



Coordinated Needs Assessment Workshop

Summary Note and Action Points

29th January 2014

As part of an Inter-Sector Working Group (ISWG) initiative, ACAPS SNAP¹ facilitated a one-day workshop on 'Coordinated Needs Assessment' in Amman for the ISWG members and representatives of the sectors. Also participating were the Resident Coordinator's Office and the Host Community Support Platform (HCSP).

The workshop covered:

- Discussion of the problems faced due to lack of coordination of assessments;
- Presentations by ACAPs on Assessment principles;
- Review of case-studies of coordinated needs assessment systems in Kenya, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Findings from NRC/ACAPS trainings in late December and early January;
- Presentation and discussions of Information Management solutions, including an on-line registry;
- Identification of solutions and follow-up action points at the inter-sector and sector level.

The following note summarizes the sections on 1) Discussion on problems faced due to lack of coordination of assessment; 2) the proposed On-line Registry; and 3) the final session on solutions and follow-up actions. The presentations and case-studies will be sent out together with this note, and are available from UNHCR².

1) Discussion on problems faced due to lack of coordination of assessments

Through group work, and under the two broad themes of 'Systems' and 'Methodology', the following issues were raised:

Systems

- Currently no system in place for coordinating assessments. Coordination does still happen on an ad hoc basis, between individual organizations or within a few sectors, but it is not systematic.
- Organizations tend to opt immediately for primary data collection, rather than conducting a proper desk review and considering secondary data as part of assessment process. The result is that assessments duplicate each other.
- Until recently, organizations have not had access to a comprehensive list of completed assessments, or they are not aware of the inventory on the Refugee Response portal and the HCSP web-site.

¹ Syria Needs Assessment Project. Thanks in particular to Nick Parham and Rolf Bakken. For more information on SNAP, please visit <http://www.acaps.org/en/pages/syria-snap-project>

² See the ISWG page on the Refugee Response portal http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=107&Id=60 or contact the Inter-Sector Coordinator, Alex Tyler, at Tyler@unhcr.org



- Refugees become ‘over-assessed’; suffer from assessment fatigue. No system in place to screen whether an assessment is necessary or not. Although there are global best practices, there is no code of conduct specific to Jordan.
- No control system in place at the sector level. Organizations approach sectors at the end of the assessment process, not at the beginning, often after already receiving donor and government approval. This also means that sectors have little ‘ownership’ of the results, and do not use them comprehensively.
- Same concerns for ‘research bodies’ visiting Jordan. Serious concerns over lack of or insufficient ethical clearance for research projects.
- Competition between organizations can drive primary data assessments. Funding can be consequent on further assessments. Not clear from all donors that secondary data is sufficient for project proposal requirements, as opposed to primary data collection.
- Some sectors have a clear ‘research framework’ or understanding of the information gaps in their sector; others do not.
- Sometimes a tenuous link between assessment and programming. Greater emphasis on ‘data analysis’ required, rather than just collection.
- Challenges in government engagement, both for approval of assessments/projects, and for incorporation of results into national plans. In some cases, results of assessments have not been released because lack of government approval.

Methodology

- Currently difficult to assess the quality of data collected by other organizations, or to compare.
- Different methodologies used, or not explained as part of the assessment publication.
- Data sets are not necessarily available/open.
- Tendency to ask the same questions over and over again, rather than focusing on unanswered questions: does not contribute to a collective in-depth understanding.
- Multi-sector assessment questions are not necessarily checked with a technical sector beforehand, resulting in questions which are neither appropriate nor useful – e.g. of measuring health indicators, requires some technical knowledge.
- Lack of systematic gender disaggregation in all assessments questions; assessments can be gender-blind.

2) Discussion on On-line Assessment Registry Presentation

Inter-Sector Information Management presented a mock-up for a potential online assessment registry. The proposed system would allow partners to search for existing and planned assessments, and register their own. The following comments were made in the subsequent discussion:

- Question over how early partners should register their assessment. Concept stage? When already have funding? There was a suggestion of using this system as a tool through which organisations could communicate what they would like to do with a view to presenting this to a working group. Preliminary proposals could be registered on the system to let the NGOs, sectors



and donors know what is happening well in advance, and allow partners to plan joint assessments.

