British Red Cross (BRC) Syrian Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) Final Evaluation

9 August 2018

Contents

Management response

BRC is pleased to be able to present the final evaluation of the DfID-funded Syrian Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) supporting the Syria crisis, a grant of £8 million (June 2015–September 2017). The following is the management response to the external final evaluation that was conducted in February and March 2018.

The evaluation provided key insight on the delivery and impact of the programme as well as recommendations for future programming in this area through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC).

Overall, the evaluation concluded that:

> *SHRP complemented various capacity-building initiatives of several partners to support SARC in the midst of an exponential expansion in humanitarian response, and its most distinctive contribution has been: in enabling some of the sub-branches to provide humanitarian assistance to the conflict-affected population; providing basic orientation and skills in disaster management to staff and volunteers; and building capacity of SARC to undertake livelihoods programming by providing an overall framework and coordinated approach to assessment, planning and delivery of livelihoods programme. Capacity-building programmes need to take a longer-term focus, as these are complex, especially for an organisation like SARC with responsibility to deliver nearly two-thirds of humanitarian aid in a complex, protracted crisis. SHRP has been able to get SARC to start on several key initiatives which will require further development and consolidation in the next phase of humanitarian response in the country.*

The results of the evaluation reflect the complexities of the context as well as the challenges inherent with the British Red Cross (BRC) current operational model for working inside Syria. Trying to respond to a protracted conflict situation from an office based in a neighbouring country, with limited access, while also trying to capacity build the partner is indeed an ambitious task, as noted in the report. But the way BRC 'combined delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance with building short and long-term capacity of SARC, was highly relevant, and its focus on hard-to-reach and besieged areas appropriate'. While the programme enjoyed significant achievements, there are certain aspects which certainly could have been improved. This learning and key recommendations will be taken forward as relevant into the next phase of the BRC support to the Syria response.

The main areas of improvement can be summarised as: strategic direction and coordination of partners, and monitoring and evaluation.

Although this evaluation covers only a portion of the BRC work in Syria, it provides a useful review of the ongoing programme and can be used to further strengthen strategy, prioritisation of needs and operations support as the Syria crisis continues. The following section provides a more detailed response to the key findings and recommendations from the evaluation.

Strategic direction and coordination of partners

The set-up and strategic management of SARC, BRC's modality of engagement and coordination are all interlinked and reflected in several of the key recommendations put forward in the evaluation

including: the need for greater adherence to an overall longer-term organisation learning strategy, continued use and flexibility between a multilateral and bilateral delivery modality, and, finally the need for a further review of BRC's remote management model. However, without a clear vision by SARC of its needs and future, a coherent organisational learning and training strategy and adequate HR resourcing available, it remains difficult for partners to plan interventions in the most effective manner and from a value-for-money perspective. As such a certain amount of flexibility is necessary in order to achieve results and longer-term impact. SARC, IFRC and ICRC are now engaged in a process to create a strategy for SARC but this is unlikely to provide immediate clarity on SARC's direction and needs, rather it is the beginning of a long exercise. BRC are supporting this process on several levels, and are keen to remain a partner in any initiatives which promote accountability and performance.

An example of BRC's ongoing commitment to SARC's longer-term capacity development is the, recent HR assessment and development planning conducted by BRC with SARC which resulted in specific findings and recommendations related to staff and volunteers' development. This will also be reflected in the MEAL tools (see monitoring below) which will capture the effectiveness of the learning and development efforts and initiatives BRC – together with IFRC and other Movement partners – is supporting on sub-branch development. SARC has committed to review its approach to sub-branch development before the end of 2018. BRC will offer its support to such exercise if needed and in coordination with other SARC partners.

The initial modality of engagement for BRC was through the multilateral system, which was appropriate in such a fast-moving and unstable context. However, it became clear that the benefits and effectiveness of this were very mixed, which led to BRC switching the majority of its funding to the bilateral modality in 2016. BRC will continually review the best way to programme funding, most likely keeping a mixed modality, dependent on capacity of IFRC and SARC to improve the programme efficiency and effectiveness going forward. Coordination issues remain ongoing and how this links to effectiveness of programming will form the basis of any future discussion of location of the BRC Syria crisis office.

Monitoring and evaluation

Regarding recommendations concerning monitoring and evaluation, BRC accept that the programme set-up was originally lacking in PMEAL elements showing a causal pathway of change for capacity building. Internally, the newly revised BRC Syria crisis strategic framework articulates the focus of BRC programmes in Syria going forward; it includes clearer emphasis on SARC organisational development and more thematic capacity development. M&E input was incorporated resulting in a design grounded on a solid strategic approach, well-defined and measurable priorities. Through constant collaboration with SARC as a result of some of the initiatives undertaken as part of the SHRP, there is now a greater level of engagement and senior staff buy-in for monitoring and evaluation from a SARC perspective. During the life of the programme BRC faced several challenges including under-staffing of the programme team, a constant shift in priorities of SARC and lack of will or organisation of SARC to engage in standard monitoring aspects. Strengthening M&E in SARC formed a part of the BRC capacity-building plan but was subject to changeable buy-in by senior SARC management which created unsurmountable obstacles at different times.

The programme team acknowledges the need for more structured evidence gathering related to the programme performance with SARC. The newly recruited PMEAL senior officer (focusing on Syria Crisis) and the regional PMEAL/Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) delegate will provide the required technical support to fulfil this improvement, including key work on a capacity-building monitoring framework agreed at an institutional level by BRC headquarters. Externally, BRC engagement and advocacy with SARC on their MEAL capacity development remains an integral part of the next phase of programming.

Finally, the evaluation also found that the project would have benefitted from a clearly articulated Theory of Change (ToC) to ensure BRC has a strong framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation and to allow for a better assessment of impact at the end of implementation. Although this was not considered in the development of the original proposal, a ToC has been developed for the ongoing programme in order to capture more solidly the thinking in this area. Further work on the organisational development part of the BRC–SARC programme and/or any other new programmatic elements will also produce a specific ToC for each element.

Working through SARC, BRC funds were able to reach an extraordinary amount of beneficiaries in a very complex environment. BRC is wholeheartedly committed to ensuring it is accountable to those it seeks to support and will continue to use the learning here to improve its work in the Syria crisis for the years to come.
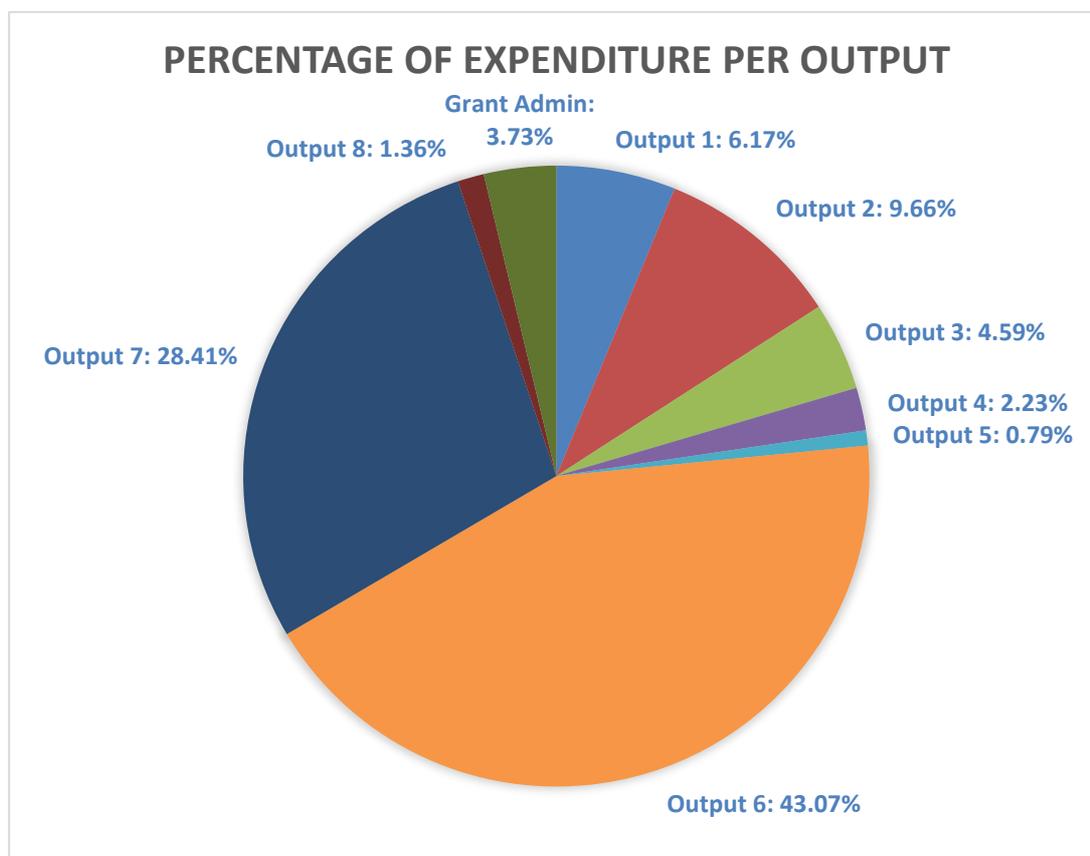
Summary of spend to output

The table below summarises the achieved results for each of the outputs in addition to detailing the financial figures (revised budget vs spent).

Outputs	Original target	Summary achieved result	Budget amount (£)	Total spent (£)	Percentage of spent vs. budget
Output 1: Provision of financial support to SARC HQ and four sub-branches to maintain functionality	4 sub-branches	8 sub-branches	742,424	491,844	**66%**
Output 2: Supporting SARC staff and volunteer retention through supporting salaried positions and providing uniforms	74 positions 4,000 uniforms	73 positions 3,445 uniforms	764,943	770,201	**101%**
Output 3: Training branch staff and volunteers in Disaster Management, Reporting & Information Management, Health, Logistics, and Humanitarian Diplomacy	2,500	3,017	337,109	366,103	**109%**

Outputs	Original target	Summary achieved result	Budget amount (£)	Total spent (£)	Percentage of spent vs. budget
Output 4: Technically supporting SARC to develop livelihoods as a programme modality	1 Movement livelihood delegate	1 Movement-livelihood delegate who helped develop 49 SARC livelihood materials	186,107	177,956	**96%**
Output 5: Establishing a PMEAL Unit, including Complaints Response Mechanisms across all branches	86 staff and volunteers trained in PMEAL at HQ and branch level 6 MEAL officers recruited to MEAL units at SARC HQ and branch level 7 SARC departments with an appropriate logic model, tailored PMEAL systems and processes	48 SARC staff and volunteers trained in project/programme planning 0 MEAL officers recruited	80,499	62,724	**78%**
Output 6: Providing effective and timely food relief distribution to 120,000 families	120,000 families	139,489 families	3,331,752	3,435,013	**103%**
Output 7: Providing effective and timely winterisation relief to 30,000 families	30,000 families	322,210 families	2,285,611	2,265,552	**99%**

Outputs	Original target	Summary achieved result	Budget amount (£)	Total spent (£)	Percentage of spent vs. budget
Output 8: Conducting monitoring and evaluation activities	2	2	56,475	108,667	**192%**
Grant administration			320,352	297,556	**93%**
GRAND TOTAL			8,105,273	7,975,615	**98.4%**

The graph below reflects the percentage of expenditure for each output based on the total amount spent:

PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURE PER OUTPUT

Grant Admin: 3.73%
Output 8: 1.36%
Output 1: 6.17%
Output 2: 9.66%
Output 3: 4.59%
Output 4: 2.23%
Output 5: 0.79%
Output 7: 28.41%
Output 6: 43.07%

Wendy McCance
Country cluster manager Syria, Lebanon and Iraq
25 July 2018

BRITISH RED CROSS – FINAL EVALUATION OF SYRIA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PROGRAMME (SHRP)

FINAL REPORT
10 MAY 2018

45 MUNGO PARK WAY, ORPINGTON, BR5 4EE

FINAL EVALUATION OF SYRIA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PROGRAMME (SHRP), BRC

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Abbreviations

AtB	Accountability to Beneficiaries
BRC	British Red Cross
CHF	Swiss Franc
DFID	Department for International Development
DM	Disaster Management
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HQ	Headquarter
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IMPACT	International Mobilisation and Preparation for ACTion
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
IR	Inception Report
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
PMEAL	Planning Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning
RCRC	Red Cross & Red Crescent
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SHRP	Syria Humanitarian Response Programme
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
TPM	Third Party Monitoring
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Glossary

Besieged Areas: An area surrounded by armed actors with the sustained effect that humanitarian assistance cannot regularly enter, and civilians, the sick and wounded cannot regularly exit.

Hard-To-Reach Areas: An area not regularly accessible to humanitarian actors for the purpose of sustained humanitarian programming due to the denial of access, the continual need to secure access, or due to restrictions such as active conflict, multiple security checkpoints or failure of the authorities to provide timely approval.

Tonne: 1 Metric Ton (1,000 kg)

Definition of terms (as per OECD/DAC Criteria for evaluating humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies)

Relevance is concerned with assessing whether projects are in line with local needs and priorities and refers to the overall goal and purpose of a programme. **Appropriateness** is about the need to tailor humanitarian activities and inputs to local needs.

Effectiveness is about the extent to which the activity achieves its outcome or purpose, or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of outputs.

Efficiency measures how economically inputs (funds, expertise, time) have been converted into outputs.

Connectedness is about the need to assure that activities of a short-term emergency nature take longer-term and interconnected problems into account and **Coherence** refers to the need to ensure that there is consistency in policies and practices.

Sustainability is concerned with assessing whether an activity or an impact is likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable.

Impact looks at the wider effects of the project - social, economic, technical, and environmental - on individuals, gender, age groups, communities, and institutions.

Executive Summary

Background to the evaluation

The British Red Cross (BRC) has been working in Syria since the start of the current crisis in 2011 in partnership with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). The latter plays the lead role within the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement and is the primary provider of humanitarian services in Syria. Through funding (£8 million) received from the Department for International Development (DFID, UK) in 2015, BRC supported SARC to implement a 27-month programme, the Syrian Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP), aimed at enhancing SARC's capacity and providing emergency relief assistance. As agreed with DFID, BRC commissioned an independent evaluation of the programme to assess results of SHRP and draw lessons for the future. This report summarises the methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations from the external final evaluation, conducted during January-February 2018.

Purpose, objectives and methodology of the evaluation

The purpose of this final evaluation was to assess the outcomes and impact of SHRP, as well as to identify challenges and lessons for future programming. The central focus of the evaluation was on contributions made by SHRP in *building SARC's capacity* for delivery of overall response in line with its core mandate in Syria as the lead humanitarian agency. The main objectives of the evaluation were threefold:
  i.   assess the overall impact of the SHRP programme against the intended outcomes and results outlined in the programme proposal
  ii. examine the approaches and strategies used in delivery of the programme, and
  iii. provide evidence-based recommendations and lessons to inform the next phase of the programme, starting in 2018, as well as the overall BRC programme in Syria.

