Compendium of Good Practices on Rapid Needs Assessment Methodology

This compendium of good practices was developed by the CADRI Partnership with inputs from OCHA, UNDP, UNOPS & UNFPA in February & April 2020.

I. Definition

A rapid needs assessment methodology is a tool that can be used in emergencies to collect and analyze information on affected people and their needs to inform response planning. It outlines the key steps required, as well as roles and responsibilities for joint data collection and joint analysis. It makes provisions for logistics, administrative procedures, security and safety, information management, resources for implementation.

It is not a detailed survey but a broad assessment of basic needs of the population in order to identify priorities for assistance. It can be complemented by in-depth sectoral assessments that can be carried out in the months following a disaster or in a slow onset emergency. Coordinated assessments form the basis for needs-based strategic planning and system-wide monitoring[1].

Joint assessments occur when data collection, processing and analysis form one single process among agencies within and among sectors and result in a single report.

II. Relevance

A joint rapid needs assessment methodology - using standardized data collection techniques and procedure for data analysis - is important for:

- Evidence base to support decision making by central / local government and partners in the early stage
- Reduce duplication of efforts and resources (each actor carrying out their own assessment)
- Provide a more coherent picture of needs across regions and sectors with comparable figures between affected areas
- Minimize beneficiary "assessment fatigue"
- Reduce transaction costs of local authorities
- Limit potential for discrepancies in figures
- Promote a shared situational awareness & coordinated response by building consensus on needs
- Provide sound evidence for fund raising and advocacy messages

III. Key principles emerging from the review of good practices

Timeliness. Conduct the first assessment as soon as possible, add within the first two weeks of a disaster. The earlier it starts after a sudden onset disaster, the better. The window of opportunity for coordinated assessment is extremely short (relief organizations will not wait to start their own assessment).

[1] https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/programme-cycle/space/page/assessments-overview

Government led. The rapid needs assessment is initiated by the government authority responsible for coordinating emergency response.

Multi-sectoral. Consider all key sectors: water and sanitation, food security, health, shelter, protection and additional sectors when relevant. Using a multi-sectoral approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the inter-relationships between needs, their root causes and allows for a more targeted response.

Realistic. There is no methodology that meets every information need. Balance between breadth and specificity of objectives. Limit number of questions § issues. Visiting fewer sites allows for more time at each site and ensures better data quality. Keep the sample size limited to community level. Avoid overloading data collection with excessive disaggregation.

Participative. The rapid needs assessment team should comprise a broad representation of Government entities, local authorities, local NGOs as well as humanitarian partners, representatives of disaster-affected communities (see below) and private sector. It should comprise different background and/or gender to ensure different lenses to interpret observations. Assessors should be local.

People-centred and inclusive: Needs assessment must be guided by the interests and well-being of the population: needs assessment should identify the affected community's priority needs as well as existing local capacity and coping mechanisms, protection concerns and preferred solutions to address needs. To do so, representatives of disaster affected communities must participate and be included or represented in all relevant phases of the assessment from data collection to analysis wherever possible. Assessments must be sensitive to age, sex, and all relevant aspects of diversity (see below on disaggregated data).

Accountability to Affected Populations: Building an accountability feedback mechanism will help deliver more relevant, efficient and effective humanitarian response and achieve greater impact. This is done by increasing the space for affected communities to participate in and influence the needs identification (see above) as well as the design, delivery and monitoring of humanitarian assistance. Accountability hinges on establishing effective feedback channels as well as complaints and response mechanisms. This calls for the establishment, from the onset, of trusted information sharing and communication channels and modalities. Systems of community representation must be fair and representative, enabling the most marginalized, vulnerable and affected, including women, illiterate people, the elderly and those affected by disability or illness, to have a voice.

Preparedness. Relevant stakeholders within and outside government must be trained on using the methodology. Roles and responsibilities, administrative procedures, provisions for security and safety, information management system, and resources for implementation must be clarified. Pre-disaster baseline information by region/district (demographic, geographical, malnutrition and food insecurity; access to potable water and sanitation; education facilities and school enrolment; incidence of communicable diseases, among others) must be maintained.

Analytical framework. A lesson is that often too much data is collected. An analytical framework is required to help deciding what data to collect, and how to analyse it, prior to starting the data collection. The analytical framework must be specific to every disaster event.

Information management & Information technologies. The use of a common IT tool for data collection, data storage, data processing and visualization, as well as mapping – both spatial and thematic – is a requirement. In addition, geospatial information systems (GIS), satellite imagery, crowdsourced data, and use of data management application for real time data collection are innovative tools to fill information gaps.

Triangulate by using combination of data collection techniques. The use of a combination of techniques (direct observation, key informant interviews, community group discussions) as well as the variety of data sources (local leaders, teachers, nurses, local media, Social Media, aerial survey, satellite imagery, crowdsourced data etc.) is critical to ensure good quality assessment based on triangulation of data.

