ideally, staffing should include a managerial role from the beginning of the project that focuses exclusively on organizational learning and adaptation.

Achieving the long-term goals of MYEP requires skills such as community consultation and relationship management. Managers will need to recruit, train, and manage staff and select local partners with this in mind.<sup>71</sup>

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66 Mercy Corps. (2022). *Food for Thought: A Pause and Reflect Toolkit for Emergency Food Security Programs*, p. 7.

67 Mercy Corps, 2022, p. 2.

68 Mercy Corps, 2022, p. 3.

69 Ibid.

70 Mercy Corps, 2022, p. 7.

71 The Operations Partnership, 2021, p. 22.

## DEVELOP AND UPDATE AN EXIT STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Well before the end of a multi-year program, it is important for implementing partners to develop an exit strategy to ensure that the program's successes continue after funding ends. This plan should be a living document, updated regularly throughout the life of the project. It should be accessible to staff and serve as a foundational guiding document. USAID's Advancing Nutrition strategy emphasizes the development of a transition plan prior to implementation to ensure lasting value to the community.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Baharanyi et al. recommend creating a concrete and detailed exit strategy that includes sustainability plans for each project activity with specific timelines, steps, and tasks required.<sup>73</sup> The exit strategy should also include an assessment of the current capacity of all partner organizations and what additional knowledge and/or materials are needed to ensure sustainability, e.g., an assessment of infrastructure maintenance committees (for WASH, road rehabilitation, etc.) to determine their level of functionality and requirements for post-project continuation.<sup>74</sup>

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72 USAID, Advancing Nutrition, 2019, p. 3.

73 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. vii.

74 Ibid.

# Exogenous & Contextual Considerations

In any emergency context, there will be a number of consequential factors beyond the control of the donor or implementing organization. The following is an overview of the exogenous and contextual factors, themes, and challenges that affect the effectiveness of MYEP in all phases.

## Design

Key partners, such as international non-governmental organizations and local organizations, may be entrenched in annual planning and have difficulty adapting to multi-year planning and budgeting. This “institutional inertia” can be a challenge in securing long-term partnerships. When organizational planning and budgeting cycles are not aligned, it can be a challenge to partner effectively.<sup>75</sup>

Some staff turnover is inevitable in multi-year programming. At the design stage, it is important to carefully plan for leadership changes in protracted crises and to establish measures to ensure a smooth transition.<sup>76</sup>

MYEP may also face political challenges. Domestic and international politics can complicate long-term planning and implementation. To the extent possible, anticipated changes in the political climate should be taken into account during the design phase, as was the case with the BHAKARI team in Nepal, which adjusted its plans in anticipation of political protests.

## Implementation

There is a strong correlation between the emergence and spread of multi-year planning and strong risk-informed leadership. In the Sahel, the appointment of a regional humanitarian coordinator played a key role in coordinating approaches across borders and setting multi-year objectives. Even in contexts without a regional or head coordinator, despite the clear cross-border spillover of crises such as in the Horn of Africa, the leadership of regional or head coordinators in contexts such as Somalia and South Sudan was fundamental to making multi-year planning a reality.<sup>77</sup>

For example, a 2019 report by the Norwegian Refugee Council and Development Initiatives found that the implementation of restrictive labor laws in Lebanon had an immediate impact on livelihoods programming, and the resulting demolition of refugee shelters was a major setback for the humanitarian response.<sup>78</sup>

While this is certainly beyond the control of donors and implementers, ongoing MYEP can build credibility in its engagement with national authorities, which can provide a degree of predictability over time. Political uncertainty also reinforces the need for flexible funding to adapt to changing circumstances.<sup>79</sup>

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75 Rodolpho & Lasker, 2018, p. 11.

76 Taylor et al., 2017, p. 38.

77 Rodolpho & Lasker, 2018, p. 15.

78 Development Initiatives (2019). [Field perspectives on multi-year humanitarian funding and planning: How theory has translated into practice in Jordan and Lebanon](#), p. 14.