The evaluation followed a mixed-methods approach involving document research, purposively selected key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders, semi-structured interviews and an online survey. As is customary with mixed-method evaluations, triangulation with multiple sources of data, comprising interviews, online survey and desk reviews, was crucial for developing the evidence-base for this evaluation. The evaluation team interviewed a total of 52 individuals. An online survey was administered to SARC staff and volunteers to obtain feedback on training and capacity building activities, drawing a response from 310 people, including 252 volunteers.

Limitations

The evaluation team, being unable to visit sub-branches (which were the main focus of most of the SHRP capacity building work), meant that the team lacked first-hand exposure to the area and affected communities, and to opportunity for direct observations of any of the activities undertaken by the programme at the level of communities. The evaluation, therefore, relied on secondary data and information contained in documents provided by BRC to fill the void; but this had its limitations, as secondary data available in various reports were weak in terms of evaluable data for the evaluation to draw upon. All these have limited the evaluation team's ability to assess the impact of the programme.

Findings - Outcome 1: Enhanced capacity of SARC

Findings on outputs 1 and 2 – SARC functionality and support for staff and volunteer retention
1. Output 1 ("SARC HQ and targeted SARC sub-branches financially supported to maintain functionality") and output 2 (staff and volunteer retention) together are geared to enhancing SARC's operational capacity.

Despite delays in staff recruitment, SHRP's support to sub-branches' core facilities and salaries of staff contributed to enhancement of SARC's capacity at its headquarters and specifically in eight sub-branches.

2. SARC's relief activities have multiplied several-fold in the past five years as dozens of major agencies (27, including NGOs, UN and RCRC) are working with SARC, and are contributing to SARC's core costs, besides the cost of specific humanitarian operations. Towards this, SHRP has specifically attempted to strengthen SARC's monitoring and reporting capacity, as well as in undertaking programming in new area (namely, livelihoods).

3. BRC has been supporting SARC in developing a HR system incorporating a coherent salary structure and performance appraisal of staff, as well as working with the Norwegian Red Cross to help SARC develop a comprehensive financial system.

Findings on Output 3 – training and skills development
1. SHRP provided training to 2,901 staff and volunteers – 2,549 in disaster management (DM), 143 in logistics and 209 in information management, besides several other one-off training courses. The courses were rated highly by participants, and the DM training, in particular, was seen as helpful in enabling participants to gain an understanding of SARC and RCRC Movement, and has been now made mandatory by SARC for all its new recruits.

2. Reporting and information management training was rated high and participants used the knowledge gained regularly in their work. The Training of Trainers (ToT) module was also rated as useful. However, there were several additional training provided through SHRP which participants found less useful in practice, primarily due to lack of follow up after training, in the form of refresher courses or coaching/mentoring opportunities or learning exercises.

Findings on output 4 – support on livelihoods programming
1. SHRP provided technical support to SARC in developing livelihoods programing capacity through an international IFRC Delegate seconded to support livelihoods programme, besides conducting feasibility and market studies to inform specific activities and assisting SARC to develop a livelihoods team at HQ level. There is a good level of interest and understanding of livelihoods programming now within the organisation, and several partners are now able to support SARC in its livelihoods programming using the SHRP-developed programme framework.

Findings on outputs 5 & 8 - programme monitoring & evaluation, and learning and accountability to beneficiaries
1. BRC's initial aim was to establish an Accountability-to-Beneficiaries (AtB) unit within SARC, and branches were to have established a Complaints Response Mechanism. With the benefit of hindsight, BRC recognised that the original plans were ambitious and then moved to focus on wider Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) approach to build organisational capacity in this area. There has been slow progress in this regard – recruitment of an international PMEAL delegate was delayed until January 2017, training on AtB did not take place and a formal complaints mechanism was thus not initiated. There is now a lack of clarity on the future of M&E function within SARC as this has not received adequate senior management attention.

2. SARC's ability to track outputs and outcomes, let alone impact, is hindered by a lack of a strong PMEAL system within the organisation.

Overall findings on outcome 1
All the outputs discussed above were directed at enhancing the capacity of SARC to respond to increased and evolving needs according to its humanitarian mandate. With regard to livelihoods programming in particular, SHRP has been instrumental in enabling SARC and partners in moving forward with a coherent programmatic framework which will be crucial in the coming years as the humanitarian response enters into recovery phase. SARC has been playing a crucial role for the entire humanitarian system in providing access to areas and communities which no other humanitarian organisation is able to do. SARC's ability to track outputs, outcomes

and impact remains limited due to a lack of a strong PMEAL system within the organisation, something SHRP aimed at strengthening, but with limited realisation of outcome in this regard.

Findings - Outcome 2 - Meeting basic relief needs of affected communities

Findings on outputs 6 and 7 – food relief and winterisation materials

1. There was delay in providing relief assistance, caused mainly by: (a) initial delay in procurement through the IFRC pipeline during 2015-2016, and (b) changes in the Government of Syria's import regulations in the middle of procurement process which necessitated re-tendering in 2017. This necessitated a no-cost extension of the project, and by February 2018, SHRP was able to assist a total number of 138,383 families, nearly 15 percent higher than the original target.

2. The data shows that while there was general satisfaction with the quality of material provided, the quantity, frequency and timeliness of food items in particular were considered inadequate by nearly half the recipients.

Overall findings on outcome 2

The outcome, as defined in project documents ("The most vulnerable people have some of their basic relief needs met"), laid emphasis on targeted beneficiaries' satisfaction with quality and quantity of relief assistance provided. To this limited extent, the outcome may have been achieved, although the way it is designed is not evaluable as any food distributed will have met "some need", as long as these were based on needs assessment. Overall humanitarian outcome on target communities is difficult to track due to: (a) limited availability of any evaluable data in this regard, combined with issue of lack of access; and (b) the SHRP contribution going to a much-larger distribution pool as SARC is used as channel for food and non-food distribution by multiple agencies.

Findings on Cross-cutting issues

1. The programme has ensured that gender disaggregated data on beneficiaries is maintained and reported by branches/sub-branches. However, the quarterly progress reports and mission reports show little evidence of any attempt to steer the programme to take gender issues beyond targeting and disaggregated data at the level of beneficiaries.

2. BRC changed, mid-course, its implementation modality from working through IFRC to a bi-lateral approach, with BRC working directly with SARC on account of value for money (VfM) considerations which BRC monitored quite closely, through good practices in procurement and economy in resource utilisation. BRC's constant emphasis on VfM is seen as an inspiration for several current initiatives towards streamlining systems within SARC, as well as in bringing about change in how individual partners relate to the former. BRC has also introduced SARC staff to training in best practices in anti-corruption and fraud prevention.

3. Reporting has been problematic, both in terms of their timeliness and quality, during the lifetime of the project.

Conclusions

Overall conclusion

SHRP complemented various capacity building initiatives of several partners to support SARC in the midst of an exponential expansion in humanitarian response, and its most distinctive contribution has been in enabling some of the sub-branches to provide humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected population; providing basic orientation and skills in disaster management to staff and volunteers; and building capacity of SARC to undertake livelihoods programming by providing an overall framework and coordinated approach to assessment, planning and delivery of livelihoods programme. Capacity building programmes need to take a

longer-term focus as these are complex, especially for an organisation like SARC with responsibility to deliver nearly two-thirds of humanitarian aid in a complex protracted crisis. SHRP has been able to get SARC to start on several key initiatives which will require further development and consolidation in the next phase of humanitarian response in the country.

Detailed conclusions

Relevance and appropriateness: The programme which combined delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance with building short and long-term capacity of SARC was highly relevant, and its focus on hard-to-reach and besieged areas appropriate. However, the way outputs were defined in the project design could have been improved with better analysis of the causal pathway, particularly related to capacity building. Of the many training courses SHRP supported, the modules on disaster management and information management were most appropriate as many of those trained found these courses directly relevant to their roles. However, some of the training courses were not linked to any coherent strategy or plans for their utilisation within the organisation. BRC's initial approach to delivering the programme through IFRC was appropriate, given that BRC had no physical presence in the country, and BRC changed this modality later on when this arrangement did not work out because of delays within IFRC.

Effectiveness: SHRP's main contribution on outcome 1 (enhanced capacity of SARC) has been in three key result areas: (a) strengthening sub-branches in besieged and hard-to-reach areas; (b) providing basic orientation and skills in disaster management to over 2,500 staff and volunteers; and (c) building capacity of SARC to undertake livelihoods programming. SHRP's training activities could have been more effective if these were complemented with follow-up exercises to promote ongoing learning. The PMEAL initiatives, though well-intentioned, were not anchored in an organisational learning strategy, thus undermining their effectiveness. An incremental and heuristic approach, starting with a manageable number of major outcomes focusing on fostering a results-oriented and organisational learning culture could help ground PMEAL systems in an overall organisational change process. SARC is now initiating a process of development of organisational strategy for the coming years. It will be important to ensure that future support from BRC is aligned with this strategy when it emerges. For this, BRC's continued engagement in a multi-lateral process will be crucial, and this may require BRC to review if its remote management from Beirut gives it the best institutional space for such engagement. Outcome 2 ("the most vulnerable people have some of their basic relief needs met") as defined in the project proposal may be, on the surface, said to have been met, though the way it is designed is not evaluable.

Efficiency: BRC's initial approach to delivering the programme through IFRC was right in that this was expected to ensure key Movement partners having a coordinated approach to supporting SARC's work. Several outputs like the livelihoods framework and training of volunteers provided substantial multiplier effect at optimal cost. The relief distribution however was delayed, and some of this delay could have been avoided by putting in place alternative procurement mechanism. The PMEAL initiatives under the programme (outputs 5 and 8) did not attract much traction within the organisation as it was not plugged into any organisational change strategy. This weakness has been a contributing factor to weaknesses in reporting on the project.

Coherence and connectedness: The programme interventions helped promote several best practices in line with accepted international standards and frameworks. Coordination within the Movement was weak and should improve under a new leadership in SARC and the country office of IFRC.

Sustainability and impact: SARC is now able to attract support from a number of partners for programming in different sectors, and these are also contributing to some of the core costs of the type SHRP was supporting, and this trend is likely to continue. As the scale of emergency relief needs gradually comes down, a different programming approach will be needed for recovery phase, and this will require SARC to be able to manage the scale-back. The DM training is now embedded in SARC's mandatory training for freshly recruited volunteers and staff, and SARC is likely to continue this in future. Likewise, the livelihoods framework that SHRP helped to build is already attracting several partners/donors who will continue to support its livelihoods activities in different areas. SARC delivers nearly 60 percent of all humanitarian aid in the country, and support

to the volunteers and sub-branches have directly contributed to this overall humanitarian response in the country.

Lessons from SHRP

1. A coordinated approach to humanitarian response is necessary for RCRC and for this, while trying to work through IFRC, BRC needs to have a flexible approach right from the start – in the case of SHRP, BRC adopted this halfway through the programme - whereby alternative options for time-critical components of programmes are explored, and a mixture of implementation modalities adopted.

2. A project-led approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning without reference to overall organisational culture and an overarching learning strategy leads to suboptimal results that cannot usually be sustained.

3. Project designs need to be based on a clear delineation of causal pathway in order to render the project to generate evidences that can demonstrate outputs, outcomes and impact.

Recommendations

For joint action by BRC and SARC

R1:   For the next phase of the programme, especially for the capacity building and recovery components, the project needs to articulate a clear theory of change showing the causal pathway, with clear identification of preconditions and assumptions which can be monitored periodically during the course of implementation. In this regard, it will be necessary to ensure that Monitoring & Evaluation /theory of change specialists are involved during the initial design of the project to ensure that the design is evaluable before it is finalised.

R2:   While building SARC's capacity in the long-term, BRC needs to put in place participatory monitoring, review and learning exercises involving staff and volunteers, through which outcome-related data on programme performance can be collected by using tools like contributions analysis, most significant change stories, case studies, evaluation rubrics, etc., on an ongoing basis. Ensure that PDM findings are collated, synthesised and lessons drawn through a participatory learning process involving SARC staff and volunteers, linking these to after-action reviews/real-time evaluations during the response. These will also strengthen BRC's reporting to donors.

R3:   Ensure that all training courses supported by BRC are backed by a coherent learning and development strategy which integrates training with post-training follow-up, coaching, mentoring and ongoing learning exercises, ensuring that classroom learning is tied to work-site learning on a continuous basis.

R4:   Support SARC in developing systematic criteria and process for setting up and supporting sub-branches, and how these are linked to branches in future.

For BRC action

R5:   BRC needs to review if its existing remote management from Beirut provides it the right institutional space to engage strategically with SARC and the Movement partners.

R6:   Continue to work multi-laterally through IFRC in areas that relate to organisational change and institutional systems for SARC, but explore alternative modes of delivery, if necessary, for time-critical, life-saving interventions.

R7:   The process of development of organisational strategy which SARC plans to undertake should set a roadmap for SARC's role and how it positions itself in the future humanitarian response system in Syria. BRC's future support needs to be aligned with this strategy.

Section 1

Introduction, Purpose and Methodology of the Evaluation

1.1 Background to the evaluation

The British Red Cross (BRC) has been working in Syria since the start of the current crisis in 2011 in partnership with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), the latter undertaking the role of lead agency within the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement and primary provider of humanitarian services in Syria. In 2015, BRC received funding of £8 million to implement a 27-month programme, the Syrian Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP), to support capacity building of SARC and provide emergency relief assistance. The grant came to an end in September 2017. As agreed with the donor, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), BRC commissioned an independent evaluation of the programme to assess the outcome and impact of the SHRP and draw lessons for the future. This report details the methodology, findings, conclusions and recommendations from the external final evaluation, conducted during January-February 2018.

1.2 Purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation

Purpose and scope

As stated in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation (Annex 1), the purpose of this final evaluation was to assess the outcomes and impact of SHRP of capacity-building of SARC and provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to affected communities in Syria, as well as to identify challenges and lessons for future programming. The scope of the evaluation covered various activities undertaken since June 2015 in Syria under the SHRP. As was clarified in the inception report (Annex 2), while the evaluation examined how SHRP contributed to SARC's work in addressing humanitarian needs and reducing vulnerability in the context of Syrian crisis, the central focus of the evaluation was on contributions made by SHRP in *building SARC's capacity* for delivery of overall response in line with its core mandate in Syria as the lead humanitarian agency.

Objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation examined impact, results, achievements and challenges faced in the course of implementation over the programme period, with emphasis on learning. The main objectives of the evaluation were threefold:
- ❖ assess the overall impact of the SHRP programme against the intended outcomes and results outlined in the programme proposal
- ❖ examine the approaches and strategies used in delivery of the programme, and
- ❖ provide evidence-based recommendations and lessons to inform the next phase of the programme, starting in 2018, as well as the overall BRC programme in Syria.

