MapAction
Programme Partnership Agreement

Independent Progress Review

Executive Summary and Management Response

Final 11th October 2012

Authors: Antonella Mancini and Pauline Wilson
INTRODUCTION

MapAction (www.mapaction.org) is an NGO partner of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through a Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA). In compliance with the PPA, MapAction commissioned the first stage of an Independent Progress Review (IPR) which reported in October 2012.

The evaluators and report authors were Antonella Mancini and Pauline Wilson. Both are independent consultants with wide experience in assessment, monitoring and evaluation of international humanitarian and development programmes.

The PPA covers practically all MapAction’s humanitarian programmes so the IPR can be regarded as a general review of the charity’s activities and capacity.

This document contains the executive summary of the review report, and the MapAction management response to the report. A copy of the full report document, with appendices, is available on request from MapAction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The consultants would like to thank everyone involved in the Independent Progress Review. In all cases informants, including those from the UN, donors and other humanitarian agencies, were very frank, open and generous with their time. Particular thanks go to MapAction volunteers and trustees and to MapAction’s CEO and core staff who shared their experiences and insights and provided constructive and thoughtful input on the key findings.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW REPORT

1. Introduction

MapAction is one of 39 agencies, out of 400 applicants, chosen for the current round of PPAs, which started in April 2011 and will run to April 2014. MapAction is a second tier organisation i.e. they exist to support humanitarian agencies working at the front line of emergencies to fulfill their mission and mandate. They deploy teams of geographic information systems (GIS) specialist volunteers in the immediate emergency response phase. Teams provide information management (IM) and GIS services and mapped products to benefit relief operations, usually in conjunction with United Nations agencies. They also contribute to disaster risk reduction and preparedness through projects in vulnerable countries and collaborate and provide training to a broad range of humanitarian agencies in information management and GIS use in humanitarian response.

2. The Evaluation

The independent progress review (IPR) covered the period April 2011 through September 2012. Its primary objective was to “independently evaluate the impact of the DFID funding, with particular reference to ‘additionality’. The review draws together information from documentation and interviews and discussions with a variety of external (21) and internal (16) stakeholders. Progress was assessed in relationship to: results, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and the additionality of the PPA, and the impact and value for money of PPA funding.

3. Findings

The contribution of MapAction services and products to the humanitarian sector is significant. Feedback about MapAction’s work from external stakeholders all over the world was incredibly positive. All commended the high quality of MapAction’s work, its service ethic and the professionalism of MapAction volunteers and staff. The speed of deployments and map production to meet operational needs of humanitarian agencies was praised. These services, provided at low cost to the sector, have given humanitarian organisations a better understanding of the importance and use of mapped products for planning and implementing humanitarian responses more effectively. There is no doubt that PPA funding has enabled MapAction to continue providing high quality and efficient services to agencies on the front line of emergencies; to broaden its work in disaster risk reduction and preparedness and pursue a string of small innovations as opportunities arise.

3.1 Results at outcome and impact level

There is extensive evidence that MapAction support in the initial phase of emergencies is making it easier for agencies to bring information together to make evidence based operational and coordination decisions. Such information was said to support agencies to plan and prioritise actions, leverage resources and influence decision makers to act. However it is more challenging to assess whether mapped information leads to better informed decisions, a key assumption in MapAction’s theory of change and part of its impact statement. MapAction has no control over decision making and should reword the result at impact level so that it reflects the change that it can influence.

MapAction’s preparedness and capacity building efforts are seen as helpful and demand for MapAction’s services in preparedness and GIS information services is growing. However, this work
is still at an early stage. The impact of this support is difficult to measure and the likelihood that it will be sustained is uncertain.

3.2 Results at output level

MapAction has made good progress in delivering the four PPA outputs although progress has varied between them. This in part is due to circumstances beyond their control, i.e., there were no level 3 emergencies and other types of emergencies that required international response teams in 2011 and 2012 and changes in leadership and strategy within OCHA is affecting use of the UNDAC mechanism - MapAction’s principal deployment channel.

