

# Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of Food Security Cluster Coordination

## Lesson: Informing Common Strategic Decision-Making

*Text-only version*

*In partnership with:*

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## Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- define "coordinated assessments";
- distinguish between "harmonized" and "joint" assessments;
- identify roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in coordinated assessments during an emergency;
- describe the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) process; and
- describe the purpose and structure of a Humanitarian Needs Overview.

## Introduction

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals have agreed on a list of six core functions for Clusters. These six functions are aimed at "refocusing Clusters on strategic and operational gaps analysis, planning, assessment and results".

*(Recommendation 27, IASC, Transformative Agenda)*

This lesson focuses on the second of the six core functions of Clusters at country level: **informing common strategic decision-making**.



### *The six core functions*

#### **Support service delivery by:**

- ✓ providing a platform that ensures service delivery and is driven by the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic priorities;
- ✓ developing mechanisms to eliminate duplication of activities.

#### **Inform the HC/HCT's strategic decision-making by:**

- ✓ preparing needs assessments and analysis of gaps (across and within clusters, using information management tools as needed) to inform the setting of priorities;
- ✓ identifying and finding solutions for (emerging) gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues, including gender, age, disability/diversity, protection, HIV/AIDS and environment;
- ✓ formulating priorities on the basis of analysis.

#### **Plan and implement cluster strategies by:**

- ✓ developing sectoral plans, objectives and indicators that directly support realization of the overall response's strategic objectives;

- ✓ applying and adhering to common standards and guidelines;
- ✓ clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing cluster contributions to the HC's overall humanitarian funding proposals.

**Monitor and evaluate performance by:**

- ✓ monitoring and reporting on activities and needs;
- ✓ measuring progress against the cluster strategy and agreed results;
- ✓ recommending corrective action where necessary.

**Support robust advocacy by:**

- ✓ identifying concerns, and contributing key information and messages to HC and HCT messaging and action;
- ✓ undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.

**Build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning:**

Preparedness is a continuous process. Broadly defined, it includes any action, measure or capacity development that is introduced before an emergency to improve the overall effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of a response and recovery.

For more information see: the **IASC reference module for Cluster Coordination at country level** <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters> in section 4 and the **Transformative Agenda Protocol: Common framework for preparedness**

[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/common\\_framework\\_for\\_preparedness.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/common_framework_for_preparedness.pdf)

In this lesson, you will deal with the preparation of **assessments and gap analysis**, linked to the cluster coordination tasks, using information management tools as needed.

This lesson aims to equip you with the ability and tools to identify and **find solutions** for gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues, and **formulate priorities** on the basis of the analysis.

You will discover the secrets of an effective and coordinated use of the **Multi-Cluster Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)** as the main assessment tool recommended during sudden onset humanitarian crises. You will also learn that the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) is a coordinated tool used for needs analysis during slow onset or protracted emergencies.

## Coordinated needs assessments

Experience has shown that coordinating needs assessments not only brings significant benefits, but can also help to save more lives and restore more people's livelihoods. Prerequisites for **appropriate decision-making** and **coordinated responses** are a shared understanding of the situation, its needs, risks and priorities, and a shared understanding of the feasibility and pros and cons of different possible responses.

During a crisis, many **assessments are carried out in a coordinated manner** among partners and with national authorities, to ensure the coverage of all affected areas and populations, and avoid beneficiaries' assessment fatigue.

Whenever relevant and possible, assessments should be undertaken jointly by all partners in different sectors.

### *Why should you produce coordinated assessments?*

The benefits of coordinating assessments and using shared information management systems are enormous. In particular, the coordination of assessments is crucial to ensuring solid integrated intersectoral analysis during humanitarian crises, and better decision-making and planning as a result.

By coordinating assessments, organizations can:

- Promote a shared vision of needs and priorities.
- Establish an understanding of priority needs from an integrated perspective.
- Obtain a more comprehensive picture of needs, to serve as a basis for integrated planning.
- Encourage coordination during response and consistency, within and among Clusters.
- Increase coverage.
- Use resources more efficiently.
- Reduce duplication of effort.
- Promote interagency learning.
- Minimize beneficiary assessment fatigue.
- Identify gaps with greater precision.
- Better guide donor funding.
- Support assessment preparedness at country level.
- Highlight priority sectors or subsectors where more in-depth assessments are needed.