Organisation of the evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned by the BRC Country Manager for Syria and managed by the Impact and Evidence Manager at BRC headquarters (HQ). Through an international tendering process, Results Matter Consulting (UK) was awarded the contract to conduct the evaluation. The team comprised two international consultants and a local research assistant based in Damascus. None of the consultants had any previous association with BRC, or were being considered for any engagement as staff or consultant at the time of the evaluation.

Prior to the field visits, an inception report was drafted and finalised (Annex 2) in consultation with the BRC team in Beirut and London. The inception report outlined evaluation questions, methodology, tools and a detailed work plan for delivering the evaluation according to ToR. A visit to Beirut, Lebanon, where BRC's Syria programme team is based, and Syria was undertaken by the evaluation team from February 8 to 16, 2018. A breakdown of key informant interviews and focus group discussions undertaken during data gathering is provided in Annex 3 along with a full itinerary of the evaluation team visit. A list of key documents consulted is attached in Annex 4. At the end of the visit, exit debriefing was conducted in Beirut which was attended by key BRC staff.

The SARC team in Damascus provided support in arranging meetings, interviews and field visit and ensured that evaluators had access to available documents. However, due to restrictions on travel inside the country, travel permits for the two international consultants were not approved by the authorities and hence they could not leave Damascus to undertake any field visit to interact with affected communities and beneficiaries of SHRP. Subsequent to the main mission of the team, SARC was able to organise a brief visit by the research assistant to two branches of SARC, which enabled her to interview a small number of beneficiaries of SHRP.

Methodology

The overall methodology followed during the evaluation is described in detail in the inception report (IR) and was based on both inductive and deductive approaches using quantitative and qualitative data gathered from a carefully selected range of sources. During the inception phase, the evaluators undertook desk-based research, analysis of secondary sources and a stakeholder mapping exercise. The mapping of key stakeholders formed an initial list for the key informant interviews which was subsequently refined and added to as the data gathering progressed.

The data collection was mainly done through document research, purposively selected key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders, semi-structured interviews, an online survey and individual interviews. The following comprised key sources for data gathering:

 ♦ Secondary data – programme proposal, progress reports, mission reports, evaluation reports and related documents on SARC's institutional capacity and delivery of food relief and winterisation assistance in Syria;

 ♦ Purposively selected key informant interviews in London, Beirut and Damascus with key stakeholders, as identified in the stakeholder analysis.

A rapid online survey of participants of training courses conducted by BRC/SARC and staff/volunteers working at branch/sub-branch level during 2015-2017 was also conducted. As is customary with mixed-method evaluations, this evaluation ensured that opinions, views and perspectives offered by each interviewee or key informant were tested against information obtained from other interviewees and documents. Triangulation with multiple sources of data, comprising key informant interviews (KIIs), online survey and desk reviews, was crucial for developing the evidence base for this evaluation.

As outlined in the IR (evaluation matrix), the key questions examined in the evaluation were as follows (Box 1):

Box 1: Key questions for the evaluation

Relevance and appropriateness: Is there a clear rationale in the project in terms of linkage between activities, outputs

and outcomes? Were the implementation approaches, resources and scale of programming relevant to achieve the intended outputs and outcome? Were the capacity building and organisational development activities well-targeted, designed and implemented to address the actual needs of SARC staff and volunteers? Has the project been able to adapt its programming to the fast changing context in the country? Were the livelihoods, food relief and winterisation interventions informed by needs of affected communities? Were activities and interventions appropriate in the local context and to the needs?

Effectiveness: To what extent have key stakeholders (SARC staff & volunteers) benefited from capacity building activities, and to what extent these capacity building activities have contributed (or not) to a more effective management of the response (multiplier effect)? Have there been any unintended (positive and negative) effects of SHRP on SARC capacity or overall humanitarian response? How has increased SARC capacity affected the programming of other organisations who have a partnership with SARC? How did SHRP contribute to results/humanitarian outcomes for communities assisted directly through SHRP support (food, livelihoods and winterisation)?

Efficiency: To what extent did funding utilisation correlate with project outputs? To what extent has the programme optimised resources? To what extent was the Major Programme Board (MPB) utilised in planning, decision making and strategy reviews? Were issues that negatively affected performance identified and dealt with in a timely and effective manner? Has reporting been adequate and met the standard for programme implementation? Was M&E adequately designed and used to inform decision-making?

Coherence and connectedness: To what extent has the response supported through SHRP adhered to accepted international standards and codes of practice? Were the interventions carried out taking into account gender issues and social exclusions? How were gender considerations incorporated in the response? To what extent has SHRP enabled SARC to adhere to the Fundamental Principles and Code of Conduct of the Red Cross Movement?

Sustainability: How sustainable are the outcomes of the capacity building work - what will happen at the end of the SHRP, and which elements of the SHRP will be continued into future engagement with SARC? Has SARC been enabled to integrate and embed key elements of the SHRP into its work? To what extent have beneficiaries and communities participated in activities under the SHRP and taken ownership of activities?

Impact: To what extent has the SHRP contributed to alleviating the suffering of people affected by conflict? What specific contribution has SHRP made to the overall humanitarian response in Syria? What has been the overall impact of SHRP?

The evaluation team interviewed a total of 52 individuals. An online survey was administered to SARC staff and volunteers to obtain feedback on training and capacity building activities, drawing a response from 310 people (172 women and 135 men)[1] including 252 volunteers. The following table (Table 1) provides a breakdown of key informant interviews and survey respondents:

Table 1: Breakdown of interviews and survey conducted

Stakeholder group	No. of KII	No of survey respondents
BRC Staff	12	-
SARC Staff	20	59
SARC volunteers	6	251
Other RCRC Societies, ICRC, IFRC	6	-
UN agencies and NGOs	4	-
DFID	4	-
Communities/beneficiaries	8[2]	-
Total	**52**	**310**

A full list of all interviewees is provided in Annex 3. Data from these was supplemented with that obtained from the online survey and desk research carried out by the evaluation team. A list of the key documents consulted is attached as Annex 4. As field visits could not be conducted due to lack of access to affected communities, except for a one-day visit by the local research assistant to two sub-branches, only eight beneficiaries were met in the SARC offices. Therefore, as a departure in methodology outlined in the inception report, the evaluation team could not make any visits to affected communities and beneficiaries, except for these few meetings by the local researcher, and no beneficiary focus groups could be conducted.

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[1] Three survey respondents did not categorise themselves in either group
[2] Sub-branch of Alzabadany (4 beneficiaries) and e Point of Ein Maneen (4 beneficiaries).

As explained in the inception report, rigorous data triangulation was undertaken to validate data gathered during the course of the evaluation. This was done mainly through comparing information gathered through multiple sources and methods; where discrepancies occurred that could not be resolved, the evaluators have not used such data for drawing conclusions or lessons and recommendations.

Ethical considerations

The following protocol was adhered to by the evaluation team in all interactions with stakeholders:

❖ *Informed consent* - all participants voluntarily gave their consent to participate in any activity related to the evaluation;
❖ *Respect of rights* of those involved in any evaluation process or activity - participants were duly informed of the purpose so that they participated freely and equitably;
❖ *Confidentiality* – all information and/or views provided by the participants were on a confidential basis and evaluators have not attributed any of their observations, findings and conclusions to any individual or organisation, unless explicitly authorised by interviewees in writing, nor is information provided by individual interviewees to be shared with third-parties either orally or in writing, or transmitted electronically;
❖ *Respect dignity* - interviews and data-gathering were conducted in a way that respects individual's dignity;
❖ *Ensuring inclusivity* – all voices were heard, ensuring respect to privacy and confidentiality.

Data and information obtained through various methods were analysed to arrive at independent findings and judgements, which are presented in this report in a way that ensures the original data/information cannot be traced back to its source, unless the latter happens to be an officially published /accepted document.

Limitations

The evaluation team, not being able to visit sub-branches (which were the main focus of most of the SHRP capacity building work), meant that the team lacked first-hand exposure to the area and its communities, and to opportunity for direct observations of any of the activities undertaken by the programme. At SARC headquarters, the evaluation team was able to speak to a selection of staff and volunteers from sub-branches to partially compensate for this gap regarding primary data at the level of beneficiaries and sub-branches. The evaluation, therefore, relied on secondary data and information contained in documents provided by BRC to fill the void but, as was highlighted in the inception report, this had its limitations, as secondary data available in various reports were weak in terms of evaluable data for the evaluation to draw upon. All these have limited the evaluation team's ability to assess the impact of the programme, especially in terms of the difference it has made to the suffering of affected communities.

Format of the report

The report is in five sections. The second section provides a brief description of the project and its delivery modality. In section three, the evaluation presents its findings based on evidence gathered from desk reviews, interviews and a survey that were undertaken during the evaluation. Conclusions based on assessment as per the evaluation criteria and questions are presented in section four and section five summarises the conclusions, lessons and presents recommendations emerging from these.

Section 2

The SHRP Project Context and Content

2.1 Overall context of humanitarian crisis and needs in Syria

The context within which this programme is being implemented is described in detail in the SHRP proposal and quarterly reports.[3] The conflict in Syria has resulted in the death of more than 500,000 people in the seven years since it began. As the Syria crisis enters its eighth year, civilians continue to bear the brunt of a conflict marked by humanitarian suffering and destruction. Over 13.1 million people require humanitarian assistance, including close to 3 million people trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, where they are exposed to grave protection threats.[4] The United Nations (UN) has called the Syrian crisis "the world's largest displacement crisis": the UN estimates that 6.1 million people are internally displaced, besides 5.3 million refugees who are living in neighbouring countries. Some 1.8 million of whom were newly displaced in 2017 — approximately 6,550 people displaced each day.[5]

Syria's overall development has regressed by nearly four decades and the economy has contracted by 40 percent since the conflict began, causing large-scale unemployment and loss of livelihoods. Almost 80 percent of Syrians now live in poverty. Basic necessities like food and medical care are sparse, life expectancy has dropped by over 20 years, and school attendance has dropped over 50 percent.[6]

Well over half of the country's pre-conflict population of 22 million is in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, whether they remain in the country or have escaped to neighbouring countries.[7] Protection concerns are widespread. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and access to food are high priorities, as well as access to health services.[8] Some people survived the horrors of multiple displacements, besiegement, hunger and disease and fled to areas where they thought they would be safe, only to find themselves again in the midst of active on-going military operations and hostilities.

Life-threatening needs continue to grow. Neighbouring countries have restricted the admission of people fleeing Syria, leaving hundreds of thousands of people stranded in deplorable conditions on their borders. In some cases, these populations are beyond the reach of humanitarian actors. Children and youth comprise more than half of the displaced, as well as half of those in need of humanitarian assistance (HNO 2018). People in besieged and hard-to-reach areas continue to report severe living conditions as a result of limited humanitarian access. As of September 2017, the UN estimates that almost three million people in need lived in hard-to-reach areas across the country, including approximately 420,000 people in 10 besieged areas. (HNO 2018, pp4). Access constraints have a significant impact on the availability of food and other basic items as well. Although there has been increased access to many areas in the northeast of Syria, the needs of people in UN-declared besieged and hard-to-reach areas continue to be exceptionally severe due to arbitrary restrictions on the freedom of movement of the civilian population.

Syria is primarily a protection crisis. Besides large-scale civilian casualties, the destruction of life-sustaining civilian infrastructure and services such as water, sanitation and electricity systems, as well as attacks on hospitals, schools, housing, land and property have continued to undermine support structures in urban and rural areas, ultimately endangering civilian lives and hampering the return of the displaced populations after

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[3] A full list of quarterly reports is provided in the list of documents in Annex 4
[4] OCHA (2017). 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview –Syrian Arab Republic, November 2017. (HNO 2018)
[5] Ibid
[6] https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/syria (accessed 25 February, 2018)
[7] OCHA (2017). 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview –Syrian Arab Republic, November 2017. (HNO 2018)
[8] https://www.acaps.org/country/syria

the cessation of hostilities.[9] Factors including exposure to hostilities, widespread displacement, destruction of livelihoods, as well as deterioration of basic services and institutions have left seven out of ten people in Syria in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. The UN appeal for 2018 put the overall humanitarian assistance needs for Syria at US$3.51 billion (HNO 2018).

The overall conditions for safe, dignified and sustainable return are not yet in place in many parts of the country (HNO 2018, pp4). Some of those internally displaced in the early years of the conflict have started to return to their areas of origin where there has been cessation of active hostilities. However, of the 5.5 million Syrian refugees worldwide, most of whom remain in neighbouring countries, a very limited number have returned to Syria, and this is unlikely to change dramatically in the near future.

2.2 SARC's role in humanitarian response

SARC is the primary provider of humanitarian services in Syria and plays the role of lead agency within the RCRC Movement, responding to the biggest humanitarian crisis in decades. Since the start of the humanitarian crisis in 2011, SARC has been the main facilitator in the country for international humanitarian assistance as the crisis escalated. This has required working with, besides the RCRC Movement, 27 UN agencies and international organisations, thus demanding a phenomenal scale up in the institutional capacity of SARC for coordination, needs assessment, delivery of assistance and associated functions. SARC also acts as the focal point for 15 international NGOs (INGO) registered and operating in the country and is the key implementing partner of the UN with up to 60 percent of UN relief channelled through the SARC.[10]

The BRC has been supporting SARC in capacity building since 2007. Between July 2015 and September 2017, BRC supported SARC through the Syria Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP). The goal of the programme was to alleviate the suffering of people affected by the crisis inside Syria, through building SARC's capacity. The £8 million programme has been implemented in coordination with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and SARC, targeting 750,000 beneficiaries affected by the Syria crisis, as well as 4,000 SARC volunteers and staff.[11] The programme was initially managed multilaterally, but this was changed mid-way through the programme to a mixed modality, with most programming delivered through a bilateral modality between BRC and SARC as this was identified to be better value for money. The SHRP adopted a two-fold approach in its delivery of outputs and outcomes:

   a. supporting and enhancing the capacity of SARC to respond to increasing and evolving needs in line with its humanitarian mandate; as well as,
   b. making the most of SARC's unique role in delivering food and winterisation relief in newly accessible and besieged areas, hard to reach areas, and to suddenly displaced people to ensure that the most vulnerable people have some of their basic needs met.

The SHRP has supported capacity development of SARC through:

   ❖ the provision of financial support to its headquarters, branches and sub-branches; enabling retention of staff and volunteers;
   ❖ the provision of training in disaster management, reporting and information management, logistics, humanitarian diplomacy, building monitoring and evaluation capacity and developing livelihoods programming.