Nevertheless, over the PPA period MapAction responded to eight humanitarian crises, which included one complex, one environmental and six natural disasters. In January 2012 MapAction with OCHA also provided IM and GIS support to complete the first ever Multi Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) in the Philippines.

MapAction’s ability to deploy longer term to emergencies (Output 2) remains constrained by challenges in sourcing donor funding to maintain a standby roster for longer term deployments. Fortunately there was no need for such deployments since the start of the PPA though external informants would like to know that MapAction has the ability to stay longer term (3-6 months) should such deployments be required. Other key achievements are:

- Provision of bespoke maps for inclusion in six ACAPS disaster needs analysis reports, which are distributed widely to enhance early response in specific emergencies.
- Provision of GIS training and support to more than 640 aid workers from a range of organisations including UN agencies, the EU and INGOs.
- Completion in Zambia of the first phase of a project, in partnership with the Southern African Development Community and the OCHA Regional Office in Southern Africa, to improve emergency information management and readiness of government offices to respond to emergencies. The plan is to roll this programme out across the 15 member SADC countries to strengthen their IM/GIS disaster preparedness capacity.
- The launch of Project Dolomite (October 2012) - MapAction’s next generation mapping service that delivers mapped information to users both globally (by internet) and in the field (locally over LAN) rather than purely providing static maps.

3.3 Relevance

MapAction’s core work is relevant. They provide a unique high quality information management and GIS service including mapped products that meet the immediate needs and priorities of their target group – humanitarian actors working at the front line of emergencies. Whilst MapAction’s volunteer support is often provided as part of an UNDAC mission many other UN, local government and INGO responding agencies benefit from MapAction’s products. MapAction remains the only organisation worldwide able to achieve the rapid deployment of a trained and well equipped emergency mapping team to the point of need within 24-48 hours of a deployment request. Whilst other agencies have GIS experts that can be deployed most agencies don’t have a big pool of expertise to draw from or systems and procedures in place to deploy as quickly and as efficiently as MapAction.

Without MapAction services, it is likely that the information needed to make operational decisions would take longer to gather during the initial phase of an emergency and that the cost of similar support from others would be more expensive yet the quality of products produced uncertain. External informants all see the need for MapAction to continue their GIS support to the humanitarian sector and demand for more MapAction support is growing.
Capacity development on IM/GIS emergency preparedness with regional OCHA offices and local government National Emergency Management Agencies (NEMA) is a growing area of MapAction’s work and of interest to regional OCHA offices. This capacity support appears to be a more strategic and sustainable approach compared to developing such capacity within INGOs.

3.4 Effectiveness and efficiency
MapAction carries out work in a manner that is effective and efficient. Its way of working is human resource intensive and dependent on the dedication and commitment of a small core paid staff team (4 full-time and 3 part-time) and a highly professional group of volunteers (60), who also commit time to projects and development research. Its organisational, technical and procedural infrastructure is said to far exceed that of other volunteer communities and in some respects of UN agencies. In addition MapAction benefits from in-kind technology and software support from the private sector.

Volunteer selection, continuous training and the learning processes, which include MapAction participation in training and joint simulation exercises with UNDAC, ensure the organisation maintains its high standards and constantly improves its services. The recruitment of a new volunteer group, the Operational Support Team (OST), has created extra capacity to deliver operational outputs at a very low cost. While there are a number of technical development projects underway, progress is at times hampered due to MapAction’s core staff being over stretched and unable to cope with the current level of activity required to keep projects on track.

Current partners and organisations that MapAction collaborate with are very positive about MapAction who they trust to deliver quality services and consider a reliable partner. Many would like MapAction’s support for longer in the field.

MapAction has explored partnerships with other agencies involved in emergency response for example humanitarian clusters, the IHP and OCHA regional offices. However they have yet to formalise any new agreements.

3.5 Value for Money
MapAction’s services are highly valued by their partners. The organisation has a cost conscious ethic. Its volunteer model and the in-kind software support that it receives from the private sector enables MapAction to keep costs low. Cost calculations for the services provided by a MapAction deployed team compared to others indicate that others would be twice as high yet the quality of service be not be as consistent and reliable.