### What are coordinated assessments?

**Coordinated assessments** are those that are planned and carried out by humanitarian actors in partnership, so as to document the impact of a particular crisis and identify the needs of affected populations. The results of the assessment are shared with the broader humanitarian community. The term "coordinated assessment" includes both **joint** and **harmonized** assessments.

**Uncoordinated assessments** are those in which data sets are not interoperable, and the results cannot be used to inform the overall analysis. It is nearly impossible to provide an overview of needs based on uncoordinated assessments, especially at the start of an emergency. Uncoordinated assessments are the reason that guidance on coordinated assessments was produced.

### Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crisis

In March 2009, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) established the **Needs Assessment Task Force (NATF)** <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/needs-assessment> to improve coordinated assessment processes. In 2012, NATF developed the **Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crisis**, an operational tool to help achieve the goal of better quality and more timely assessments through coordinated processes. This guide does not seek to address a lack of assessment tools and guidelines, but rather to provide guidance for those seeking to make informed decisions on aspects of coordinated assessments (harmonized or joint).

[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy\\_files/ops\\_guidance\\_finalversion2012.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/ops_guidance_finalversion2012.pdf)

### Harmonized and joint needs assessments

There are two types of **coordinated assessment**:

#### Harmonized assessments

For harmonized assessments, data collection, processing and analysis is undertaken separately. However, the data are sufficiently comparable to be compiled into a single database, and be subjected to integrated analysis. In the case of harmonized assessments, data comparability is made possible by the use of common operational data

#### Joint assessments

For joint assessment data collection, processing and analysis form one single and common process among agencies. The result is a common report. This is sometimes also referred to as a "common assessment".

- Common assessments

- sets, key indicators, and geographical and temporal synchronization.
- Multiple assessments with common indicators
- Various interoperable methodologies
- Single or multiple reports
- Common methodology
- Common report

### Example of a joint assessment in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, between July and September 2013, a Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) was carried out to identify the causes and intensity of food insecurity by various geographical locations, namely provinces. From 2011 to 2013, many provinces were hit by natural disasters, such as floods and drought, while others were struck by high security incidents and risks. These multidimensional shocks adversely affected the livelihoods of large numbers of people, making them highly food insecure and vulnerable to various shocks. The SFSA was carried out in all **34 provinces**, covering **8 500 households**, **850 communities** and **136 traders** throughout the country. A total of **24 NGOs** (16 international and 8 national) participated in the fieldwork.

#### Collecting information tools

Three data collection tools were used:

- Household questionnaire
- Community questionnaire
- Traders questionnaire

These were developed by the Assessment Technical Working Group (ATWG), tested during and after training and used in the SFSA 2013 for interviews of households and community key informants, respectively.

#### Training for reporters

To meet the requirement for data collection, a large number of enumerators was needed. As mentioned, 24 international and national organizations (8 national NGOs and 16 international NGOs) took part in the survey.

In order **to improve the quality of data**, **3-day training sessions** were arranged in 5 regions, i.e. East, South, North/North-East, Centre (including South-East and Central Highland) and West. The training started on 15 July 2013 in Jalalabad, and ended on 2 August in Herat.

A total of **220 enumerators and supervisors were trained** to conduct the assessment.

#### **Data entry**

A national NGO was hired to enter the data in Kabul.

All NGOs involved in fieldwork were asked to send completed questionnaires to Kabul for data entry.

The data were cleaned and analysed by the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) team using software specifically designed to allow researchers to produce their own statistical analysis.

The creation of an **Assessment Working Group** may be recommended by the Inter Cluster Coordination Group, depending on the nature and magnitude of the crisis, as well as on the assessment preparedness level of the humanitarian community.

## **Responsibilities in coordinated assessments**

### *What are the responsibilities of Cluster partners and members?*

The Cluster **partners and members** should support and implement coordinated assessments by:

- sharing information on assessments with the Cluster Coordination Team and Cluster partners;
- participating in joint assessments at the Cluster level, or using common tools and indicators for harmonized assessments; and
- contributing to joint Cluster analyses.

**Country level Cluster lead agencies** are expected to ensure effective and coherent sectoral needs assessments.

**Operational agencies** have the primary responsibility for undertaking assessments. They are expected to do so in a coordinated manner and to adhere to the definitions, principles, methodologies and approaches set out in the IASC-NATF operational guidance.