Ethical considerations. The design of the needs assessment exercise must be underpinned by ethical considerations relating to the principles of neutrality (not collecting, analysing or reporting controversial information of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature), and impartiality (understanding population needs without making distinctions based on race, class, political opinions). The data collection tools must seek participants / responders' consent and protect the anonymity of individuals and information collected. It is recommended to use an "informed consent form" (see REACH example). Referral and feedback channels and procedures must be clearly communicated.

Availability of data. The identification of needs cannot be done in isolation of an overall analysis of the context in which the crises has occurred. Use of pre-crisis baseline data is a critical element, it has to be sufficiently comparable to be compiled and used in a shared analysis.

Disaggregated data: Consider a balanced number of women and men and informants from different communities or groups to understand their differentiated needs (men/women, elderly, disabled, religious / ethnic minorities for instance – need to be selective but at a minimum sex and gender disaggregation).

Transparency. Share the methodology with local authorities and communities ahead of the assessment. Manage community expectations by avoiding unrealistic expectations of what the assessment will lead to. Make the methodology public in the needs assessment report including sources, assumptions and limitations.

Specificity of urban needs assessment. Assessment methodologies based on rural experience do not transfer comfortably to more complex population centres and are more expensive and administratively more demanding in urban areas, and might require specific skills in urban planning, civil engineering and construction and protection.

Assessment team composition. Assign an Assessment Coordinator and an Information Analyst from the start (two critical roles). The core team can also include a logistician, a data entry clerk, a GIS officer, a statistician/epidemiologist, who will support the work of the field team leaders and the assessors / sector specialists.

A harmonized methodology for rapid needs assessment should include the following:

- ✔ Definition & objectives by types of needs assessments
- ✔ Roles and responsibilities (Lead, Coordination, Operations and Logistics, Information management)
- ✔ Resources (human, assets including GIS, financing)
- ✔ Principles
- ✔ Information management including framework for data sharing & data sharing protocols
- ✔ Process, steps, timelines
- ✔ Techniques for secondary and primary data collection and analysis

IV. Examples of best practices & resources

1) **<u>The Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)</u>**

The MiRA (2015) was developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) by drawing from the wealth of experience and knowledge gathered from UN agencies, NGOs, donors, academia and other technical bodies. The MiRA is implemented through a phased process of data collection, joint data analysis and reporting:

- Phase 1 (0-3 days): Review secondary data (pre-crisis and crisis), identify priority sectors and groups, number of assessment sites & samples, establish the assessment team, adapt the analytical framework.
- Phase 2 (2 weeks): Primary data collection (1 week) through visits to affected areas and interviews with the affected communities to identify inter-sector priority needs by affected group and geographical area; Joint inter-sectoral analysis (1 week) and consensus building on priority humanitarian needs to produce the MIRA report.

The MiRA is a flexible guidance and set of principles that can be adapted to any country context to support a Government develop its own methodology.

Highlights:

- ✔ The MIRA analytical framework includes a questionnaire which considers the conditions of the affected populations - the estimate of number and type of people in need at each sector level, the primary and secondary effects, the vulnerabilities of groups at risk, the impact of the physical disruption of key infrastructure and losses – as well as the local response capacity (within the community, local government, central government, private sector, humanitarian partners) and humanitarian access / logistics.
- ✔ The Initial Rapid Assessment Form (IRA) developed by IASC (prior to MIRA) provides a concrete example of a field assessment form / questionnaire that can be adapted to any local context.

2) ACAPS rapid needs assessment methodology

ACAPS is an independent humanitarian consortium of specialists in humanitarian needs analysis and assessment. ACAPS provides a tool box for designing a country / organization specific methodology and carrying out a rapid needs assessment. It contains practical guidance including tips, do's and don'ts, on how to proceed with both the data collection and the data analysis.

Highlights:

- ✔ The Good Enough Guide (2015) provides detailed checklists on how to select affected sites and vulnerable groups? Various tools and methods to collect secondary and primary data?
- ✔ The questionnaire design for needs assessment in humanitarian emergencies (2016) provides the ten steps of designing a questionnaire.
- ✔ Rapid humanitarian assessment in urban settings (2013) provides practical guidance on designing a needs assessment methodology in urban contexts.
- ✔ Qualitative and quantitative techniques for humanitarian needs assessment (2012).
- ✔ Building an effective assessment team (2012) elaborates on the team architecture and profiles.
- ✔ Secondary data review analytical frame (2014).
- ✔ Earthquake needs assessment summary sheet.
- ✔ Floods needs assessment summary sheet
- ✔ Tropical cyclones needs assessment summary sheet
- ✔ Spotting dubious data

3) REACH Rapid Needs Assessment Methodology

The REACH[2] rapid assessment model is based on a flexible methodological approach that is adaptable to various contexts with a timeframe that can range from a standard first-72-hours rapid assessment to 1 week, following 6 sequential steps. The guidance for undertaking rapid needs assessment includes Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for information management and data protection, and data cleaning standards, as well as training modules on preparing data collection, including ethical considerations, data collection approaches and research methods.