- There was a lack of sex gender differentiation on the methodology page of the assessment mock up.
- It was recommended not to have a very complicated or cumbersome approval system at the beginning. There was a suggestion to remove some of the fields. On the mapping page, a timeline should be inserted.
- Question over who would review assessments registered. At sector level, should be by sector chairs. For multi-sector assessments, then at the ISWG level. Would need to ensure camp and urban coordination are also involved in this review.
- It was proposed to develop a system which could be used by both the Refugee Response sectors and the HCSP Task Forces. It was proposed that a group that represents both HCSP/sector chairs and those doing the assessments could be formed as part of the review process.



3) Solutions and Follow-up Actions

The ‘problems’ described above were grouped together by the facilitators, and then potential solutions were discussed in plenary. The following table was used to guide the discussion. Minor edits have been made for consistency and clarity.

Systems			
Problem	Solution	Process	Timeframe
No System in place. Lack of procedures i.e. SOP for submission and sector review of assessments. No Code of conduct; guidelines	Define framework for a Coordinated Needs Assessments process, including SOPs for submission. Include a Flow charts/decision tree, showing at which points organizations have to register, and approach sectors/camp coord/HCSP for review.	Est. ad hoc group through ISWG, INGO forum, HCSP, donors, to develop these documents. Could eventually be converted into a ‘Coordinated Needs Assessment’ body. Take examples from other operations, and adapt to Jordan. Has to be inclusive; space for meaningful input. Sector chairs to brief and discuss with sectors, feedback on experiences	Priority. However, do not need a complex system to put some minimum standards into place. Build up little by little. Initial docs/ToRs Sop within 1 month
	Set up of a simple on-line Registry	Initial prototype, testing, Validation with both sectors, HCSP and users. Populate with existing inventories. Common ownership with Sectors/HCSP/ donors /NGOs.	Within 6 weeks
Lack of awareness of existing or planned mechanisms, and buy-in the coordination	Better publicity of existing information; sending info or updates by email, and in sector meetings Updates on the Coordinated Needs Assessment	Through the sector / ISWG and HCSP systems	Priority



system, Duplication of information needs	process to ISWG, Sectors, Country platforms Encourage donors to make it a pre-condition to use secondary sources, before embarking on primary data.		
Lack of understand of info gaps; sector capacities; Research Framework	Establish better understanding of info gaps at sector level.	Begin with review of Assessment Inventory at the sector level. To be developed at sector level. ISWG to follow-up and support sectors in putting into place Link assessment strategy or research framework at sector level to RRP processes and the mid-year review.	Time frame will vary by sector. Some initial feedback in short term.
Donors requirements on assessments as part of project proposal	Engagement with donors on system/process;	Clarify expectations of donors in asking for assessments. Encourage donors to make it a pre-condition to use secondary sources, before embarking on primary data.	Organize meeting with donors to discuss in short-term
Lack of engagement with national authorities/capacities and procedures for Government Approval	Inclusion of government / authorities in assessments;	Including Ministry of Planning, Line Ministries and Department of Stats Encourage greater leadership/engagement of government in some sectors. Engagement can create ownership	Not specified

Methodology			
Problem	Solution	Process	Timeframe
Lack of clarity on standards, indicators, sampling, and data collection/sampling	Samples for surveys can be generated through the registration system, based on data sharing agreements. Confirm/adapt indicators by sector in Jordan context.	Guidelines to be developed on accessing sampling from the registration database, with confidentiality checks and balances. Reference made to the parallel process of the	Common indicators by March.



methods; including disaggregation esp. SADD.	Define the most important/relevant which could be used by different organizations in assessments. Define minimum basket of indicators/and methodology.	Vulnerability Assessment Framework, where common indicators are being developed. Multi-sector assessments to discuss technical questions with specialized sectors. Ensure organizations are aware of common pool of indicators.	
Difficult to compare data sets / methodologies including disaggregation esp. SADD.	Develop policy on Open Data Sets; licensing and agreements. Encourage government leadership of IM groups; HCSP. Training and support to govt.	To be further discussed at the Information Management Working Group	Develop agency agreement. Drafts (by April) Advocacy with government (June)
Not enough focus on data analysis, rather on data collection	Ensure capacity to analyse with IM working group and organizations; awareness of what already exists. Link to open data sets; protocols for data sharing. Collective analysis at the sector level. Joint analysis sessions at sector level - linking to programming. More in- depth data mining	To be further discussed at the Information Management Working Group	To be defined at next IM working group.
Lack of standards for reporting methodology, as well as results	See Systems (SOPs development) above; including methodology in publication.	See Systems above.	