### *Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crisis*

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[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy\\_files/ops\\_guidance\\_finalversion2012.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/ops_guidance_finalversion2012.pdf)

#### The guidance suggests responsibilities as follows:

<b>Cluster Coordinator</b>	Support inter-Cluster assessments	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support inter-Cluster assessments. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Promote joint assessments within the Cluster.
	Coordinate Cluster assessment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coordinate assessments of Cluster members and promote the use of common tools and indicators for harmonized assessments when a joint assessment is not possible. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Set out standards for Cluster assessments. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support joint Cluster situation and response analyses.
<b>Cluster partners/members</b>	Support and implement coordinated assessment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Share information on assessments with the Cluster Coordination Team and Cluster partners. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participate in joint assessments at the Cluster level, or use common tools and indicators for harmonized assessments. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contribute to joint Cluster analyses.

### Coordinated assessments in sudden onset crisis and in protracted crisis

Humanitarian assessments not only provide information about the needs and context of disaster affected people, but also serve as the **preparatory step for the strategic planning process**.



Humanitarian assessments contribute to strengthening the humanitarian response, providing vital and accurate information about the needs of affected people.

### Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)

In the event of a **sudden onset crisis**, the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) is the recommended tool for reaching a good understanding of the priority needs.

### Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)

In a **protracted crisis**, or at a **later stage of a sudden onset crisis**, a consolidated analysis of the needs of affected people is presented in a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The HNO can be based on a MIRA, or on another type of joint analysis.

## The Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)

### What is MIRA?

#### Multi-Cluster

#### Initial

Sudden Onset

#### Rapid

Emergency

#### Assessment

MIRA is a **joint needs assessment tool** that can be used in sudden onset emergencies (or in the initial weeks of a protracted emergency), including, but not limited to, system-wide Level 3 emergency responses (L3).



#### Level 3 emergency responses (L3)

A Level 3, or L3, emergency response is declared when a humanitarian crisis requires a system-wide response from Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) organizations.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator, in consultation with the IASC Principals, determines when an L3 response is required, based on the criteria of scale, complexity, urgency, capacity and reputational risk.

The L3 declaration commits IASC organizations to mobilizing the resources and establishing the systems necessary to contribute to the response in a way that complements each agency's capacity and supports interagency coordination.

It is a **precursor to subsequent Cluster and sectoral needs assessments**, which are often more detailed and operational in focus.

## Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) Guidance

[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/mira\\_revised\\_2015\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/mira_revised_2015_en_1.pdf)

MIRA should be carried out by a **team of multisector emergency specialists**, under the guidance of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and, wherever possible, led by the government. The team should include assessment and sectoral specialists drawn from the various clusters or sectors present in the country, to ensure that local knowledge is included in the findings.

MIRA provides a **process** for collecting and analysing information on affected people and their needs, so as to inform response planning. The process **is based on five broad stages**, from the moment the assessment is initiated to the dissemination of its results.

## The MIRA 5-step process

### 1. Initiating and planning the MIRA

As a Cluster Coordinator, you will play a key role in planning the MIRA assessment, together with your sector partners. Careful planning and early inclusion of all key stakeholders will ensure that all critical issues are taken into consideration and that all required resources are anticipated and provided. The table describes the main steps and activities.

STEPS	ACTIVITIES
Plan and revise coordination arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Review and activate existing plans, tools and lessons learned.</li> <li>✓ Identify suitable technical resources and capacities.</li> <li>✓ Establish assessment coordination structure.</li> </ul>
Define the objectives and scope of the assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Define initial objectives which should be broad in scope, determined by basic facts and assumptions derived from location, type of hazard, sectors affected and lessons learned.</li> <li>✓ Validate objectives and scope with stakeholders.</li> </ul>
Define information needs and adapt MIRA framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Adapt MIRA analytical framework to local context.</li> <li>✓ Define context relevant categories of analysis.</li> </ul>

## 2. Secondary data review

Secondary data review uses pre- and in-crisis secondary information to form a reasonable picture of the situation and promote a common and consistent understanding of the context, i.e. to help everyone be "on the same page".

### Pre-crisis secondary data

- Provides background information, as it identifies pre-existing problems, vulnerabilities and risks.
- Historical data helps to identify patterns in priority needs.
- Provides a baseline for assessing the impact of the disaster and helps to differentiate between the impact of the crisis and pre-existing or chronic needs.

### In-crisis secondary data

Provides an understanding of the effects of the current crisis and, when compared with pre-crisis information, helps to assess the impact of the disaster.