The key outcomes and outputs intended under the programme were as follows (Table 2):

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[9] https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/2018-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-enar
[10] British Red Cross (2017). Terms of Reference – Syria Humanitarian Response Programme, Final Evaluation, p1-2
[11] Ibid

Table 2: Outcome and outputs, SHRP[12]

Outcome 1: Enhanced capacity of SARC to respond to increased and evolving needs according to its humanitarian mandate. Outcome 2: The most vulnerable people have some of their basic relief needs met.		
Outputs	**Key interventions/activities/results sought**	**Activities/results achieved[13]**
Output 1: SARC HQ and targeted SARC sub-branches financially supported to maintain functionality.	● 4 month rent for SARC HQ (the annual rent cost is shared with other Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, IFRC and ICRC) ● 2 years rent for four sub-branches (Qamishly in Hasakeh; Qaryatain in Homs; Farqalas in Homs; Qara in Rural Damascus)[14] ● Contribution to HQ and four sub-branch essential running costs ● Support packages to four sub-branches ● Appropriate vehicle for each of the four sub-branches to support with local, rapid distributions.	● Core cost support provided to 8 sub-branches (4 were added to the original list in year 2) and HQ rent paid for 4 months ● Provision of vehicles to 4 sub-branches enabled increasing coverage of relief distribution ● In the last quarter of the programme, support provided for warehousing facility in one sub-branch
Output 2: SARC HQ, Branches, and sub-branches are able to retain their staff and volunteers	● Salary of 74 staff in SARC HQ and sub-branches: finance & admin, logistics, reporting & information management; disaster management at HQ; and two core operational staff in each of the four sub-branches ● Per diems, which are provided to staff and volunteers to cover travel costs ● Incentives for five volunteers per sub-branch. These incentives are offered to highly-skilled volunteers, who are able to undertake senior roles at branch level. They are paid for their time but only up to a certain monthly cap and they do not receive employment benefits ● Insurance for 3,000 volunteers – basic cover in case of accident, death or disability ● Uniforms for 4,000 volunteers – essential for visibility, access and protection, these costs will be supported for 24 months for uniform replenishment taking into account wear and tear and turnover of volunteers.	● Salary of 71 staff supported, including 17 in HQ, with some delayed recruitments ● Uniforms for 2,511 volunteers ● 3,000 volunteers covered under IFRC insurance scheme
Output 3: SARC Staff and Volunteers are trained	● Provide training on a regular basis to staff and volunteers of SARC in the following areas: Information Management and Reporting (IM), Logistics, Disaster Management (DM); Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) and Advocacy.	● 2,549 staff & volunteers trained in DM, 209 in reporting and information management, and 143 in logistics, besides several one-off training conducted from time to time. ● Humanitarian diplomacy training not conducted as other trainings were prioritised during ongoing emergency operations

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[12] Source: BRC (2015). Syria Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) Proposal, 15 May 2015
[13] Source: BRC SHRP Narrative Report Q9
[14] These initially selected sub-branches were replaced by other sub-branches for BRC support for various reasons, including access and needs.

Output 4: SARC technically supported to develop livelihoods as a programme modality	● Conduct a livelihoods feasibility assessment study and deploy a livelihoods technical specialist to take forward the outcomes of the feasibility assessment conducted jointly with IFRC and SARC. The livelihoods delegate will coordinate all RCRC support to SARC and ensuring synergy so that livelihoods activities that SARC implements, either within the RCM or with other INGOs and the UN, are well designed and planned, and support the inter-agency early recovery and livelihoods sector strategic plan.	● Feasibility study conducted and a delegate recruited who helped SARC develop a livelihood framework and set up a Livelihood Steering Committee which enabled a consolidated approach to livelihoods across the Movement partners. Training was also provided to staff/volunteers to improve their technical capacity to assess, design and implement livelihood interventions.
Output 5: Accountability to beneficiaries unit is established at SARC HQ	● Help establish an Accountability-to-Beneficiaries (AtB) unit at HQ, as well as an AtB framework and Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM). The beneficiaries' feedback that will be collected through the proposed AtB systems will inform decision-making process at SARC management and technical levels.	● This output was subsequently revised to cover MEAL functions, but progress was slow. A PMEAL delegate was recruited after severe delays in January 2017, but apt from some progress on post distribution monitoring, no other activity could be delivered.
Output 6: Effective and timely food relief distribution to 120,000 affected families	● Food parcels are targeted to newly displaced people, people in hard-to-reach areas and areas under siege for households that meet SARC standardised relief selection criteria.	● After some delay in procurement which required a no-cost extension of the programme, 129,942 families were provided food parcels by January 2018.
Output 7: Effective and timely winter relief distribution to 30,000 affected families	● The SHRP aims to provide 30,000 winterisation kits[15] to families over two years. The kit includes: 5 blankets, 2 tarpaulins, 2 sleeping mats and 2 mattresses to each family.	● BRC provided 130,148 winter relief *items*, including tarpaulins, blankets, sleeping mats and mattresses to SARC which, with additional support from other donors, provided relief to 274,064 families. Some 30,000 tarpaulins were distributed early 2018 due to delay in procurement.
Output 8: Monitoring and evaluation activities conducted	● Regular monitoring including post-distribution monitoring (PDM) generating data disaggregated by gender, age and disability, as well as value-for-money analysis, particularly with regard to procurement.	● Regular monitoring visits and PDM conducted.

(Source: BRC (2015). Syria Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) Proposal, 15 May 2015)

2.3 Project (SHRP) management and delivery

The BRC does not have an ongoing presence in Syria and the programme was managed from its country programme office based in Beirut. The team comprises a Syria Crisis Programme Manager with responsibility for day-to-day management of and liaison with SARC, assisted by support staff comprising a logistician (a Programme Assistant and a Planning Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) Officer

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[15] This was later changed as BRC decided to distribute items based on the needs, and not as a full kit to families.

joined later), who are supported by the Country Programme Manager with overall management responsibility for programmes in Syria and Lebanon. The team is supported by regional specialists/thematic advisers based in Beirut and BRC headquarters from time to time. In HQ, there is a Syria/Lebanon Programme Officer to provide desk support to the programme team in Beirut. BRC established a Syria Crisis Major Programme Board (MPB) as a governance and decision-making body to oversee BRC's response and provide strategic guidance. This Board meets regularly at BRC's UK office and is composed of members of the BRC International Senior Management Team. At the start of the programme, implementation was done through IFRC and, as mentioned earlier, from October 2016 the delivery modality changed to BRC working bi-laterally with SARC. The primary reason for this was to ensure timely implementation and better value for money.

BRC's support to SARC is part of overall IFRC Appeal for Syria. For the two years, 2016 and 2017, IFRC's appeal was approximately £81 million (CHF 56.1 million and CHF 49.7 million respectively).[16] With a total budget of £8 million, the SHRP[17] thus represents about 10 percent of the IFRC Syria appeal. The following Table (Table 3) presents the financial status of the project at the end of SHRP final project closure.

Table 3: Original budget and expenditure[18]

Outputs	Original target	Achieved result	Budget amount (£)	Total spent (£)
Output 1: Provision financial support to SARC HQ and four sub-branches to maintain functionality	4 sub-branches	8 sub-branches	742,424	491,844
Output 2: Supporting SARC staff and volunteer retention through supporting salaried positions and providing uniforms	74 positions 4,000 uniforms	73 positions 3,445 uniforms	764,943	770,201
Output 3: Training branch staff and volunteers in Disaster Management, Reporting & Information Management, Health, Logistics, and Humanitarian Diplomacy	2,500	3,017	337,109	366,103
Output 4: Technically supporting SARC to develop livelihoods as a programme modality	1 Movement livelihood delegate	1 Movement-livelihood delegate (supported by SHRP from July 2015 till September 2017) who helped develop 49 SARC livelihood materials by providing her inputs.	186,107	177,956

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[16] IFRC. Emergency Appeal – Syria Complex Emergency, Appeal No. MDRSY003/Revision No. 5 and Operations update No. 14, 21 December, 2017

[17] SHRP duration is for 27 months.

[18] The remaining 7 percent of the budget represents grant administration. (Source: BRC (2015). Syria Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) Proposal, 15 May 2015)

Outputs	Original target	Achieved result	Budget amount (£)	Total spent (£)
Output 5: Establishing a PMEAL Unit, including Complaints Response Mechanisms across all branches	86 staff and volunteers trained in PMEAL at HQ and branch level 6 MEAL officers recruited to MEAL units at SARC HQ and branch level 7 SARC departments with an appropriate logic models, tailored PMEAL systems and processes	48 SARC staff and volunteers trained in Project/programme planning 0 MEAL officers recruited N/A	80,499	62,724
Output 6: Providing effective and timely food relief distribution to 120,000 families	120,000 families	139,489 families	3,331,752	3,435,013
Output 7: Providing effective and timely winterization relief to 30,000 families	30,000 families	322,210 families	2,285,611	2,265,552
Output 8: Conducting monitoring and evaluation activities	2	2	56,475	108,667
Grant administration			320,352	297,556
GRAND TOTAL			8,105,273	7,975,615

Section 3

Evaluation Findings – Outputs and Crosscutting Issues

3.1 Outcome 1: Enhanced capacity of SARC

3.1.1 Outputs 1 and 2 – SARC functionality and support for staff and volunteers retention

In the SHRP proposal, outputs 1 (SARC functionality) and 2 (staff and volunteer retention) are separately presented, though output 1 is described as an input ("SARC HQ and targeted SARC sub-branches financially supported to maintain functionality"), and together these two are geared to enhancing SARC's operational capacity. For the purpose of evaluation, the two outputs are merged together, as findings on these are inseparable (also *see* section 4.1).

SARC branches and sub-branches

SARC has 14 well-established branches across the country, and most of the branches have their own building and are well resourced, according to key informants. The KIIs during the evaluation with staff and volunteers indicate that branches have good capacity in terms of human resources, financial and administrative system. Some branches have been running well-developed health programmes, clinics, hospitals and ambulance services for many years, and have long-serving volunteers and staff. The emergence of sub-branches is fairly new and gained pace in the past few years as the humanitarian crisis deepened.

SHRP aimed at enhancing capacity of SARC HQ and (initially) four sub-branches for maintaining core facilities and providing salaries for 71 positions in SARC HQ,[19] branches and sub-branches through financial core cost support amounting to £407,480, representing 5.1% of the original SHRP budget. There was a delay in the recruitment of salaried staff. One year into implementation, SARC had appointed only 40 staff out of a target of 78. This was partly due to delays caused by difficulty in finding qualified monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) staff, and partly due to major changes in management that took place in the organisation during 2017. In relation to delays in recruiting other staff, BRC attributes the delay to the nature of the crisis and SARC's extensive involvement in humanitarian operations and emergency response priorities, which routinely interrupts recruitment of staff.[20] Some delay in recruitment of sub-branch staff occurred as BRC had to seek permission from DFID to increase the number of sub-branches supported through SHRP from the initial four to eight, which was finally granted in May 2017. Further, the fact that several of the sub-branches were new and have not had paid staff prior to 2015 meant that SARC management needed time to decide on recruitment. By the end of the programme, however, BRC was able to support sub-branches in government-held Rural Damascus, northern Homs, southern Hama, Tartous, Latakia and As-Sweida, and opposition-controlled Aleppo.[21] BRC, Danish Red Cross (DRC) and IFRC are specifically targeting capacity development at sub-branch level, the latter focusing on health programmes.

Most of the sub-branches emerged spontaneously, rather than through any coherent strategy of SARC; sometimes, a group of local volunteers got together to assist their own communities and later came into contact with SARC. This has meant that sub-branches were not always linked with the branches in their respective areas, and some sub-branches relate directly to the HQ, according to two senior SARC officials and three external key informants. While such organic and unplanned evolution during times of crisis is understandable, lack of a dedicated department at the SARC HQ to coordinate and support the development of branches and sub-branches through a coherent framework has left the organisation with a slightly-unorganised process of expansion, as the criteria and vetting process for opening (or not opening) a sub-branch are not clearly

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[19] BRC SHRP Narrative Report Q9 DFID Draft v1.0
[20] Ibid
[21] Besides these, SHRP supported the position of a DM Coordinator and DM training in Idleb.

established, though these may exist on paper. Going forward, it will be important to have clear criteria established for sub-branches and systematic assessment of their role as humanitarian needs change.

SARC does not have a streamlined system for supporting and managing volunteers. Branches being decentralised and autonomous, volunteer management is left to them. There is no centralised database of volunteers. According to one key informant, in Damascus branch, for example, it is reported that about 20-40 percent of volunteers drop out every year due to some leaving the country, others losing interest and/or finding other opportunities in the country, requiring the organisation to continually recruit and train new volunteers. There is no consolidated data in the organisation regarding dropout or retention rate of volunteers.

SARC systems and procedures

SARC's systems and procedures have not kept pace with its rapid expansion and scale up, mainly due to the fact that the entire organisational energy and resources have been focused on providing emergency response. With a change in leadership and senior management in early 2017, the organisation has been moving slowly towards a better-organised business system. With rapid expansion in its staff and volunteers, human resource (HR) management is an increasing challenge as there is no written HR manual or procedure in place. The HR department itself is two years old and has been in the process of drafting a HR manual. All staff, whether in HQ, branches or sub-branches, have contracts which are renewed annually. Each branch now has a HR coordinator who has a dotted line relationship with the HR Manager at HQ. Before jobs are advertised,[22] job descriptions are sent to the HR Manager for vetting, so as to ensure some form of consistent job measurement across the organisation. According to key informants interviewed during the evaluation, by and large, the system appears to work satisfactorily, though complaints were heard of a recent case in which a new staff member was recruited to a sub-branch without adequate experience, and without the knowledge and involvement of any local staff or volunteers, solely because the person was reportedly a close friend of a senior branch official. Though the evaluation team got this information independently from two separate interviews, this could not be verified. BRC has been supporting SARC in developing a HR system incorporating a coherent salary structure and performance appraisal of staff. The Norwegian Red Cross, in collaboration with BRC and IFRC, is working with SARC to develop a comprehensive financial system which will, in future, make it easier to have a unified system of accounting for all grants from various donors, instead of individually tailored donor reporting, as is the case now.]

Partnership with and capacity building support from other humanitarian actors

SARC's relief activities have multiplied several-fold in the past five years as it became the channel for nearly two-thirds of all response operations. Between 2013 and 2015 when the programme was planned, SARC staff levels increased by 500%.[23] Dozens of major agencies (27, including NGOs, UN and RCRC) are working with SARC and, through their programmes, are contributing to SARC's core costs, besides the cost of targeted humanitarian operations (Box 2).

