

EVALUATION IN ACTION: Evaluating the Impact and Cost Effectiveness of Bundled Activities for Economic Recovery in Fragile Contexts

HAEC-Funded Impact Evaluation



Photo Credit: Etinosa Yvonne / Save the Children

Background

The protracted insurgency in Northeast Nigeria – now in its thirteenth year – continues to drive a massive humanitarian crisis. The 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview estimated that a total of 8.4 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection in Nigeria.

Given the situation, Mercy Corps initiated the Broadening Emergency and Graduation Efforts (BEGE) Activity in 2023, funded by USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), to deliver lifesaving, life-sustaining interventions for 524,719 displaced, returned, and host households to better respond to shocks and systemic constraints within Borno State.

Evaluation Overview

As part of the BEGE Activity, Mercy Corps is interested in evaluating the most effective approaches to transition conflict-affected households to early recovery/resilience. Specifically, Mercy Corps wanted to test whether adding life skills training to existing technical training on agricultural and livestock production is cost-effective and has a greater impact on socio-economic outcomes, compared to providing the technical training alone.

To evaluate this, Mercy Corps, in partnership with Casual Design, is implementing a cluster randomized control trial (RCT). The study includes 1,500 households from 30 communities in Northeast Nigeria, including marginalized groups among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities.

Research Questions: What works to transition conflict-affected households out of humanitarian assistance into early recovery/resilience? How do outcomes vary for households that receive **technical livelihood training**, compared to those that receive **technical livelihood skills and an “add-on” life-skills component**? What is the cost effectiveness of these approaches?

Navigating Evaluation Constraints

When it comes to reach with extremely vulnerable populations, there are often ethical concerns around withholding programming to form control groups. In this impact evaluation, the research team faced these very ethical considerations while considering options impact evaluation design options and constructing pure control groups. The complexity of participant registration in this program contributes to these challenges, given that targeted areas host vulnerable households, both newly displaced and protracted crisis-affected populations. Therefore, Mercy Corps identified a need to design a program responsive to participant needs, and refined its design, choosing an RCT approach with treatment and control groups clustered at the community level.

Quick Facts

TITLE

Evaluating the Impact and Cost Effectiveness of Bundled Activities for Economic Recovery in Fragile Contexts

TYPE OF EVALUATION

Impact Evaluation

EVALUATION METHODS

Randomized Control Trial

EVALUATION ARMS

1. Treatment Group:

Households in 15 communities receiving life skills and technical training

2. Control Group:

Households in 15 communities receiving only technical training

COUNTRY

Nigeria

DONORS

USAID/BHA

PARTICIPANTS

1,500 Households

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

Mercy Corps

EVALUATION/RESEARCH PARTNERS

Causal Design, HAEC

By providing technical training to both groups and evaluating the supplementary benefits of life skills training, the research team developed a study design that effectively addressed these ethical concerns. The study's emphasis on ensuring fair sample selection, providing comprehensive support through bundled activities, and consistently refining the research design underscores a strong ethical commitment to addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by vulnerable populations in the context of humanitarian assistance.

Evaluation Purpose & Audience

Studies from the development sector have shown that teaching people life skills (or transferable skills) can be more effective in enabling households' recovery to shocks. Existing research has also demonstrated that these interventions are more cost effective compared to the more traditional approach of exclusively providing technical skills. However, the benefits of adding a life skills component have not yet been rigorously tested in a humanitarian context. This impact evaluation aims to fill this gap.

The research team will disseminate findings from this impact evaluation to humanitarian and development practitioners and government agencies in Nigeria and the wider region. If this impact evaluation demonstrates similarly positive effects of adding the lifeskills component, Mercy Corps will also share the life skills curriculum with peers and key stakeholders within the region and beyond, alongside promising practices and guidance to facilitate further adaptation and adoption of this curriculum in other contexts.

Context and What's Next

The Mercy Corps team began implementation of the BEGE Activity in June 2023. The team expects to complete the technical training and life skills training by November 2023. The research team started the impact evaluation in August 2023 and will complete collecting endline data in April 2024. The team will then analyze the data and share findings and recommendations in May/June 2024. Furthermore, Mercy Corps will also explore the possibility of conducting a follow-up survey 6-12 months after this evaluation to detect any differences with higher level food security outcomes.

For further information, contact Vaidehi Krishnan, Director of Research- Economic Opportunities at vkrishnan@mercy Corps.org or Reimar Macaranas, Senior Director of Research and Evaluation- Causal Design at reimar@causal design.com or visit <https://www.mercy Corps.org/where-we-work/nigeria> to learn more about Mercy Corps programming in Nigeria.

Humanitarian Assistance Evidence Cycle

This brief is brought to you by the [Humanitarian Assistance Evidence Cycle \(HAEC\)](#) Associate Award. HAEC works to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency food security activities funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) by increasing the use of cost-effective and timely impact evaluations in humanitarian contexts.

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This brief is part of HAEC's Evaluation in Action series highlighting ongoing impact evaluations from around the world. Do you have an ongoing impact evaluation in a humanitarian context that you want to share?

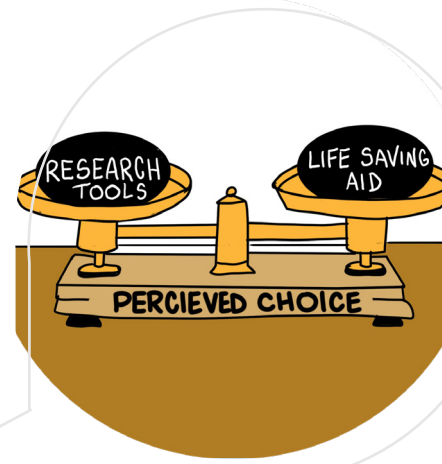


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