The secondary data review leads to a **situation analysis** that informs the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) on day 3, and subsequently guides initial response planning. Secondary data review will continue throughout the assessment process.

### What to do next?

Here is a chart of possible outcomes and next steps after the secondary data analysis is complete.

#### Phase 1: Secondary data review

Sufficient secondary data information? → Yes

Report



No

Access to affected areas? → No



Yes

#### Phase 2: Joint data collection

Key informant known and accessible?  
Respondent safety guaranteed?

Yes

Remote key  
informant interviews

No

Remote sensing  
available?

Time, expertise, resources available?



Other secondary sources?

Limited

Yes

Sampling and  
selection criteria

Purposive  
sampling  
Geographic level

Purposive sampling  
Affected group  
level



Report

Affected population figures	Estimation methods Secondary data	Estimation methods Secondary data
Data collection techniques	Direct observation Key informant interview	Direct observation Key informant interview Community group discussion

### 3. Primary data collection

Primary data collection deals with the **collection and analysis of primary data**. It focuses mostly on qualitative information and provides a unique opportunity to assess the needs and priorities, as perceived by affected populations (disaggregated by sex and age) into the broader assessment of strategic humanitarian priorities.

Depending on the information gaps identified during the secondary data analysis, the **scope and methodology** will be set by the assessment team, led by the assessment coordinator. In particular, the assessment team will:

- refine the assessment objectives and scope;
- refine information needs and the MIRA framework in consultation with stakeholders;
- design an analysis plan based on the adapted MIRA framework;
- design the data collection tools, according to the analysis plan.

#### Example of an analysis plan

The following is a sample analysis plan for the **physical disruption of key infrastructures and losses**.

<b>Theme</b>	Infrastructure damage level
<b>Information/indicator</b>	Level of damage to private buildings (i.e. houses, apartment buildings)
<b>Data Required</b>	Percentage of infrastructure damaged on a scale of magnitude: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No damage</li> <li>• Slight damage</li> <li>• Moderate damage</li> <li>• Heavy damage</li> <li>• Total destruction</li> </ul>

<b>Data sources</b>	Secondary data (provided by districts or Provincial government officer, volunteers), NDMA and UNOSAT data, crowdsourcing data Primary data (community level), direct observation and key Informant interview
<b>Analysis and comparison</b>	Level of damage in urban vs. rural areas Visualization: stack bars To place in Section 2 of the report "Damages and losses"

#### 4. Joint needs analysis

Once the secondary data review and the primary data collection have taken place, key MIRA participants convene to conduct a final **intersectoral analysis** and identify **strategic humanitarian priorities**.

In order to identify those priorities, the discussion first focuses on the following questions:

*Where does the humanitarian community need to respond as a priority?*

*Who should be protected and assisted as a priority, and which are the priority cluster response domains?*

##### Key steps for a joint needs analysis:

<b>DESCRIBE</b> <i>Who, what, where, when, how?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarize and consolidate relevant measures or observations.</li> <li>Aggregate data to allow patterns and trends to emerge.</li> <li>Compare temporal and geographical data spanning different social groups, sex and age.</li> </ul>
<b>EXPLAIN</b> <i>Why?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine why particular conditions are observed.</li> <li>Give plausible context for how and why conditions are changing.</li> <li>Explore immediate causes of situation across dimensions such as access, availability and quality.</li> </ul>
<b>INTERPRET</b> <i>What does it mean?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attach meaning to data and evaluate the evidence.</li> <li>Contextualize patterns/trends to understand them.</li> <li>Identify the most important and relevant findings.</li> </ul> <p>Determine the degree of uncertainty on the findings</p>
<b>FORECAST</b> <i>What happens next?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify new and emerging risks.</li> <li>Anticipate likely evolution over time (short, medium and long-term).</li> <li>Develop scenarios</li> </ul>

## 5. Reporting and dissemination

MIRA outputs are:

- ✓ **Situation analysis**, released within 72 hours of the crisis, is mostly based on secondary data review and guides initial response planning. View an example.
- ✓ **MIRA report**, usually released around two weeks after the crisis, it is produced from the analysis of secondary and primary data and informs strategic response planning and appeals. View an example.

### MIRA Central Africa Republic – 2014

[http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/OCHA\\_CAR\\_MIRA\\_FINAL\\_0112014.pdf](http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/OCHA_CAR_MIRA_FINAL_0112014.pdf)

The MIRA report's key findings should be captured in the **Humanitarian Dashboard**.