The DFID PPA grant continues to underpin the organisation’s core finances representing 44% of total income for the April 2011 to September 2012 period. However efforts to increase income from non-DFID sources have intensified since September 2011 when a part time fundraiser was hired. Still more needs to be done to package and market MapAction’s work to appeal to a wider array of donors and funders.

3.6 Additionality of PPA funding
PPA funding was directly responsible for enabling MapAction to maintain and strengthen its core operations during a critical funding gap period and it facilitated third party investment to create a more balanced income stream for the longer term. These impacts cannot be underestimated. With secure funding MapAction was able to maintain its contingent capacity to deliver quality services to the humanitarian sector fast. This has allowed MapAction to retain their reputation as a reliable partner. It has also supported MapAction to develop its preparedness work, develop new
partnerships and enhance operational capacity through the OST and technical project development. MapAction is now in a position to better package and market their work and attract funding from a wider group of donors such as the EU and other bilateral donors that fund disaster risk reduction and preparedness projects.

4. Lessons learnt

Policy and sector level: The Transformative Agenda process underway in OCHA has yet to clarify where in OCHA responsibility for first phase deployments will be held. Limitations of the OCHA driven information management for UNDAC missions and cluster operations has made it difficult for MapAction to decide where best to focus its efforts to ensure that its services can be utilized quickly and effectively. The humanitarian sector continues to struggle with decisions about when there is a need for mapping assets on the ground and how best to use such assets for operational decision-making.

PPA level: The PPA has ensured core funds for unrestricted use that enabled MapAction to grow and strengthen its services. Funding for such services is difficult to raise from other sources. MapAction receives the smallest grant in the PPA portfolio however transaction costs of meeting PPA reporting requirements are high compared to the requirements under previous DFID funding. The proportionality principle has not translated into practice whereby requirements for small PPA holders are streamlined to accord with their size and funding level.

Organisational level: Raising funds for MapAction provided services continues to be a challenge, yet the demand and expectation for what MapAction teams will do in the field continues to grow and UN organisations are not willing to pay for services. MapAction has a low profile among the public and amongst organisations outside of the UN and European donor agencies. Whilst MapAction's work and services is held in high regard by their key service uses, not everyone is aware of the scope of their services and what can be expected when a team is deployed. The perception of MapAction as a free service risks their services being used for less strategic purposes. Funding needs to be attached to any phase two deployment missions and funding for an emergency phase two standby roster is needed. In addition MapAction is at the limit of what it can deliver with the current staff capacity and volunteer model now in place.

5. Recommendations

Strategy: Build on the IPR findings and the MapAction Strategy Green Paper 2009 and Planning Framework for 2012 to develop a longer term 3 year strategy that clarifies the organisation's role and position; the scope of its services in both immediate emergency response and preparedness; its key partners, and the operational model to use to deliver its strategic objectives while keeping up to date with relevant technological improvements and developments.

Communications: Develop a communication plan to market and raise the profile of MapAction within the humanitarian sector, funders and the wider UK public. This includes reviewing and improving the MapAction website and developing a regular bulletin so that MapAction service users are kept up to date with MapAction's current work and projects.

Partners: Monitor shifts within OCHA to identify the most appropriate offices to engage and partner with. Review the current level of demand and agencies that are asking for MapAction’s services and decide which partners are the most strategic to engage with and what terms of engagement will be appropriate.

Funding: Identify the full cost of providing services (direct and indirect) and ensure future funding and project proposals sufficiently take into account the full cost of particular activities and seek cost sharing options.
Staffing: MapAction need extra paid staff resource in a number of areas to support the various technological and innovation projects underway or in the pipeline and to work and coordinate support from volunteers in these projects. Additional support could be hired on a fixed term basis and reviewed once the new CEO is established and a strategic plan developed. MapAction should also consider outsourcing some aspects of their more routine IT maintenance work to free up staff time to focus on the core work of the organisation.

Monitoring and evaluation: Systematise the current monitoring and evaluation processes that MapAction carries out. Hold an annual review workshop with staff and volunteers that reviews all activities carried out for the year and document what is working and where improvements are needed. Ensure a longer lead in time to appoint and plan for the end of PPA evaluation.