79 Development Initiatives, 2019, p. 14.



## **SOUTH SUDAN: ADAPTATION IN RESEARCH** (LASER PULSE, 2022)

The Long-term Assistance and Services for Research and Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (LASER PULSE), which conducted the impact evaluation of a BHA-funded multi-year emergency activity in South Sudan, planned for unforeseen implementation challenges that could have programmatic and research implications.

**Proactively mitigating unanticipated challenges:** The research team oversampled 19 villages as a buffer in case any of the sampled villages were inaccessible. This proved to be exactly the right number, as during implementation the team was unable to access 19 villages they had planned to survey due to conflict and flooding.

**Accounting for widespread local displacement:** At baseline, the research team found that one of the most commonly reported coping strategies was migration or the sale of livestock. Conflict and flooding caused widespread displacement, creating significant programmatic and evaluation challenges (and the need for additional security assessments to ensure the safety of program and data collection staff) that should be considered during the design phase.

## **Integration & Adaptation**

In protracted and recurrent crises, planning for adaptation (and agreeing on what it entails) can be challenging. As the Pause and Reflect framework aims to engage as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, it is possible that different parties may define success differently, with practical implications for how, for example, local partner organizations are willing or able to adopt proposed changes or adaptations. In addition, any sustainability plans that require ongoing, specific action by local partner organizations are beyond the control of the donor.

# Case Study

Several donors and implementing agencies referenced in this desk review have shared their lessons of best and promising practices that actors involved in future multi-year humanitarian activities can use to improve programming. The following case study provides several instructive examples of the importance of these principles.

## DRC: LESSONS FROM JENGA JAMAA II

Jenga Jamaa II was a 5-year USAID Office of Food for Peace-funded Development Food Assistance program to improve food security in three territories of eastern DRC. It was implemented from 2012 to 2016 in the midst of an ongoing humanitarian crisis. During implementation, Jenga Jamaa II suffered from several fundamental implementation challenges, most notably poor project documentation and a lack of effective and relevant monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.<sup>80</sup> These issues undermined the project's ability to continuously improve its programming over the years, understand its impact, and contribute to recommendations for similar food security-focused development plans.

Jenga Jamaa II struggled to create an M&E system that collected reliable data and incorporated broader lessons learned to support program sustainability after Jenga Jamaa II ended. The final report found that of the four interventions offered, the Jenga Jamaa II Women's Empowerment Group (WEG) performed best in improving food security at the household level and also reported success in improving several key indicators of women's empowerment.<sup>81</sup> At the end of Jenga Jamaa II, however, it was difficult for researchers to provide a nuanced understanding of the success of the WEG program on food security and child nutrition.<sup>82</sup> It was unclear how the WEG indicators, or even the programs themselves, supported the stated goals of the intervention, resulting in the collection of data that was not very relevant to the program's goals.<sup>83</sup> The strong disconnect between the M&E strategy, the data collected, and the program itself resulted in a loss of knowledge, but created an opportunity to incorporate and adapt the lessons learned from Jenga Jamaa II into another successful iteration of the WEG program. This is particularly important because versions of the WEG program are still being implemented in USAID-funded projects around the world as of 2023.

Jenga Jamaa II also struggled with creating and maintaining documentation—a critical part of implementation, especially given the length of multi-year projects. At the midline, which occurs at the end of the third year, researchers requested several key program documents to support their evaluation.<sup>84</sup> Some key reports and strategies were never produced, including the Behavior Change Communication Strategy and Gender Analysis.<sup>85</sup> It was found that these reports, and possibly the strategies themselves,

80 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. ix.

81 Doocy, S. et al. (2016). [Jenga Jamaa II Operations Research Final Report](#). John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, p. 62.

82 Doocy et al., 2016, p. 62.

83 Ibid.

84 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. viii.