Box 2: Support from various UN agencies

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[22] Usually amongst volunteers, and then on SARC website
[23] Source: IFRC Syria Complex Emergency 2-year update, SARC Audited Financial Statement 2012-13, cited in: BRC (2015). Syria Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) Proposal, 15 May 2015

During the past five years, WFP reported having provided SARC with approximately 200 laptops, 200 personal computers, 55 trucks and six land cruisers.[24] Besides this operational assistance, SARC receives over US$3 million every year in "other direct costs" for handling around 200,000 tonnes of food on behalf of WFP every year for the past three years.[25] These are in addition to transport and handling charges for distribution of food which are borne by WFP. In addition to these, WFP supports salaries for about 1,000 staff and volunteers' remuneration, warehouse rent and spare parts for vehicles in areas of their operations with SARC. UNHCR's support to SARC is also reportedly of a similar scale. UNICEF is another UN agency which works closely with SARC for the past several years – currently, UNICEF has three programme cooperation agreements (PCA) with SARC on emergency response, child protection and WASH.[26]

Within the Movement, ICRC has the longest ongoing collaboration with SARC and, through its cooperation programme, has been supporting SARC's capacity building over the years. ICRC's budget for cooperation during 2017 was CHF 12 million (£9 million); nearly 75 percent of this was implemented in close cooperation with SARC and included support towards salaries of staff positions in SARC headquarters and branches, besides paying rent for warehouses and office premises in branches.[27] Focusing mainly on branches in conflict areas, ICRC's Syria programme represents the largest operation of its kind. Danish Red Cross (DRC) has also focused on sub-branch capacity along with BRC as intensified conflict showed that development of sub-branches was crucial to bolster SARC's capacity to provide humanitarian response in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. With a total annual budget of Danish Krone 85 million (£10 million approximately) to support provision of emergency health, primary health care, provision of insulin, psycho social support and relief, DRC is planning to support 23 sub-branches in coming years for their capacity development. Besides staff salaries, the SHRP contributed to rent for the HQ for four months, sub-branches and warehouses, uniforms for staff and volunteers, and provision of vehicles for sub-branches which, according to key informants and BRC quarterly reports, enhanced functionality of the sub-branches.

It is important to note here that though much of the support to SARC from various organisations comes in the form of grants and contracts for emergency response operations, these have also provided resources toward core support in the HQ and branches over the years. This is evidenced in the fact that SARC was able to meet the challenges of scaling up from an organisation providing basic health care and ambulance services in 2010 to the largest operational humanitarian agency providing multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance in the country in 2017. From 3,200 active SARC volunteers and only 30 staff located in Damascus before the conflict,[28] currently SARC has 326 staff on its rolls in the HQ, 2103 in branches and 7,702 volunteers across the country.[29]

SARC's wider role in humanitarian coordination

It needs to be borne in mind that SARC, as a national society of the RCRC, is unique in that it is tasked by the Government of Syria to coordinate the overall humanitarian response in the country. This involves not only coordinating humanitarian response *per se*, but also dealing with issues related to approval to operate in Syria for 15 (currently) INGO,[30] hiring of local and foreign employees, facilitating visa and work permits, opening offices, vetting INGO programme proposals, arranging travel permits, opening and closing of bank accounts and all related administrative matters. This imposes heavy demands on the organisation on a daily basis, some often requiring senior management attention, and is a core function of SARC. If SARC capacity fell short at any point in time in meeting these demands, the overall humanitarian response in the country will be negatively affected. This factor needs to be understood by all those supporting SARC – that it is mandated by the government to provide emergency relief as well as coordinate all humanitarian response, a role national societies elsewhere would not ordinarily be required to perform.

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[24] Source: WFP Damascus, in a personal communication with evaluators.
[25] In addition to other direct cost, an administrative cost of 7 percent of total field level agreement is also paid to all organisations involved in food distribution on behalf of WFP.
[26] Source: UNICEF Damascus, in a personal communication with evaluators.
[27] Source: ICRC Damascus, in a personal communication with evaluators.
[28] The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017
[29] Source: SARC Semi-Annual Report, Jan – June 2017
[30] INGOs are registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but are required to have a Memorandum of Understanding with SARC.

All external and internal stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation identified SARC's ability to be a

> SARC volunteers and staff have risked their lives in many instances. We have seen them die as well, while brining assistance to people. So we have high respect for SARC, and that's their uniqueness."
>
> *A senior UN official to the evaluation team*

strong advocate for impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian operations in a turbulent environment as its core strength. Several volunteers from different governorates cited this as a motivating factor for them to join SARC in the first place. The most distinctive role SARC has been playing for the entire humanitarian system has, undoubtedly, been its ability to access areas and communities which no other humanitarian organisation is able to do – all external interviewees in particular were unanimous in their views on this.
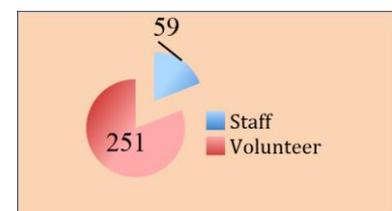
3.1.2 Output 3 – training and skills development

Initially training courses were run by IFRC, but due to slow pace of implementation – and reasons as stated in section 2.2 – BRC took over direct implementation of these from late-2016. The SHRP initially prioritised training of staff and volunteers in several areas, namely: disaster management, reporting & information management, logistics, health and humanitarian diplomacy. Subsequent review of gaps and needs rightly led to dropping the last two themes – health, because there were other providers, and humanitarian diplomacy[31] was seen as less of a priority in the face of other urgent training needs in logistics to support ongoing operations, and was reportedly incorporated into the communications training module. By the end of the programme, training was provided to 2,901 staff and volunteers – 2,549 in disaster management (DM), 143 in logistics and 209 in information management.[32] BRC and SARC conducted a post-training survey in April 2017 to assess the impact of training activities: out of 410 respondents (43 percent women and 57 percent men), 388 respondents found the training courses useful, and 338 respondents reported that they used the knowledge gained in their work.[33]

This evaluation team conducted an online survey of staff and volunteers (Figure 1) to obtain feedback on the usefulness of training and related capacity building initiatives undertaken through SHRP.[34] Of the 310 respondents (56% female and 44% male; 23% staff and 77% volunteers), 241 attended DM training which was rolled out widely among the volunteers and staff, 22 attended information management training and 24 logistics. Slightly over 80 percent of those attending training rated the courses highly in terms of delivery of training, and 89 per cent (Figure 2) stated that attending the training enhanced their confidence significantly. The DM training was seen as helpful in enabling participants to gain an understanding of SARC and RCRC Movement, as well as assessing needs of affected communities. The course covered basics of humanitarian law and principles, RCRC, disaster management, apart from various tools like needs assessment

Figure 1: No. of survey respondents

and emergency response standards. The DM training has now become a standard basic entry-level training for all volunteers and staff joining SARC. Prior to SHRP, the equivalent training focussed on first aid only, and it is only in the last two years that broader concept of modern disaster management has been introduced and made mandatory for all new recruits.

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[31] BRC Q9 progress report submitted to DFID at the end of the project and DFID PCR state that humanitarian diplomacy was de-prioritised, while a logframe update says humanitarian diplomacy was part of communications training module.

[32] The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017

[33] SARC Impact Survey Responses (2017)

[34] The survey was not structured to analyse response by staff and volunteers separately. In SARC, the roles and identity in this regard are very fluid - some volunteers are also staff for few months and vice versa.
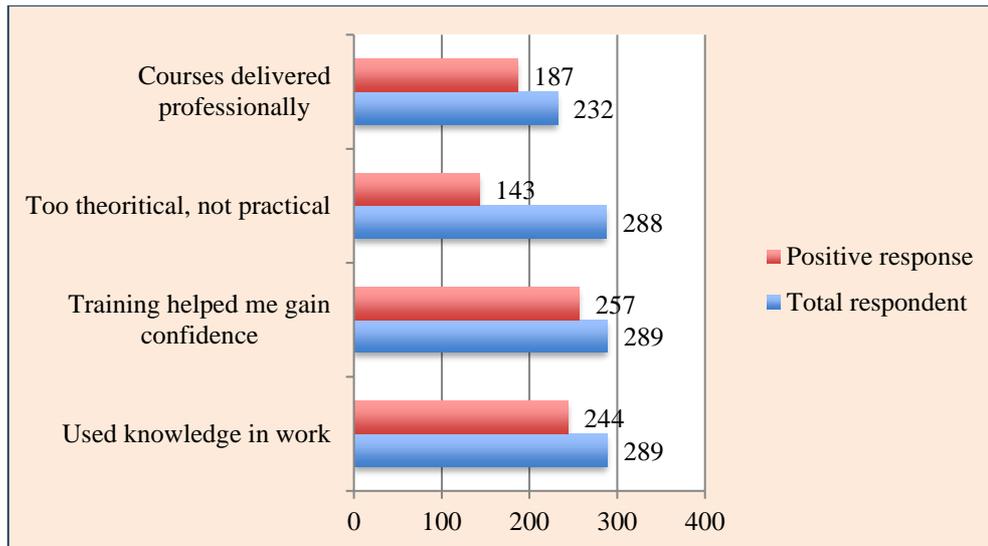
Figure 2: Feedback on SHRP training

Three-quarters of the staff and volunteers (12 of 16 who attended training) who were interviewed stated that the training courses were theoretical and basic, and they would have expected far more advanced and practical skills, especially in DM. This view was also shared by half of the survey respondents (143/288) who attended training courses. Reporting and information management training was rated highly on this score and those taking the courses responded that the tools they learnt in the course were being used on a daily basis in their work. The interviews and survey both confirm that there was a lack of follow up after trainings, in the form of refresher courses or coaching/mentoring opportunities or lessons learning exercises. Standard tools like after-action reviews, lessons workshops and operations away-days, which are usually used extensively in humanitarian sector periodically, during and after major emergency response, were not used. These could have provided opportunities, not only to review what was done, but to stock-take how tools like Sphere or needs assessments, for example, learnt during training courses, were utilised in the operations. The SHRP focused on classroom teaching and training, and did not complement these with providing opportunities for learning and capacity building that often take place outside of class rooms.

The evaluation's above finding that training was seen to be theoretical with limited practical applications may be seen to contradict the finding that participants are able to use their knowledge in their work (which 244 survey respondents, or nearly 84 percent, claimed to have done). It may be worth noting that when asked an open-ended question in the survey - to describe how and where respondents have used their knowledge gained in the training course - most respondents (except those attending information management training) categorically stated that the trainings were "theoretical" and they have not used much of their knowledge in practice.

One of the trainings that appear to have been useful is the Training of Trainers (ToT). In 2016, BRC conducted an eight-day DM ToT in Beirut for 28 staff members from SARC HQ and 12 branches and sub-branches. In 2017 BRC conducted a nine-days Sphere ToT in Beirut for 25 SARC staff from HQ, branches and sub-branches.[35] Participants rated this highly and some of them claimed to be using their skills to train others. In Damascus branch for example, there are three trainers who conducted five training courses for volunteers during 2017. Some SARC trainers have been used by other national societies in the region. There is however no systematic plan to utilise or support these trainers. Similar *ad hocism* in some training was seen in the case of field survey training conducted by BRC in Beirut – it is reported by three participants that though they were trained for 5 days, they have not been able to use, nor currently see any opportunity of using, any of their knowledge in the coming period. It is likely that BRC trained these people to undertake surveys for monitoring of programme activities, but as the M&E function (*see* section 3.1.4 below) in SARC has not yet been established, there is no coherent plan for M&E where field survey skills could be used. Another training BRC

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[35] Source: BRC Trainings listing, Oct 2016- December 2017

organised for SARC staff (the training targeted new key management) and volunteers was the standard IMPACT (International Mobilisation and Preparation for ACTion) training which is designed to provide training to participants that will prepare future Red Cross delegates for a mission with the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement by taking an in-depth look at the roles of the ICRC, the Federation, and National Societies in times of disaster and conflict. Although post-training feedback from participants suggested that they found the course valuable for their learning, it is unclear how this contributed to SARC's response capacity, a view shared by all Movement partners interviewed for this evaluation. BRC stated that the rationale for prioritising this training was to ensure that SARC staff gained an in-depth understanding of working with the Movement partners.

Within the organisation, there is a good understanding of principled humanitarian assistance, as was borne out during interviews with staff and volunteers. Additionally, sphere standards and Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) were also well understood by key staff and volunteers interviewed. Though a small number, several volunteers and staff interviewed during this evaluation hinted at arbitrariness and "favouritism" in selection of participants for training; more so in the case of training courses organised in Beirut. Similar comments were also received in the online survey.

3.1.3 Output 4 – support on livelihoods programming

Through the SHRP, BRC provided technical support to SARC in developing livelihoods programing capacity. Until 2015, SARC, like most national societies, was reluctant to get into livelihoods sector as this was not seen as a core role of national society. Increasingly in the protracted crisis, many organisations began focusing on livelihoods, as continued provisioning of relief assistance was unsustainable. Especially now, as some areas get stabilised, livelihoods is seen as a main component in future programming by many humanitarian actors in Syria. SHRP provided support for an international Delegate seconded to the IFRC to support livelihoods programme, besides conducting several feasibility and market studies to inform specific activities and assisting SARC to develop a livelihoods team at HQ level. Key informant interviews with SARC staff and volunteers indicate that there is a good level of interest and understanding of livelihoods programming now within the organisation. According to a senior SARC official, there are currently six livelihood staff members at the HQ; in addition, there are livelihood coordinators in each governorate and 140 volunteers in different governorates trained in the basics of livelihoods programming.

In order to facilitate a coherent approach within the Movement support to SARC on livelihoods, a Steering Committee comprising SARC, IFRC, ICRC and BRC was set up in 2015, and several national societies operating in Syria have expressed interest in joining this initiative. All proposals for livelihoods activities are vetted by this steering committee. Several national societies operating in Syria stated that they did not have in-house expertise on livelihoods, but with a common livelihoods strategy for SARC programming, they are beginning to join BRC, IFRC and ICRC in supporting SARC's work. The steering committee previously met bi-monthly, but with changes in leadership within SARC, there has not been any meeting since July 2017, according to one key informant. It was reported by a key informant that starting with about 70 beneficiaries in 2015, livelihoods programme of SARC now covers over 7,000 beneficiaries, besides ICRC which has a large programme for providing agricultural inputs to about 32,000 households, apart from livestock and microeconomic initiatives. Since November 2017, WFP has started supporting a few livelihoods activities through SARC as it was assessed to have developed good capacity in this regard. So far, major activities have been in the area of asset replacement, household food production and home gardening. BRC/SARC conduct community assessment and labour market assessments before any project and all the data is kept with SARC's livelihood coordinator.

Though SHRP did not fund any livelihood activity *per se,* which were funded through other resources, the programmatic framework and approach SHRP helped create, besides training provided on livelihoods, are credited by all interviewees for SARC making significant progress in livelihoods programming. A feasibility study for cash programming was undertaken in December 2017, and at the time of the evaluation, data were still being analysed. The WFP has been piloting voucher system and hopes to scale this up in the coming months with support from its partners, including SARC. Several agencies (Danish Refugee Council, UNRWA, besides UNHCR) have substantial market-based response, and the scale of cash programming is reported to

have expanded significantly in the past two years. To inform cash-based responses in Syria, REACH conducts a monthly Market Monitoring Exercise in partnership with the Cash-Based Responses Technical Working Group (CBR–TWG).[36] SARC is still seen to be somewhat hesitant when it comes to livelihoods programming, according to three external key stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation. Other organisations and local NGOs are reported to have been moving much faster on livelihoods on a large scale, with international assistance.