The Humanitarian Dashboard is designed to facilitate the consolidation of needs assessment and response information. It provides a structured format for the collection of data. It also presents a shared analysis of a humanitarian situation.

The Dashboard supports both the Humanitarian Response Plan cycle and the consolidation of information in sudden onset emergencies. It is usually prepared by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), using the information provided by all Cluster Coordinators.

## The Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)

### *What is the HNO?*

The Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) is the main assessment tool used during **slow onset or protracted crisis, or at a later stage of a sudden onset crisis**.

An HNO is a consolidation and analysis of existing information (secondary data), gathered on the needs of affected people. The available data are derived from NGO needs assessments, joint and cluster needs assessments. An HNO also serves to **identify information gaps**.



#### *Existing information*

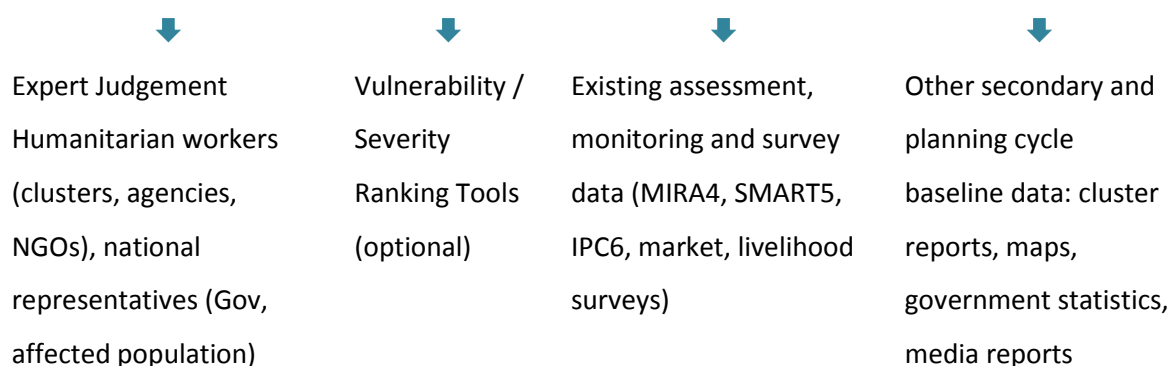
The HNO is based on existing information (secondary data) derived from multi-Cluster and sectoral assessments, monitoring data, survey results, contextual judgement of humanitarian

actors and of local sources, such as government, community bodies and representatives from affected communities. The Humanitarian Needs Overview is informed by Clusters sharing and collating this data and information and developing a joint analysis.



Ensuring consensus between partners (agencies, NGO's, sectoral experts) and the host government in the compilation of data to prioritize needs is essential to the HNO process. At a minimum, country teams should engage in a structured discussion to agree on intersectoral priority needs to inform strategic planning.

**Analysis** Current situation + likely evolution over Other secondary data planning cycle



The Humanitarian Needs Overview is conducted to identify and prioritize needs in-country. It is then **reviewed at regular intervals**. The HNO supports the HCT in developing a shared understanding of the impact and evolution of a crisis, and informs strategic response planning. This ensures that credible evidence and a joint analysis of needs underpins an effective and targeted humanitarian response.

In particular, the **purpose** of the HNO is to:

- ➡ identify and prioritize the **humanitarian needs** of affected people, based on assessment and monitoring of data.
- ➡ identify **information gaps** and inform the development of a plan, to fill gaps in information on humanitarian needs.
- ➡ provide an **evidence base** to enable the HC and HCT to **evaluate** the degree to which the **objectives and programmes** of the Preliminary or Strategic Response Plan continue to address the needs of affected people.
- ➡ provide an **evidence base** to enable all organizations involved in the response to **monitor, evaluate and review the impact and relevance** of their **programmes and objectives** on the basis of sound information.



**What needs to be done by the stakeholders involved in the response?**

All efforts should be made to include the views of the affected population and to involve a wide range of humanitarian partners in developing the HNO.

**! Every organization** involved in a response **should participate in the collection of data for HNO** and apply HNO findings to their policies and programmes.

These are the main tasks:

- ✓ Agree parameters for collecting, analysing and sharing information.
- ✓ Involve affected populations in identifying and understanding their needs.
- ✓ Identify and resolve information gaps.
- ✓ Collect and analyse information.
- ✓ Disseminate the outcomes of the HNO and apply them to programming.
- ✓ Select indicators for measuring humanitarian and protection needs.

