

Commitment 7: Learning and continuous improvement

Learning objectives:

By the end of the session, the participants will be able to:

- List different opportunities for learning, at individual, organisational, and sectoral levels;
- Give examples of how learning can be captured to lead to improvement in a humanitarian or development organisation's future work;
- Explain how case studies can be a tool for learning at all levels;
- List the different sections in a typical format for a case study;
- Give an example of a case study, highlighting the learning to be drawn from it.

Facilitation notes:

Timing	Activity	Materials needed
05	Ask participants to turn to Commitment 7 in the CHS booklet (page 16). Ask them to share with the group key words that they see summarise the content/intention of this Commitment.	CHS booklet
10	Go through the first page of the handout below, one level of learning at a time, starting with Individual. Invite the participants to contribute examples and experiences for the each level, as you go through them. You should emphasize the importance of the third column, 'How does this lead to improvement?'. If learning is not applied, an opportunity has been wasted.	Session handout (below)
05	One method through which individuals, organisations and the sector as a whole can learn and improve is through the writing-up and sharing of case studies which demonstrate successes and challenges in practice. With the participants, look at the second page of the handout below. Go through the sample format for a case study. Introduce the exercise, and put participants in groups of three to four to work on this.	Session handout (below)
15	Participants work in groups to put together a case study, with a particular emphasis on the learning to be had from it, whether that be learning from a success or learning from mistakes made. The case study should not be written up, but simply recorded as key points, which the group will present in plenary.	
15	Groups present their case studies verbally, in plenary. Participants should be given the opportunity to ask questions after each presentation. The facilitator should give a brief comment at the end of each to emphasize how it relates to Commitment 7.	
05	A key learning point and challenge which should be re-emphasized at this point is the importance of having systematic ways of capturing learning and using it to inform future programme design and planning. Encourage participants to share examples of how it is done in their organisations.	
05	The facilitator sums up the key learning points of the session, and gives a final opportunity for participants to raise outstanding questions on this topic.	
60	Total number of minutes scheduled for the session	

Core Humanitarian Standard training: Handout

CHS Commitment 7: Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection.

Level	Opportunities for learning	How does this lead to improvement?
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • E-learning – ATHA, disasterready, etc • Training courses – RedR, CHS Alliance, MANGO, Bioforce Institute • Academic study – postgraduate courses on humanitarian action • On-the-job learning • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative and leadership • Staff performance management
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation • Self-assessment or external verification • Team meetings, learning meetings and after-action reviews • Exchange visits between programmes, countries, head office • Analysis of feedback and complaints received • Participatory approaches – participatory review, community monitoring committees, community score cards, social audit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational learning policy • Focal point staff member or team for learning • After-action reviews • Recommendations trackers • Reviewing learning at outset of all planning processes • Improvement plans from self-assessment or external verification • Knowledge management (such as project database) • Immediate action on serious issues
Sector-wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities of practice • Networks, learning events, conferences, workshops: ALNAP, etc • Sharing of assessment reports, evaluations, research documents, case studies and coordination meeting minutes. • Using global quality standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence and peer pressure • Benchmarking of results of verification against standards

Case studies

A case study analyses a problem or a success story, and can help others learn and reflect on how it relates to their own work and organisation.

One possible structure for a case study is as follows:

Background	General information to set the scene – for example, the situation, the programme location, the organisation’s involvement in the country.
Rationale	Why did your organisation undertake this activity?
Process	What were the steps taken?
Resources required	What human and financial resources were needed? Who was involved?
Factors for success	What factors led to the success in this case?
Challenges overcome	What challenges, if any, did you have to overcome?
Results and impact	What were the key results? What was the impact?
Lessons learned	What worked particularly well? What would you do differently next time? What advice would you give to staff in other organisations wishing to try this in their own programmes?
Additional information	Such as photos, quantitative data in a table, quotes from someone involved in the case study (with their permission) and/or links to additional information.

Exercise

Develop a case study from your own experience, making sure you draw out the lessons learned. Present the case study in plenary. Highlight the improvement which other organisations could potentially achieve by applying the learning from it.