Highlights:

- ✔ REACH Toolkit Research Guidance
- ✔ Country examples of rapid needs assessments

4) Innovation in Disaster Rapid Assessment

This handbook (2017) developed by UNESCAP[3] and AHA Centre[4] provides a methodology for performing rapid disaster assessment looking at both immediate humanitarian needs *and* asset-based damage and loss estimates within a short time frame *making use of innovative technologies*, to provide early estimates of recovery and reconstruction needs. Having access to information through technologies such as crowdsourcing, satellite imagery, real time / remote field data collection through smart phones, can display the extent and magnitude of damage (classified as high, medium and low) in disaster-hit areas, providing a solid foundation for targeted, effective response as well as recovery efforts to begin early.

5) The SPHERE Handbook

The SPHERE handbook (revision 2018) developed by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and a group of NGOs & UN humanitarian partners provides resources to help assess specific sectors, in particular check lists of questions and indicators to conduct needs assessments in key sectors.

Highlights*:*

- ✔ Water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion initial needs assessment checklist
- ✔ Food security and livelihoods assessment checklist
- ✔ Nutrition assessment check list
- ✔ Shelter, settlement and non-food items assessment checklist
- ✔ Health assessment check list

6) Initial rapid multi-sectoral assessment

The operational guidance for the conduct of initial rapid multi-sectoral assessment (2014) developed by IFRC describes the key steps, various data collection techniques and sources of data to consider, as well as a method for undertaking analysis of data and reaching decisions based on data analysis.

7) The 72-hour assessment approach

The 72-hour assessment approach (2017) developed by WFP marks a deliberate shift away from other rapid assessment methodologies. It seeks to give a "best estimate" snapshot in the first few hours to inform initial budgeting and logistical decisions. It helps determining the scale and severity of an impact

---

[2] REACH is a humanitarian consortium of NGO and UN supporting data collection and in-depth analysis in contexts of crisis, disaster and displacement.
[3] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
[4] ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management

and forecasting areas expected to be impacted further. The 72-hour approach can therefore be a preliminary step to a rapid needs assessment. This tool puts a strong emphasis on data preparedness and other essential organizational readiness actions.

8) Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment Form

IOM Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment Form is a practical and concise template for rapid primary data collection to collect disaggregated data in health, water, shelter, food, nutrition, livestock and agriculture, energy, education. It also covers local response capacities and humanitarian access.

9) Framework for data sharing in practice

The Framework for Data Sharing in Practice developed by PIM[5] offers practical guidance for how to share humanitarian data through a set of minimums in terms of trust, concepts, principles, methods, and processes.

10) Analytical Framework guide and template

The analytical framework guide is meant to adopt a structured and strategic approach to data collection and analysis. It provides a way to organize what data to collect (scales of prioritization), how to analyse it, and describe the interactions between elements that need to be measured.

Highlights

- ✔ The Analytical Framework template helps organize the data collected to ease the analysis.

11) Nepal Initial Rapid Assessment Format

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal Initial Rapid Assessment is a practical and concise template for rapid primary data collection to collect disaggregated data in water, housing, food, health, protection. It also covers local response capacities and coping mechanisms.

12) Kenya Inter-Agency Rapid Assessment Mechanism (KIRA)

KIRA is an innovative[6] joint assessment mechanism developed by the Kenya Government, Red Cross Society, NGOs, UN and faith-based organizations, that establishes an easy-to-use-and-deploy, light-weight, collaborative tool to support effective and efficient humanitarian response.

Highlights

- ✔ Assessing needs when humanitarian access is not possible based on collection and analysis of secondary data based on existing knowledge of the affected-population's living standards, and using mFieldwork technology for real time data collection even with limited internet connectivity.
- ✔ KIRA Manual (2014)
- ✔ KIRA Initial Assessment Terms of Reference template
- ✔ KIRA Community Group Discussion form
- ✔ KIRA Key Informant Interview form
- ✔ KIRA Direct Observation Questionnaire

13) Guideline for coordinated assessment in Pakistan

[5] The Protection Information Management (PIM) Initiative brings together UN, NGO, academia and other protection and information management partners to define standards for information management in humanitarian settings.
[6] KIRA was selected for the prestigious Oxford Humanitarian Innovation Conference

The guideline for coordinated assessment (2012) developed by the Government of Pakistan and its humanitarian partners, outlines the methodology for needs assessments and surveys.

Highlights

- ✔ Includes a table of selected cluster indicators
- ✔ Describe data collection methods
- ✔ Includes a check list for coordinated rapid needs assessment

14) Bangladesh Joint Assessment Methodology

It elaborates on the pros and cons of conducting a joint rapid assessment, and on the institutional and preparedness arrangements required.

Highlights

- ✔ Bangladesh contextualized MIRA needs assessment tool

15) Philippines information management handbook

16) Guidance for Rapid Needs Assessment in India

The guidance for Rapid Needs Assessments developed by India includes two separate tools: one for villages and one for city districts. The district format is a mix of secondary data needs and some primary data while the village data format has a higher degree of primary data needed.

Highlights

- ✔ Sample TORs
- ✔ Assessment Report Format
- ✔ Tool for Villages
- ✔ Tool for Districts
- ✔ Bihar Urban Floods Report (2019)