3.1.4 Outputs 5 & 8 - Programme monitoring, evaluation and learning, accountability to beneficiaries

In the SHRP proposal, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was split into two outputs (output 5 – establishing AtB unit, and 8 – conducting M&E activities), with a great deal of overlap between the two. The evaluation findings led the team to merge the two outputs in this report.

BRC's planned intervention was to establish an Accountability-to-Beneficiaries (AtB) unit within SARC that would train 588 SARC staff and volunteers in approaches to AtB at HQ and branch level. As part of this, branches were to have established Complaints Response Mechanism to have the capacity to respond to beneficiaries' complaints.[37] Additionally, a number of MEAL officers were to be to recruited and trained at both HQ and branch levels in order to complement the monitoring system with AtB mechanism. With the benefit of hindsight, BRC recognised that the original plans under this output were ambitious – a fact also noted in DFID's Project Completion Review.[38] In the prevailing environment of continued conflict where access is erratic, expecting a well-developed AtB system to be operational was highly unrealistic, as in many instances volunteers and staff who, for instance, were to distribute relief materials, did not know when and how often they would be able to access a particular community. Interviews indicated that breakdown in food pipeline (both WFP and IFRC), combined with access issues, more often that not, made any systematic scheduling of relief provisioning to communities difficult. In many instances, SARC would arrive at distribution points to find many more people desperately in need than they had previously assessed, as more displaced people may have arrived at those sites since they had carried out needs assessments. In view of all these factors, the output focus was changed from AtB to a comprehensive PMEAL system.

There has been tardy progress on this output. An international PMEAL delegate was recruited only in January 2017 after a long delay in recruitment.[39] Training on AtB did not take place and formal feedback mechanism was thus not initiated,[40] as SARC could not recruit MEAL officers due to lack of candidates with requisite qualifications. Terms of reference for the PMEAL Unit, with detailed implementation framework were drafted and submitted to SARC management for review and feedback.[41] Meanwhile, with the PMEAL delegate having left towards the end of 2017 and changes in SARC leadership, momentum appears to have been lost, as was confirmed in KIIs during this evaluation. Although staff were trained in basics of M & E in Beirut in late 2017, and a Coordinator appointed in HQ, interviews suggest there is lack of clarity on the M&E function which has not received adequate senior management attention.

There is no internal complaint mechanism; the evaluation team learnt from interviews that there is a 'complaints hotline' for beneficiaries who have not received relief items from SARC. Complaints are investigated by branch/sub-branch staff or volunteers and appropriate action taken. This however is not systematic, and as revealed in 3 of the 8 beneficiary interviews, people may be afraid of complaining against SARC staff and volunteers, unsure how these will be handled. Even within the organisation, there is reluctance among staff and volunteers to make complaints or be open with managers if things go wrong, as was borne out in half a dozen interviews. This may however be changing as, according to most staff and volunteers

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[36] http://www.reach-initiative.org/syria-monitoring-markets-in-northern-and-southern-syria-to-inform-cash-based-responses
[37] Source: Logframe BRC Syria Humanitarian Response Programme 2015 - 2017
[38] The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017
[39] The delay was partly on account of the fact that SARC management reportedly was not keen on this.
[40] This was also noted in DFID's Project Completion Review (The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017)
[41] BRC SHRP Narrative Report Q9 DFID Qs Draft v1.0

interviewed for this evaluation, the new leadership is trying to foster a more open and collegial culture than which prevailed in the past.

SARC's ability to track outputs and outcomes, let alone impact, is stymied by lack of a strong PMEAL system within the organisation. Several agencies which work with SARC find its reporting weak in this regard, though interviewees considered SARC's work on the ground to be good. BRC's reports to DFID which are compiled on the basis of regular reports submitted by SARC mostly provide details of activities undertaken during the reporting period, and bear scant information on analysis of outcomes or lessons. DFID's Due Diligence report[42] identified a number of issues related to SHRP implementation including significant delays in developing SARC's monitoring and evaluation capacity and the lack of SARC internal monitoring capacity or third party monitoring systems (TPM). While SARC may not have been used to comprehensive monitoring systems or the concept of results framework, it appears from the nine quarterly reports submitted by BRC that BRC has also not attempted to fill the gap by gathering evaluable evidence and/ or

Box 3: BRC SHRP narrative report - Y2 Q4 (extracts)
SARC staff and volunteers continue to be trained and *so SARC's organisational capacity continues to grow.*
In Q8 385 SARC staff and volunteers were trained *to better respond to crise*s: 280 in Disaster Management, 83 in Relief and 22 in Project & Programme Planning.
Positive feedback from SARC HQ, branches and sub-branches regarding SHRP support.
Increased *scale-up of SARC's livelihoods projects and capabilities for implementation*.

undertaking periodic reviews of outputs and outcomes. One example is that of BRC reports to DFID which while reporting on activities, jumps straight to outcomes without providing any evidence (a random sample provided in Box 3). To give another example: while SARC has carried out 189 needs assessments,[43] there is little analysis in the reports of how the results were disseminated and used to influence humanitarian response, or of lessons from these exercises that have or have not influenced SARC's own capacity. It is understood that BRC will now have a dedicated PMEAL staff based in Beirut from March and this is likely to help provide substantive support to SARC in this regard.

Under SHRP, monitoring activities included quarterly monitoring visits by BRC's Syria Crisis Programme Manager to monitor progress on outputs and outcomes, besides periodic visits from BRC HQ and regional office in Beirut. Following each monitoring visit, a mission report in the form of back-to-office-report was produced which dwells on progress on activities, challenges and any follow up actions discussed with SARC. Additionally SARC conducted 5 post-distribution monitoring (PDM) surveys[44] which verify, through data collected directly from beneficiaries, quantity and quality of materials provided, usage of the items, level of vulnerability in the household and the overall level of satisfaction of the recipients.[45] Of the 5 PDMs stated to have been undertaken, the evaluation team had access to only three, of which two which were undertaken towards the closing months of the programme (April-June, 2017) were still in pilot phase. The data these generated (Box 4) consisted of feedback from beneficiaries primarily on their level of satisfaction with the frequency, quality, and quality of materials provided. The PDMs have not been systematic - the first PDM was undertaken in May 2016 and then there was a gap of approximately a year before subsequent PDMs were undertaken. This evaluation has not come across any synthesis of these PDMs or any follow-up action demonstrating how the findings were utilised to adapt the response. BRC was slow in developing a coordinated approach to PDM, including a system to consolidate data, and its ability to undertake these exercises is restricted due to security concerns, lack of approvals for access and internal capacity.

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[42] Moore Stephens (2017). Department for International Development (2017) - Syria Due Diligence Draft Report – Assessment Of British Red Cross (BRC) Policies and Procedures in Preparation for Contribution to the DFID Syria Programme, 29 September 2017
[43] The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017
[44] BRC SHRP Narrative Report Q9 DFID Qs Draft v1.0
[45] Post Distribution Monitoring Report, May 2016

Box 4: What the PDM reports show

Progress report for Q9 states that five PDMs were undertaken. The evaluation team has been provided three of these reports – the first one is dated May 2016, and the other two during Q8 (April-June, 2017). The last two which were part of field mission reports are supposed to be meant for pilot testing of PDM questionnaire. The following is a summary of what these reports convey.

The first part is about demographics, accommodation and income status of the household being interviewed. Unclear from any of the reports, what proportion of beneficiaries constituted the sample size in each PDM.

PDM, Area Baba Amr- Hilaliya- Hulayah, May 2016
We can understand that the distribution of food items has been irregular in Homs. 40% received food items for the first time. Data on non-food items (NFI) were insufficient and hence not covered in the report. 55% of the beneficiaries reported unmet needs with regard to items distributed, as the quantity was not enough to cover beneficiaries' needs. The majority relied on the income from their livelihoods to cover their needs.

"We distributed so far enough food items to cover 61% of the needs. In order to fully cover the needs, we need to distribute more food items." The need for NFI distribution like carpets, fans, diapers, quilts and baby hygiene kits was noted. Overall high satisfaction (79% of the beneficiaries were totally satisfied) with quality of items and distribution process, and no complains on this score was reported, except quantity not being adequate.

Field Mission Report, 26-28 April 2017, PDM Homs
For 93% of respondent, assistance covered less than one month, and none of the 30 respondents received from any other organisation. Frequency of distribution was every 2 months for 46.7% of the respondents, and for another 40% it was between four to six weeks. The quantity supplied was adequate for a maximum of 4 weeks. Rice, oil, sugar rated most useful; beans, pasta and lentils least useful. 94% rated quality of food provided to be good or excellent.

Field Mission Report, May-June 2017, PDM Damascus and Rural Damascus
48.72% received assistance for the first time; 41.03% of individuals surveyed receive assistance every 4 months. Out of 39 individuals surveyed, 2 stated that they receive additional humanitarian assistance from other humanitarian organisations. Based on the 39 individuals surveyed, the three most useful items were: oil, sugar and rice. Beans, lentils and chickpea not preferred. All respondents said quality of food items was either good or excellent and distribution process was generally good, though an unspecific number of comments suggested that the quality of mattresses and blankets needed improvement, and in rural Damascus distribution process needed to be better organised.

Besides PDM, BRC has a system of cross-checking monthly distribution reports (food and NFIs) against commodity tracking number of BRC-funded items in order to determine the sex, location and category of beneficiary reached. Through BRC's support over the past two years, SARC has now begun gathering disaggregated data on its relief distributions, though it varies from branch to branch. The SARC relief reporting continues to provide basic disaggregated data (gender and elderly), though BRC would like to see this disaggregated by districts, sub-districts, city/villages, as well as sector wise. According to several external stakeholders as well as BRC key informants, disaggregation and reporting could be improved significantly by developing SARC's capacity in data collection and providing additional human and financial resources to improve data collection process. One agency which has used SARC to deliver US$5 million worth of winterisation materials during 2017-2018 stated that SARC's distribution process and logistical capacity was "phenomenal", but its tracking system was not always consistent. It is worth bearing in mind that there are departments within SARC – health, for instance – which have put in place a fairly elaborate database and monitoring system that have been developed over the years of work in specific sectors. Health has been traditionally SARC's core business, while, as was noted earlier, it is only since the start of current conflict that SARC has had to get into large scale relief assistance of the kind they are doing now.

> SARC has phenomenal capacity for doing things. But they do not have a culture of reflecting, documenting or reporting well."
>
> *A humanitarian agency official to the evaluation team*

3.1.5 Summary findings on outcome 1

All the outputs discussed above were directed at enhancing the capacity of SARC to respond to increased and evolving needs according to its humanitarian mandate. In this regard, the following key findings were noted:

❖ SARC has been playing a crucial role for the entire humanitarian system in providing access to areas and communities which no other humanitarian organisation is able to access. Towards this, SHRP's support to sub-branches' core facilities and salaries of staff contributed to enhancement of SARC's capacity at its headquarters and specifically in eight sub-branches. As sub-branches are fairly new, going forward, it will be important to have clear criteria established for sub-branches and systematic assessment of their role as the humanitarian needs change.

❖ The DM training helped to enable participants to gain an understanding of SARC and RCRC Movement, as well as to assess the needs of affected communities. Besides this, participants rated the information management training and ToT highly. SHRP has helped SARC adopt the DM course as mandatory for all new recruits in the organisation. However, there were several additional training provided through SHRP which participants found less useful in practice, primarily due to lack of follow up after trainings, in the form of refresher courses or coaching/mentoring opportunities or lessons learning exercises.

❖ A distinctive contribution of SHRP has been in developing SARC's capacity to undertake livelihoods programming through a coherent programmatic framework, besides training provided on livelihoods.

❖ SARC's ability to track outputs and outcomes, let alone impact, remains limited due to lack of a strong PMEAL system within the organisation, something SHRP aimed at strengthening, but with limited realisation of outcome in this regard.

3.2 Outcome 2 - Meeting basic relief needs of affected communities

3.2.1 Outputs 6 and 7 – food relief and winterisation materials

As has been noted in the introduction section (section 1.6), due to constraints of access, the evaluation team had to rely on secondary data from reports and interviews in Damascus to assess these two outputs which accounted for slightly short of three-quarters (73 per cent) of expenditure of the programme.

The initial plans of SHRP envisaged that SARC would distribute food to 120,000 families[46] in besieged, hard-to-reach and newly displaced populations. By September 2017 when the project was to end, BRC could distribute to only 51,942 families,[47] far short of the initial target, because of two main reasons: (a) initial delay in procurement through IFRC pipeline during 2015-2016, and (b) changes in the Government of Syria's import regulations in the middle of procurement process which necessitated re-tendering in 2017. Consequently, distribution for the second year was delayed and was nearing completion[48] only in February 2018 as the evaluation was underway, bringing the total number of families reached to 138,383, nearly 15 percent higher than the original target. Similar delays occurred in distribution of some winterisation materials which have only recently been completed. The delay in procurement through IFRC pipeline in the first year was probably along expected lines and could have been averted had BRC opted to explore alternatives.

The overall humanitarian outcome of the SHRP-supported relief assistance is difficult for the evaluation to comment on for: (a) limited availability of any evaluable data in this regard, combined with the issue of access mentioned earlier; and (b) the SHRP contribution going to a much-larger distribution pool as SARC is used as channel for food and non-food distribution by WFP, UNHCR and a host of INGOs. For non-food items for example, while SHRP provides a basket of items to SARC, the latter combines these items with materials from other donors to constitute family parcels which are finally distributed to beneficiaries. Until 2013, SARC was WFP's sole partner, handling all its food and non-food items, though the proportion has gradually reduced (now about 35 percent) as other local NGOs emerged in the past few years and, with dramatic increase in the

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[46] This target was subsequently increased to 188,000 when BRC realised some savings from the allocated budget due to changes made in the food basket.
[47] BRC SHRP Narrative Report Q9 DFID Qs Draft v1.0
[48] It is reported by BRC that another 22,000 food parcels still remain to be distributed by the end of February 2018.

volume of food that needed to be distributed, WFP had to proactively seek out additional organisations to assist in distributions.

SARC's beneficiary selection criteria include:[49] (i) displaced status since 2011; (ii) displacement from a hotspot; (iii) family and income status; (iv) female-headed households; and (v) disability and health conditions. Now WFP is assisting SARC to develop a database for registration which will have connectivity across all branches. This will also help in PDM, including TPM, which does not happen at present. At least one agency working with SARC has agreed on joint monitoring missions in different areas. For SHRP, needs assessments and PDM were undertaken by SARC which shared distribution lists with BRC after food was delivered to beneficiaries.

In terms of timeliness of distribution of food (within 24-72 hours), data is patchy, and PDMs do not provide a clear picture. Though staff and volunteers interviewed stated that they try to conduct assessments and distribute food items as soon as they can access displaced population, given the delay in procurement, it is unclear to the evaluation team the extent to which this timeliness, as envisaged in the logframe, was actually adhered to. Semi-structured discussions with eight individual beneficiaries (of SARC food and non-food distribution) in two sub-branches indicated that the quantity of food parcels was barely enough for 6-8 weeks, and beneficiaries expressed a preference for cash, instead of materials. This is probably something that needed serious consideration, given that the displaced and affected communities were located in towns and villages which had good access to markets. A 2016 study for UNHCR[50] found that markets have capacity to absorb additional injection of cash, and risks to cash-based assistance in Syria were no greater than those associated with alternative forms of assistance. The study recommended shifting away from in-kind assistance towards a blended response of cash-based approaches with in-kind assistance.