85 Ibid.

never existed or at least were poorly used by program staff. The sustainability plan that was prepared had not been updated since the proposal was written.<sup>86</sup> Although it appeared that staff had considered it, it had never been recorded, leaving staff without a basic guiding document. Most importantly, the submission of the program's detailed implementation plan documenting the outcomes of the intervention by the end of year three and the 2014 annual survey report was delayed until after the evaluation was completed.<sup>87</sup> Upon receipt, it was found that the project had overemphasized the achievement of project objectives at the expense of the quality of implementation.<sup>88</sup> It was also found that the recorded achievement figures, as well as the targets of the detailed implementation plan, were not consistent with previous iterations, and the data in the annual survey report were not consistent with other project data, raising serious questions about the reliability, quality, and validity of the data.<sup>89</sup> The apparent lack of documentation also suggested that the substantial amounts of data collected by the program remained under analyzed and underutilized.

By documenting both the successes and challenges of MYEP, USAID can contribute to a virtuous cycle within the donor community of collective learning and adaptation for a more sustainable and collaborative response to humanitarian emergencies.

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86 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. ix.

87 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. 7.

88 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. ix.

89 Baharanyi et al., 2014, p. 7.

## Concluding Remarks

While the literature on the most effective factors in multi-year programming is rapidly evolving, established studies and guidance point to several promising practices.

MYEP requires a different mindset for long-term success—more upfront preparation and investment than short-term interventions. This applies to building and sustaining local partnerships, financial planning, MERL, and adaptation.

MYEP requires a high level of collaboration, support, and communication among stakeholders, as well as strengthening local capacity. This is necessary in the preparation of MYEP, during its implementation, and most importantly, for its exit strategy and sustainability. In low-resource contexts, local organizations are often not equipped to implement MYEP and will need donor support and investment to build their capacity to analyze, plan, respond, and adapt.

On the financial side, donors can leverage the multi-year nature of activities to achieve greater value for money and improve assistance if they follow promising practices to proactively identify opportunities for cost-effectiveness. This is particularly true in the case of procurement and logistics.

Promising practices in designing MERL for MYEP include planning for more rigorous, long-term monitoring and the possibility of more robust impact measurement compared to short-term approaches. For example, the longer timeframe of MYEP provides an opportunity to establish monitoring for systemic issues and contribute to longer-term development goals.

Learning and adaptation are not automatic and need to be planned in advance, ultimately including an exit and sustainability strategy. The continued success of MYEP requires integrating lessons learned into subsequent rounds of funding and programming. Implementing partners need to establish a process for capitalizing on findings and lessons learned at the outset. One promising practice in this area is to schedule annual Pause and Reflect sessions for partners implementing MYEP to meaningfully reflect on lessons learned and integrate them into programming.

The most prominent theme in promising practices is flexibility and adaptability. This includes flexible use of resources to meet spikes in support needs, including contingency funds when possible. Funding needs should be updated annually, with annual breakdowns that allow for effective financial tracking. Implementing partners should seek to fund MYEP using different types of funding where possible to allow for greater flexibility and predictability.

To operate effectively in a protracted crisis, implementing partners must commit to a flexible management approach. This requires comprehensive monitoring systems capable of collecting the necessary data to allow for rapid course corrections in response to dynamic circumstances. Continuous evaluation is essential to maintain a high level of agility and responsiveness.

On the contractual front, a flexible management strategy requires a mutual understanding between donors and implementing organizations on how project plans can be revised based on new information. Such an agreement should allow for adjustments in implementation without requiring cumbersome and time-consuming adjustments to contracts and budgets.

Before the completion of multi-year initiatives, it is critical for implementing partners to develop a well-thought-out exit plan to ensure that the achievements and lessons learned during the course of the project are sustained beyond the funding period. This blueprint should be viewed as a dynamic resource that is updated regularly throughout the life of the project.