

B.1 The importance of assessment in Shelter

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Introduction

This article describes how assessments have been used to inform humanitarian Shelter programming and support inter-agency coordination, with examples from different countries.

Background to REACH Initiative

REACH was created in 2010 as a joint initiative of two INGOs and a UN agency to facilitate the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The REACH Initiative has been working as a stand-by partner of the Global Shelter Cluster since 2011, supporting the development of a global assessment strategy and carrying out rapid assessments and evaluations for Cluster operations worldwide.

Improving coordination through data sharing in Somalia

Following an increase in displacement in 2011 and 2012 due to famine and continued conflict, gaps in data across multiple sectors in settlements of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland made it difficult to quantify needs and to effectively target the delivery of humanitarian assistance to displaced populations.

In 2012, REACH worked with the Shelter Cluster to carry out a Shelter Sector Review to understand country-wide shelter needs, identify critical gaps and collect the information needed to fill them. Building on a contextual overview of the IDP situation from secondary data, the Shelter Sector Review used three types of primary data collection: household surveys, direct observation by enumerators, and remote sensing.

Sites were selected for assessment based on a review of secondary data and remote sensing analysis. A cluster sampling methodology was used to select a representative sample of households at the settlement level, which allowed for disaggregation of data by individual settlement. While this method of sampling required a large number of households to be assessed (8000), it decreased the overall error inherent in using complex paper forms, and provided comparable data at a settlement level, which had not previously been possible.

The assessment provided several outcomes, the most important of which was improved coordination between aid organisations and the government. The assessment instilled a common understanding by all actors of shelter



Using smartphones to collect survey data.
Photo: REACH.

types and conditions, which in turn allowed better resource allocation by all actors.

Increased participation in inter-organisational and Cluster-based exercises facilitated the adoption of common frameworks for monitoring and evaluation.

Rapid assessment, monitoring and evaluation in the Philippines

Typhoon Haiyan, known locally as Yolanda, struck the Philippines in early November 2013, damaging over a million houses and displacing over 4 million people.

In partnership with the Shelter and WASH Clusters, REACH carried out a rapid assessment in the immediate aftermath of the typhoon, to gather baseline data on the impact of the disaster. The affected area was vast, and coupled with significant damage to infrastructure, posed considerable challenges to carrying out the assessment.

Following a review of secondary data to identify the affected areas, the first round of primary data collection was carried out in November 2013 and included over 6,000 interviews in 16 targeted municipalities within 100km of the storm path.

For both baseline and monitoring assessments, primary data was collected by enumerators using a smartphone application, which allows surveys to be loaded on to a smartphone, completed off-line, and then uploaded onto a server at the end of a day. Each survey can be geo-located using GPS data, which clearly shows the spread of data collection across a geographic area and helps to check that sampling is random.

The use of mobile phone applications for data collection removes many of the problems with incomplete or illegible paper forms, and saves valuable time in data-entry. While this method of data collection worked well for the initial

assessment, technical issues with the smartphones caused problems with the monitoring assessment, which highlights the importance of having the correct equipment.

The speed of the initial assessment allowed the information collected to be fed directly into the 2014 Strategic Response Plan and the associated appeal. Subsequent sector response monitoring assessments in June and August 2014, together with an evaluation in late 2014, were also planned to coincide with the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC). Timing assessments to coincide with these key programming and funding milestones was vital to ensure that up-to-date information was available to those who needed it for both practical response planning and wider advocacy efforts.

Assessment access constraints in Iraq

Between January and August 2014, an estimated 1.7 million people had been displaced by months of increasing violence by armed opposition groups across much of Iraq. Following the declaration of a Level 3 emergency, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) requested that the Clusters collect sectoral information for an overview of humanitarian needs to inform the revised Strategic Response Plan.

REACH worked jointly with the Shelter Cluster and newly activated Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster to carry out a sectoral assessment of the needs of internally displaced Iraqis.

Due to ongoing violence and a lack of humanitarian access, the assessment adopted a mixed approach to data collection: household-level data was collected in the accessible Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), while community group discussions with key informants were used to assess shelter needs in inaccessible governorates.

Based on available data from an INGO and other secondary sources, sample sizes were constructed to allow a comparison of IDP needs by type of accommodation. Household interviews of over 750 families were carried out across the KR-I in a seven-day period, with provisional results monitored on a daily basis and shared with the

Resources and further reading

Further information about the REACH Initiative is available from www.reachresourcecentre.info

Somalia Shelter Sector Review for Somalia, Somaliland & Puntland, December 2012

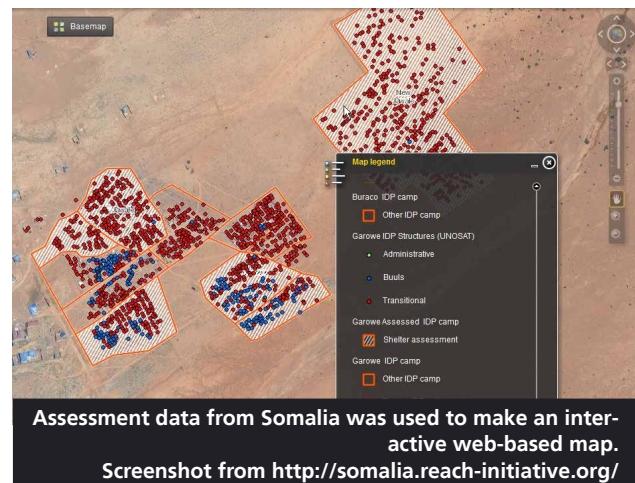
Philippines: Typhoon Haiyan Shelter & WASH Rapid Assessment, January 2014

Philippines: Typhoon Haiyan Shelter & WASH Response Monitoring, April 2014

Philippines: Typhoon Haiyan Shelter Sector Response Monitoring, September 2014

Iraq: Shelter & CCCM Cluster Rapid Assessment, Sept. 2014

Iraq: Shelter Cluster Area of Origin Assessment, Oct. 2014



Clusters. Data collected remotely from inaccessible areas was compiled into a series of factsheets and dashboards and also fed into the inter-agency planning process.

As in the Philippines, the ability to mobilise quickly was vital to ensure that data could be collected in time to inform the Humanitarian Needs Overview. A high level of information-sharing, facilitated by OCHA, meant that existing data on shelter types could be built upon, rather than duplicated. Collaboration between the Shelter and CCCM Clusters meant that a single data collection form covered indicators for both sectors, avoiding an unnecessary duplication of questions, which could have quickly led to assessment fatigue amongst the displaced population.

Key points for an effective assessment

- Timely, coordinated assessments are vital. If data collection is timed to coincide with key humanitarian milestones, results can be disseminated widely for planning, advocacy and appeals.
- Inclusive assessments engage a range of actors. Collaboration for an assessment and providing publicly accessible information can result in improved communication, information sharing and increased participation in Clusters and inter-agency processes.
- Needs assessment data can be built upon for response monitoring, evaluation and preparedness. Assessment findings can feed into every phase of a project cycle, with consistent indicators used to establish a baseline, monitor progress, evaluate a response and prepare for the future.
- Triangulation is vital. Primary data is most useful when it builds upon a strong base of secondary data, can be geolocated and displayed visually on a map as well as in reports and databases.
- Embrace new technology. The speed and accuracy of data collection and analysis can be improved considerably by using new technology, when it complements existing processes.