The winterisation materials provided through SHRP included mattresses, blankets and sometimes, tarpaulins. While people were generally satisfied with quality, in one of the PDMs (Damascus and Rural Damascus, Box 4), the quality of mattresses was raised as an issue by beneficiaries, and three of the eight beneficiaries this evaluation team interviewed complained of 'unfair and disrespectful' treatment by SARC volunteers in some instances. People who were known personally to the volunteers at distribution centres often jumped queues while others had to wait for hours for their turn.

3.2.2 Summary finding on outcome 2

The outcome as defined in project documents ("The most vulnerable people have some of their basic relief needs met") laid emphasis on targeted beneficiaries' satisfaction with quality and quantity of relief assistance provided. To this limited extent, the PDM data shows that while there was general satisfaction with quality of material provided, the quantity, frequency and timeliness of food items in particular were considered inadequate by almost half the recipients. This may be partly attributable to delays in procurement and partly due to fast-evolving nature of the conflict and problems of access.

3.3 Crosscutting issues

3.3.1 Gender

The programme has ensured that relief distribution mechanism targets vulnerable women, children and elderly, in particular. Gender disaggregated data on beneficiaries is maintained and reported by branches/sub-branches. The PDM reports seen by the evaluation team show that an attempt is made to ensure that sample survey is evenly distributed between men and women. The programme limited its focus on gender issues to ensuring that vulnerable women were targeted and staff and volunteers undergoing training were sensitised on gender-based vulnerability. The quarterly progress reports and mission reports show little evidence of any attempt on part of BRC to steer the programme to take gender issues beyond targeting and disaggregated data at the level of beneficiaries. While this is understandable as in the current context, meeting survival needs were given

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[49] Yasmine Ferret, IFRC. Field Mission Report, May-June 2017
[50] UNHCR (2016). Cash based response – feasibility assessment in Northern Syria, March 2016.

priority over issues of empowerment and rights, moving forward, as the response shifts from immediate relief to recovery, capacity for better analysis of gender and empowerment issues will be necessary.

3.3.2 Value for Money

The SHRP mid-term review[51] and DFID's project completion report (PCR) referred to earlier provided detailed analysis of value for money (VfM). It was VfM considerations which made BRC change mid-course its implementation modality from working through IFRC to a bi-lateral approach, with BRC working directly with SARC. As was noted in the PCR, all major procurements were made by BRC through open and transparent tenders, taking into account VfM considerations which resulted significant savings.[52] At the level of economy, the project has detailed analysis of unit costs of major activities. These have definitely brought about time and cost savings, ensuring that project activities were delivered and funds well spent within the project duration, albeit with a brief period of no-cost extension granted by DFID. To reduce procurement delays in 2017, BRC identified suppliers in neighbouring countries and established framework agreements with them; however, due to changes in specifications caused by amended import regulations of the government, this option did not ultimately materialise.

Currently SARC is required to produce information and reports according to individual donor/partner requirements, and VfM may have a different connotation for each partner. While an individual donor may be satisfied that SARC is complying with its requirements, in aggregate, this goes against the grain of VfM for SARC's humanitarian response if it has to invest resources and time in needless duplication of efforts. Movement partners are now helping SARC develop a unified financial system which will, once completed, lead to time-saving by avoiding the need to produce 'personalised' financial reports for each donor, besides ensuring a consolidated approach to monitoring the organisation's financial system. Besides, BRC's contribution in developing a joint livelihood strategy, its constant emphasis on VfM is seen to be an inspiration for several current initiatives towards streamlining systems within SARC, as well as in bringing about change in how individual partners relate to the former.

3.3.3 Programme management and partnership

BRC has built a good working relationship with SARC which has enabled it to engage with SARC management in critical discussions on management systems and processes. As mentioned before, BRC is now supporting SARC in developing a comprehensive HR system, and is proactively involved with Norwegian Red Cross, IFRC and other national societies in helping SARC develop a unified finance and accounting system which will bring about greater efficiency, transparency and coherence in SARC's financial monitoring and reporting. BRC has also introduced SARC staff to training in best practices in anti-corruption and fraud prevention measures which will strengthen SARC's existing mechanisms for dealing with incidents that occasionally arise as the organisation grows.

Reporting has been problematic, both in terms of their timeliness and quality, during the lifetime of the project, as was noted in several quarterly reports, mid-term report and DFID PCR. Initially, when working through IFRC, quarterly reports were on an average late by about five months, rendering any follow up discussion between BRC and DFID based on the reports, irrelevant. From late 2017, the timeliness is reported to have improved slightly; however, the quality of the reports have been weak from the point of view of reporting on outputs and outcomes, as was noted earlier.

Though IFRC has not been very successful in the past few years in providing leadership for a coordinated approach to supporting SARC, it is understood that in the past few months, with changes in both SARC and IFRC country management, initiatives are underway to develop a coordinated strategy. The new leadership in SARC is keen to see a coordinated approach within the Movement emerge in the coming months. In this regard, developing an organisational strategy for SARC is seen as the first step, as this will provide a steer to the Movement partners to help SARC in its long-term capacity building.

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[51] Laura Rana (2016). Syria Humanitarian Response Programme (SHRP) - Mid-term Review. British Red Cross, September-November 2016

[52] The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017. Pp14

BRC is highly valued for its contribution in Syria by the Movement partners. Despite being located in Beirut, BRC Syria staff maintain regular contact with all Movement partners, keeping everyone in the communication loop and updating periodically on progress and challenges. This however still limits space for BRC to engage in collective thinking. Sometimes periodically BRC is also seen as 'aggressive and interfering' when it tries to unilaterally push, what one senior Movement official described as, "its own agenda". This may be an issue to do with communication gaps that arise partly because of BRC not being present in the country and not being in the communication loop all the time which those resident in Damascus are privy to, and partly due to having to press on with what it requires its projects to deliver in the brief visits staff make to the country every few weeks. Movement partners (4) commented that in Syria, BRC's preference is to work bi-laterally with SARC, rather than multi-laterally, which the former is known for. Moving forward, BRC may need to review if its remote management of the programme – and relationship with SARC and Movement partners - from Beirut is the most effective approach to programming in Syria.

Section 4

Conclusions – Assessment Against Evaluation Criteria

4.1 Relevance and appropriateness[53]

With dramatic expansion in the scale of SARC's humanitarian operations, there was a simultaneous need to strengthen SARC's management and support systems to ensure robust monitoring, reporting, coordination, financial and people management, besides capacity to deliver principled humanitarian assistance. The programme's twin objectives of providing immediate emergency assistance along with addressing longer-term organisational capacity needs reflected a good understanding of this. Though the programme did not have a theory of change (ToC) underpinning its design and logframe, the two outcomes sought were, and still remain, broadly relevant to the organisational context as well as the volatile country context where continuing violence, displacement and human suffering is an everyday reality, even after seven years of conflict. Developing a comprehensive ToC would have required a degree of predictability about the operating context and trajectory the response would take, which would have been difficult as BRC was one of many partners providing assistance through SARC in an extremely volatile environment. However, for the capacity building component of the programme, having a ToC, however tentative, would have helped identify various preconditions and assumptions underpinning each of the outputs. A ToC would have helped trace a clear causal pathway – in its absence, the project design assumed that *inputs* like payment of rent, financial support and provision of vehicles under what is defined as output 1 contributed directly to the outcome, enhanced capacity of SARC.

Outputs 1 and 2 (Box 5), for example, are closely linked and could have been articulated to reflect changes in capacity – which output 2 partly does, but output 1 is stated as an input – and as one combined output. Such a statement of output would have identified, for example, the need to ensure that the SARC had clear plans and criteria to establish and support sub-branches. As discussed in section 3.1.1, currently there are no clear plans for sub-branches. Outputs 5 and 8, likewise, overlap, and a ToC analysis would have shown that exclusive focus on AtB as was initially planned, though much needed in principled

> **Box 5: Outputs 1 & 2**
>
> **Output 1**: SARC HQ and targeted SARC sub-branches financially supported to maintain functionality.
>
> **Output 2**: SARC HQ, branches, and sub-branches are able to retain their staff and volunteers.

humanitarian action, was unrealistic in the prevailing environment - something BRC did eventually acknowledge and change its approach accordingly by focusing on broader PMEAL (section 3.1.4), of which AtB is a component, aimed at building SARC's capacity to track and monitor its activities and results.

PMEAL systems need to be anchored in the wider organisational approach and culture, particularly with reference to result-based management, learning and accountability. Without a strong commitment and buy in from senior management to a result-oriented and learning culture, attempts to introduce PMEAL measures run the risk of not being assimilated in the organisation, as findings in section 3.1.4 show. A ToC process would have helped identify organisational bottlenecks in introducing systematic PMEAL in the design stage, and enabled BRC to adapt its approach accordingly.

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[53] *Questions examined*: Is there a clear rationale in the project in terms of linkage between activities, outputs and outcomes? Were the implementation approaches, resources and scale of programming relevant to achieve the intended outputs and outcome? Were the capacity building and organisational development activities well targeted, designed and implemented to address the actual needs of SARC staff and volunteers? Has the project been able to adapt its programming to the fast changing context in the country? Were the livelihoods, food relief and winterisation interventions informed by needs of affected communities? Were activities and interventions appropriate in the local context and to the needs?

SHRP's focus on sub-branches and targeting besieged and hard-to-reach areas was a critical element of its implementation approach. This built on SARC's unique ability to access areas which other agencies could not. BRC's initial approach to delivering the programme through IFRC was right in that this was expected to ensure key Movement partners having a coordinated approach to supporting SARC's work. This was also appropriate, given that BRC had no physical presence in the country to support the programme except with technical assistance from Beirut. BRC did change this modality later on when this arrangement did not work out because of delays within IFRC. However, the evaluation is not convinced that it should have taken BRC nearly 15 months to make this change, given that delays at IFRC's end were apparent right from the beginning of the programme, and time was of essence in the crisis response SHRP was to support. It is also not clear why alternatives like using the ICRC pipeline, at least for procurement of relief supplies, were not explored.

The relief distributions were based on needs assessments which SARC undertook from time to time, and as the PDMs showed, the items distributed were generally appropriate as these constituted basic food rations and non-food items that displaced families were in desperate need of. The SHRP supported several training courses, of which the modules on DM and information management appeared to have been most appropriate as many of those trained found these courses directly relevant to their roles. However, some of the training courses (like field survey and IMPACT) were not linked to any coherent strategy or plans for their utilisation within the organisation, though these may have helped participant-individuals gain advanced knowledge in specific areas. The support on livelihoods capacity development reflected an emerging need and SHRP has gone about this in a way that helped SARC assimilate the support in its response system, using assistance from other organisations for various livelihoods activities. In this regard, SHRP filled a critical void which all stakeholders were experiencing due to lack of an overall livelihoods framework.

4.2 Effectiveness[54]

Overall, SHRP has contributed to enhancing the capacity of SARC to respond to increased and evolving needs (outcome 1). SHRP complemented the various capacity building initiatives of several partners, and its most distinctive contribution has been in three main areas, namely: (a) strengthening some of the sub-branches in besieged and hard-to-reach areas; (b) providing basic orientation and skills in DM to over 2,500 staff and volunteers; and (c) building capacity of SARC to undertake livelihoods programming on an increasingly significant scale by providing an overall framework and coordinated approach to assessment, planning and delivery of livelihoods programme. It is very likely that in the coming years, SARC will play an active role in livelihoods programming during recovery phase through funding from various agencies, thanks to SHRP's contribution in developing SARC's capacity. SHRP's training activities, however, could have been more effective if these were complemented with follow-up exercises which promoted ongoing learning process through refresher courses, mentoring, workshops, after-action reviews, etc. For example, while SHRP introduced PDM process in relief distribution, if the PDM findings were distilled into lessons and applied in planning and delivery of subsequent relief operations, this would have not only ensured continuous improvement in effectiveness of assistance, but also helped staff and volunteers learn from the process.

Outcome 2 ("the most vulnerable people have some of their basic relief needs met"), as defined in the project proposal, may be, on the surface, said to have been met, though the way the outcome statement is designed is not evaluable as any food distributed will have met "some need", as long as these were based on needs assessment. The evaluation could find little evidential data to comment on the extent to which relief needs were met (outcome 2), except to say, as stated in section 3.2.1, that beneficiaries were generally positive on the quality of materials provided, less so on quantity and timeliness of food parcels. There is no available data, nor was the evaluation team able to collect any data, to show whether or not the assistance improved, for

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[54] *Questions examined*: To what extent have key stakeholders (SARC staff & volunteers) benefited from capacity building activities, and to what extent / in what ways have these capacity building activities contributed (or not) to a more effective management of the response (multiplier effect)? Have there been any unintended (positive and negative) effects of SHRP on SARC capacity or overall humanitarian response? How has increased SARC capacity affected the programming of other organisations who have a partnership with SARC? How did SHRP contribute to results/humanitarian outcomes for communities assisted directly through SHRP support (food, livelihoods and winterisation)?

example, food parcel recipients' food consumption score,[55] and if so, for how long. The fact that the assistance was combined with relief provided by other organisations from time to time make any attempt to isolate SHRP's contribution difficult.

BRC, through its constant emphasis on VfM, has underscored for SARC and Movement partners the importance of streamlining SARC's business processes, and several initiatives are currently underway to develop a unified financial system, comprehensive HR system, and procurement process. The management is also sensitised to the need to ensure that there are well-established processes within the organisation to ensure fraud prevention and anti-corruption measures.

On PMEAL, BRC needs to recognise that attempting to introduce comprehensive PMEAL tools in an organisational culture where time and energy spent on these activities are seen as taking away resources from life-saving operations is bound to be met with resistance. An incremental and heuristic approach, starting with "mission-critical" elements that the management can recognise as adding direct value to their work may have greater chance of success. A starting point would be to help SARC management identify a manageable number (5-7) of major outcomes at organisational level they would like to see, and develop mechanisms for tracking those. These will then provide an overarching framework for more detailed work at programme and organisational change level, focusing on *results management and organisational learning*. Time is probably now ripe as the new leadership recognises the importance of greater transparency, better reporting and impact assessments, as reflected in the appointment of a senior Adviser to the President, specifically charged to take forward these functions within the organisation. Without a clear agreement on overarching framework that underpins the management's commitment to a result-oriented organisational learning culture in the near and long term, any 'projectised' approach to M&E is likely to meet the same fate as happened during SHRP. It is understandable that to meet the needs of donor-funded projects, additionally BRC may, in the interim, need to continue with project-specific mechanisms to generate appropriate MEAL data for its limited purpose.