Following page: MapAction management response
MAPACTION IPR: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Introduction

Antonella Mancini and Pauline Wilson, as independent evaluation consultants, conducted a mid term review of MapAction’s actions covered by a DFID Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) from April 2011 to September 2012. This note contains a management response to the evaluation report, written prior to its dissemination.

General comments

MapAction’s management is grateful to the consultants for their diligence in conducting the review, and to the informants who contributed to it. The review was conducted satisfactorily within the scope of its terms of reference. As well as meeting, we trust, the evaluation requirements of DFID as a funder, the report is also a very valuable tool for MapAction management in strengthening the charity’s overall effectiveness.

The management welcomes the review report and concurs with the findings in all substantive areas.

We are particularly encouraged by the findings that:

- MapAction is being effective in making it easier for aid agencies to make evidence-based operational and coordination decisions.
- Feedback from external stakeholders was described as “incredibly positive”.
- Our work is judged to be conducted effectively and efficiently.
- MapAction delivers value-for-money both through its volunteer capacity and its cost conscious ethos.

We note and concur with the observation that having maps available may not in all cases result in better decisions by agencies and that the ultimate impact is hard to assess. However, this remains a tenet of our theory of change and we feel it is important to keep clearly in mind this aim of our work and to seek ways to make mapped information as effective and compelling as possible.

We concur that our work on preparedness and capacity building is still emergent. We intend to keep this under close review with particular attention to understanding the long term impact of these actions, and to reconfigure programmes as necessary to achieve this.

Responses to report recommendations

Strategy. We recognise the need to articulate a new medium-term strategy, beyond the PPA horizon. However we have deferred this until the handover to our new Chief Executive, Liz Hughes, in January 2013; it is obviously essential that she has the opportunity to direct the formulation of that strategy which will be her responsibility to execute.

Communications. We accept the recommendation to boost external communications, particularly with humanitarian organisations. We have already begun work on this.

Partners. As the report recommends, we are keeping partnership arrangements under review. We have recently renewed our dialogue with two of the cluster lead agencies. We are currently reviewing our partnering approach with INGOs to analyse their recurring needs and to find ways to deliver sustained impact within that sector.
**Funding.** We note the recommendation to seek full cost recovery in funding proposals and in fact that has been our aim for some time. Nevertheless it remains an obstacle that many donors are pre-disposed to project funding that allows for only a small percentage of headquarters-based costs. That is why strategic funding, as with the DFID PPA, is so crucial to our organisational model.

**Staffing.** We concur with the finding that the current small staff group is overstretched. We note the recommendation to move ahead immediately to recruit additional technical staff: this will be considered against specific short-term requirements, discussed with the charity’s trustees and implemented if approved by them.

**M&E.** We accept all the recommendations under this heading.

**Concluding remarks**

We feel that the report paints a realistic picture of the charity’s capacity, relevance, performance and value to the humanitarian sector, and highlights well the key obstacles that need to be overcome to sustain and grow the charity’s services.

There is considerable unmet demand and potential to expand the charity’s scope and scale of action both during emergencies and in preparedness and capacity building. We recognise that external partners say that they would like ‘more of MapAction’: longer deployments, new platforms for delivering information, and more capacity building support. At the same time the report draws attention to MapAction’s current capacity limits, constrained in particular by staff resources and by funding arrangements. We observe that, while front line actors, humanitarian donors and coordinating agencies value our services, there is a recurring assumption that someone else should be paying for them! The outlook for significant core funding follow-on from the current DFID PPA, post-2014, remains uncertain.

The geospatial industry is undergoing explosive growth in technologies and methods, some of which have substantial potential in the humanitarian domain. Our approach to adopting and operationalising these technologies is steered by the need to deliver the right information for decision making humanitarian partners, not by technical virtuosity or novelty.

Finally, insofar as external informants have praised our work in the report – to a remarkable and gratifying extent – I wish to recognise and put on record that this has only been made possible by the selfless commitment and exemplary professionalism of our volunteers and staff.

Nigel Woof
Chief Executive, MapAction
11 October 2012