The Humanitarian Needs Overview consists of **four sections**:

1. **Humanitarian needs & key figures** This first section summarizes the 3-5 most pressing humanitarian problems at sectoral and cross-sectoral level, as appropriate. It flags the priority humanitarian challenges that require discussion at the response analysis stage.
2. **Impact of the crisis** This section describes the situation of affected populations by analysing drivers and underlying factors, geographical scope and demographic scale, while fully integrating a protection and gender analysis.
3. **Information gaps** This section highlights information gaps that impact the response.
4. **Annexe operational environment** This section summarizes capacity and access constraints or enablers.



### Humanitarian Needs Overview Yemen 2015

[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015\\_HNO\\_Yemen\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015_HNO_Yemen_Final_0.pdf)

## Identifying and prioritizing the FS problems in a food crisis situation

Are not familiar with the situation in Aristopulous? Take a look at the Aristopulous report update

- ✓ It has been 72 hours since a category 5 typhoon has made landfall on Aristopulous.
- ✓ The government of Aristopulous has welcomed international assistance however they have stated this must be carried out in close coordination with the government and that they will give the final approval to any strategy for intervention.
- ✓ There is a Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team in place.
- ✓ The Emergency Relief Coordinator has declared an L3 emergency in Aristopulous.
- ✓ Clusters that already existed are meeting, additional clusters are likely to be activated.

### Example of analysing food security problems in Aristopulous

In order to analyse problems and risks, **the main food security stakeholders should get together**, including, in particular, those who have recently been involved in conducting assessments in the affected areas. Together, they should then review all available information and agree on a joint analysis of the following issues:

- Food security situation of different **population groups**, how it differs from what would be normal for the season.
- Status and effectiveness of the institutional and other **support systems** on which livelihoods and agricultural production depend.
- Direct and indirect **causes** of the observed problems, and the extent to which they are transitory or chronic.
- **Effects on people** (men, women, boys and girls) within the different population and livelihood groups.

- Relevance of contextual factors for food security, among them **political, social and cultural factors** (including but not limited to gender considerations), the security situation (including the causes of conflict and the implications for food security action), **the resources and capacities** available, and what might reasonably be expected to be mobilized, and the roles and influence of any new sector actors or **stakeholders** (e.g. military forces, non-state entities).
- Examine carefully any **discrepancies in information** or instances where reported findings differ from what might have been expected. What might explain these differences? What is their significance?

In addition, the main stakeholders should perform the following activities, together:

- Look out for possible **sources of error or bias** in reported data, and ensure that the needs of isolated areas (with disrupted communications) are not underestimated or overlooked, and that total needs are not overestimated by concentrating on data from the worst affected areas.
- Prepare one or more **problem trees** identifying causal linkages, and highlight those for which remedial humanitarian or early recovery actions are time critical; agree on a prioritization of the various problems.
- Review the preliminary **conclusions** and make sure that all:
  - are evidence-based and any extrapolations and assumptions clearly indicated;
  - are based on a convergence of evidence, with data triangulated from different sources, each of which has been assessed for reliability;
  - take account of the cultural context, gender, protection and human rights issues, the impact of HIV/AIDS, security conditions, and any limitations on access;
  - identify differences among localities and distinct population groups, as well as age and gender related differences (i.e. consider the different situation and needs of men and women, girls and boys);
  - identify any topics, areas or population groups for which information is lacking or particularly unreliable. Why is information lacking or unreliable? What is the significance? Which are the most important information gaps? What can be done to fill them, when and by whom?

## Summary

Coordinating needs assessments with partners and national authorities during humanitarian crises brings significant benefits. It ensures the coverage of all affected areas and populations, as well as an integrated intersectoral analysis, and better decision-making and planning as a result.

Coordinated assessment can be of two types: **harmonized** (the analysis is undertaken separately, the data are comparable and are subject to integrated analysis), or **joint** (the analysis is made jointly among agencies, which produce a common report).

Cluster Coordinators should support and coordinate inter-Cluster assessment. The Cluster partners and members should support and implement coordinated assessments.

The Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) is the recommended tool for reaching a good understanding of the priority needs in the event of a sudden onset crisis.

In a protracted crisis, or at a later stage of a sudden onset crisis, a consolidated analysis of the needs of affected people is presented in a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The HNO can be based on a MIRA, or another type of joint analysis.