Capacity building programmes need to take a longer-term focus,[56] as these are complex, especially for an organisation like SARC operating in one of the most volatile and complex protracted emergencies in the world. It is to the credit of SARC that it has so far played this complex role which requires it to uphold humanitarian principles as part of the RCRC Movement, while simultaneously playing an auxiliary role for a government that is an active belligerent in creating an ongoing humanitarian crisis. The values and humanitarian principles are at the core of SARC's *raison d'être*, and may not have been developed through any specific capacity building intervention, but through years of work it has done with the ICRC, IFRC and other Movement partners, besides UN agencies and NGOs. For an evaluation, it is difficult to trace the critical pathway of change for such softer organisational values, let alone attribute the changes to any particular intervention, project or agency. SARC is itself an enabler – facilitating the work of a large humanitarian system – as well as an implementer. Measuring and tracking its performance in these two separate roles require a composite M&E system that tracks both processes ('enabling' role) and outputs ('implementing' role). Moving forward, SARC and its partners need to develop an overall strategy for the organisation with a time-frame of 3-5 years and ensure that all capacity building activities flow from such an overarching strategy.

The leadership in SARC, with support from Movement partners, is now initiating a process of development of organisational strategy for the coming years. It will be important to ensure that future support from BRC is aligned with the strategy as it emerges in the coming months. For this, BRC's continued engagement in a multi-lateral process will be crucial. In this connection, BRC may need to review if its remote management from Beirut gives it the best institutional space for such engagement.

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[55] Food consumption score (FCS), a tool used to periodically monitor change in food consumption or sometimes in tracking food security, is a composite score based on dietary diversity, food frequency, and relative nutritional importance of different food groups, and captures both dietary diversity and food frequency (frequency in terms of days of consumption over a reference period that a specific food item or food group is eaten at the household level). The FCS of a household is calculated by multiplying the frequency of foods consumed in the last seven days with the weighting of each food group.
[56] The Department for International Development (2017). SHRP – Project Completion Review, 30 December 2017

4.3 Efficiency[57]

Fund utilisation under the project is shown in Table 2. With nearly 72 percent (£5.6 million) of total expenses going into provision of relief assistance, and a little over 15 percent (£1.24 million) going to core cost and staffing for SARC for two years, the project has utilised its limited funds optimally. A number of its outputs have provided a substantial multiplier effect, though it is difficult to quantify in financial terms. The livelihoods component (£178,000) has led to SARC now being able to attract substantial amount of programme support in this area. The training component, at a cost of circa £384,000, can be said to have been good value for money – taking an average, it cost about £150 to train one volunteer or staff in disaster management.

The Major Programme Board (MPB) played a key role in strategic decision making related to SHRP. One of the major decisions it took was to shift the implementation modality and put in place a periodic review mechanism through modality health-check. While deciding to shift the bulk (93 per cent) of the programme to bilateral, the MPB in its meeting on 15 July 2016, decided to retain outputs 4, 5 and 8 under multilateral arrangement, implemented through IFRC which was the right thing to do. The issue of persistent deficiency in data for progress reporting was also discussed in several meetings and BRC management encouraged to take this up with IFRC from time to time, albeit with limited success.

Leaving aside the financial analysis part, the project could have done better in terms of timeliness. As discussed in section 3.2.1, the relief distribution was delayed, and some of this delay could have been avoided had BRC demonstrated greater agility by putting in place an alternative procurement mechanism. The PMEAL initiatives under the programme (outputs 5 and 8) did not attract much traction within the organisation and there is no evidence that it informed any major decision during the course of the programme as it was not plugged into any organisational change strategy. This weakness has been a contributing factor to weaknesses in reporting on the project, noted previously.

4.4 Coherence and connectedness[58]

As discussed in section 3, the programme implementation was based on needs assessments in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and targeted some of the most vulnerable people. This owed much to SARC's ability to work impartially to meet humanitarian needs, despite all odds, in line with the principles of humanitarian imperative; response based on needs; equity, gender and conflict issues; and not influenced by religion and politics (principles 1, 2 and 3) which are at the core of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.[59] One of SHRP's main emphases was on building the capacity of SARC (principle 6 of RCRC code) which is the premier national humanitarian organisation in the country. On beneficiary involvement and participation, and accountability to donors and beneficiaries (principles 7 and 9), except for accountability to donor, the programme has had limited success, largely due to circumstances beyond its control (*see* section 3.1.4). The SHRP, through its training programmes for staff and volunteers helped reinforce some of these global standards, including Sphere, the awareness of which among staff and volunteers was noted during interviews.

Applying Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), the programme has done well on this score. CHS 1 (appropriateness and relevance), CHS 2 (effectiveness and timeliness) and CHS 9 (resource

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[57] *Questions examined*: To what extent did funding utilisation correlate with project outputs? To what extent has the programme optimised resources? To what extent was the Major Programme Board (MPB) utilised in planning, decision making and strategy reviews? Were issues that negatively affected performance identified and dealt with in a timely and effective manner? Has reporting been adequate and met the standard for programme implementation? Was M&E adequately designed and used to inform decision-making?

[58] *Questions examined*: To what extent has the response supported through SHRP adhered to accepted international standards and codes of practice? Were the interventions carried out taking into account gender issues and social exclusions? How were gender considerations incorporated in the response? To what extent has SHRP enabled SARC to adhere to the Fundamental Principles and Code of Conduct of the Red Cross Movement?

[59] IFRC/ICRC (2003). The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (RCRC code)

utilisation/efficiency) are discussed above. In relation to CHS 3 which relates to strengthening local capacity and do-no-harm, one of the central objectives (outcome 1) revolved around this. Community participation, feedback process (CHS 4) and complaints mechanism (CHS 5), which together comprise the basis of accountability to affected population, are discussed in section 3.1.4 and in the above paragraph. As the humanitarian context moves into early recovery and recovery phase, the space for proactive engagement with communities on this will increase and need to be prioritised in any post-SHRP programme.

CHS 6 requires that humanitarian action is well coordinated and complementary. Coordination within the Movement was weak and should improve under new leadership in SARC and a new management team at country office of IFRC. BRC will need to find a way to contribute proactively to ongoing in-country coordination. On learning (CHS 7), as discussed in section 3.1.2, there was a need for SHRP to complement classroom training and various exercises like needs assessments and PDM with creative ways of learning and sharing that was not emphasised during SHRP implementation. On CHS 8 which is about staff (and volunteers) support and equitable treatment, the evaluation noted that BRC is now supporting SARC in developing a comprehensive HR manual incorporating best practices which should position SARC well to meet the demands and expectations of its staff and volunteers as the organisation grows.

4.5 Sustainability[60]

SHRP was designed to enable SARC to be able to respond to a growing crisis, and core support to sub-branches and the HQ was intended to enable a rapid scale-up of the organisation's capacity specifically for the crisis response. The question of sustainability in this context is nuanced, and depends on how the response context evolves in the coming years. It is likely that as the scale of emergency relief needs gradually comes down, a different programming approach will be needed for recovery phase, and this will require SARC to be able to manage the scale back. The SHRP/BRC (and other partners) will need to support this process. As discussed earlier, SARC is in the process of developing an organisational strategy for coming years and this will provide an opportunity to map out its resource needs and plans, taking into account likely changes in overall response. SARC is now able to attract support from a number of partners for programming in different sectors and these are also contributing to some of the core costs of the type SHRP was supporting, and this trend is likely to continue.

The DM training introduced through SHRP is now embedded in SARC's mandatory training for freshly recruited volunteers and staff, and this is likely to continue post-SHRP. Likewise, the livelihoods framework that SHRP helped build is providing a coherent programmatic direction for SARC to continue working on livelihoods and is already attracting several partners/donors who will continue to support its livelihoods activities in different areas.

4.6 Impact[61]

As explained in section 1.6, the evaluation has not been able to examine the direct impact of SHRP on people affected by conflict. The livelihoods capacity built through SHRP is indirectly contributing to early recovery and re-establishment of livelihoods for a large number of families, now being supported by several organisations. As recovery programming gains pace, this will continue to have significant impact for the

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[60] *Questions examined*: How sustainable are the outcomes of the capacity building work - what will happen at the end of the SHRP, and which elements of the SHRP will be continued into future engagement with SARC? Has SARC been enabled to integrate and embed key elements of the SHRP into its work? To what extent have beneficiaries and communities participated in activities under the SHRP and taken ownership of activities?

[61] *Questions examined*: To what extent has the SHRP contributed to alleviating the suffering of people affected by conflict? What specific contribution has SHRP made to the overall humanitarian response in Syria? What has been the overall impact of SHRP?

affected families. Its impact can only be assessed in future. SARC delivers nearly 60 percent of all humanitarian aid in the country, and support to the volunteers and sub-branches have directly contributed to this overall humanitarian response in the country.

Section 5

Summary of Key Conclusions, Lessons and Recommendations

5.1 Overall conclusion

SHRP complemented various capacity building initiatives of several partners to support SARC in the midst of an exponential expansion in humanitarian response, and its most distinctive contribution has been in enabling some of the sub-branches to provide humanitarian assistance to the conflict-affected population; providing basic orientation and skills in disaster management to staff and volunteers; and building capacity of SARC to undertake livelihoods programming by providing an overall framework and coordinated approach to assessment, planning and delivery of livelihoods programme. Capacity building programmes need to take a longer-term focus, as these are complex, especially for an organisation like SARC with responsibility to deliver nearly two-thirds of humanitarian aid in a complex, protracted crisis. SHRP has been able to get SARC to start on several key initiatives which will require further development and consolidation in the next phase of humanitarian response in the country.

5.2 Detailed conclusions

Relevance and appropriateness
The programme, which combined delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance with building short and long-term capacity of SARC, was highly relevant, and its focus on hard-to-reach and besieged areas appropriate, though the way outputs were defined in the project design could have been improved with better analysis of theory of change, particularly related to capacity building. Of the many training courses SHRP supported, the modules on DM and information management were most appropriate as many of those trained found these courses directly relevant to their roles. However, some of the training courses (like field survey and IMPACT) were not linked to any coherent strategy or plans for their utilisation within the organisation.

Effectiveness
SHRP's main contribution has been in three key result areas: (a) strengthening sub-branches in besieged and hard-to-reach areas; (b) providing basic orientation and skills in DM to over 2,500 staff and volunteers; and (c) building capacity of SARC to undertake livelihoods programming. It is very likely that in the coming years, SARC will play an active role in livelihoods programming during the recovery phase through funding from various agencies, thanks to SHRP's contribution in developing SARC's capacity. SHRP's training activities however could have been more effective if these were complemented with follow-up exercises to promote ongoing learning. The PMEAL initiatives, though well intentioned, were not anchored in an organisational learning strategy, thus undermining their effectiveness. An incremental and heuristic approach, starting with a manageable number (5-7) of major outcomes focusing on fostering a results-oriented and organisational learning culture agreed with senior management could help ground PMEAL systems in an overall organisational change process. SARC is now initiating a process of development of organisational strategy for the coming years. It will be important to ensure that future support from BRC is aligned with the strategy as it emerges in the coming months. For this, BRC's continued engagement in a multi-lateral process will be crucial. In this connection, BRC may need to review if its remote management from Beirut gives it the best institutional space for such engagement.

Efficiency
BRC's initial approach to delivering the programme through IFRC, though this had to be changed mid-course, was right in that this was expected to ensure key Movement partners had a coordinated approach to supporting SARC's work. Several outputs like livelihoods framework and training of volunteers provided substantial

multiplier effect, at optimal cost. The relief distribution, however, was delayed, and some of this delay could have been avoided by putting in place an alternative procurement mechanism.

Coherence and connectedness

The programme interventions helped promote several best practices in line with accepted international standards and framework. Coordination within the Movement was weak and should improve under a new leadership in SARC and the country office of IFRC. BRC will need to find a way to contribute proactively to ongoing in-country coordination within the Movement.

Sustainability and impact

SARC is now able to attract support from a number of partners for programming in different sectors, and these are also contributing to some of the core costs of the type SHRP was supporting, and this trend is likely to continue. As the scale of emergency relief needs gradually comes down, a different programming approach will be needed for the recovery phase, and this will require SARC to be able to manage the scale-back. The DM training is now embedded in SARC's mandatory training for freshly recruited volunteers and staff, and SARC likely to continue this in future. Likewise, the livelihoods framework that SHRP helped build is already attracting several partners/donors who will continue to support its livelihoods activities in different areas.

5.3 Lessons emerging from SHRP

1. A coordinated approach to humanitarian response is necessary for RCRC and for this, while trying to work through IFRC, BRC needs to have a flexible approach right from the start (in the case of SHRP, BRC adopted this half way through the programme) whereby alternative options for time-critical components of programmes are explored, and a mixture of implementation modalities adopted.

2. A project-led approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning without reference to overall organisational culture and an overarching learning strategy leads to suboptimal results that cannot usually be sustained.

3. Project designs need to be based on a clear delineation of causal pathway in order to render the project to generate evidences that can demonstrate outputs, outcomes and impact.

5.4 Recommendations

For joint action by BRC and SARC

R1: For the next phase of the programme, especially for the capacity building and recovery components, the project needs to articulate a clear theory of change showing the causal pathway, with clear identification of preconditions and assumptions which can be monitored periodically during the course of implementation. In this regard, ensure that Monitoring & Evaluation /theory of change specialists are involved during initial design of the project to check that the design is evaluable before it is finalised.

R2: While building SARC's capacity in the long-term, BRC needs to put in place participatory monitoring, review and learning exercises involving staff and volunteers through which outcome-related data on the programme performance can be collected by using tools like contributions analysis, most significant change stories, case studies, evaluation rubrics, etc., on an ongoing basis. Ensure that PDM findings are collated, synthesised and lessons drawn through a participatory learning process involving SARC staff and volunteers, linking these to after-action reviews/real-time evaluations during the response. These will also strengthen BRC's reporting to the donor.

R3:   Ensure that all training courses supported by BRC are backed by a coherent learning and development strategy which integrates training with post-training follow up, coaching, mentoring and ongoing lessons learning exercises, ensuring that classroom learning is tied to work-site learning on a continuous basis.

R4:   Support SARC in developing systematic criteria and process for setting up and supporting sub-branches, and how these are linked to branches in future.

For BRC action

R5:   BRC needs to review if its existing remote management from Beirut provides it the right institutional space to engage strategically with SARC and the Movement partners.

R6:   Continue to work multi-laterally through IFRC in areas that relate to organisational change and institutional systems for SARC, but explore alternative modes of delivery, if necessary, for time-critical life-saving interventions.

R7:   The process of development of organisational strategy which SARC plans to undertake should set a roadmap for SARC's role and how it positions itself in the future humanitarian response system in Syria. BRC's future support needs to be aligned with this strategy.

End

BRITISH RED CROSS – FINAL EVALUATION OF SYRIA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PROGRAMME (SHRP)

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