

JOINT UN/ NGO STATEMENT OF THE REGIONAL WORKING GROUP ON NEEDS ASSESSMENT ASIA PACIFIC

Introduction

A technically sound and well conducted needs assessment saves lives, alleviates suffering and establishes the framework to ensure finite resources are used in the most effective manner possible. By establishing an effective needs assessment process the humanitarian community can ensure timely access to reliable information required by humanitarian agencies so that informed decisions are made in an often chaotic environment.

The Regional Working Group on Needs Assessment was formed following workshops on Common Needs Assessments (CNA) held in the region in January 2009. Recognizing the need to continue improving the quality of data collected, collation of that data and the coordination amongst the many stakeholders involved in relation to rapid needs assessments, the working group makes the following recommendations to the IASC Task Force on Needs Assessment aimed at ensuring well informed, timely and effective responses to alleviate human suffering following rapid onset emergencies.

Current Context

Changes in the humanitarian field worldwide continue to strengthen its capacity to save lives and deliver credible, timely and reliable assistance to people in need. These changes are characterized by:

- Ongoing strengthening and improving of processes through humanitarian reform;
- Development of high quality program systems, guidelines and technical standards; and
- Streamlining of institutional funding mechanisms

At the same time, institutional donors are increasingly channeling emergency funds through the UN system such as the CERF mechanism, which NGOs do not have direct access to, while more and more humanitarian programs are being directly implemented by NGO partners.

It is therefore crucial for both the UN and the NGO agencies to ensure that the immediate needs assessment data that is used to inform the development of UN and NGO appeal documents is technically sound as well as collected, collated and disseminated in an inclusive manner. Ensuring the participation of key stakeholders including affected communities, local authorities, local and international NGOs, UN and the donor community is essential if the needs assessment is to be credible and reliable. Currently the ad-hoc rapid needs assessment processes undertaken by humanitarian agencies do not function adequately. While there are multiple positive and well coordinated initiatives in the area of joint rapid needs assessments, significant and continued support and prioritization is required to ensure consistency and predictability.

There is a growing acknowledgement by the humanitarian community that multi-sector joint assessments provide value to both the participating agencies and, more importantly, the affected population. This includes: enhanced coordination, collaboration and complementarities of response and reduced duplication of effort and resources as well as more systematic involvement of beneficiaries. As a result there has been a substantial increase in the implementation of multi-sector assessments within the region, however, this is yet to be reflected and supported as a more predictable and consistent standard of emergency response coordination.

Recommendations

While acknowledging the diverse emergency contexts and needs and agency mandates and capacities, the working group would like to make the following recommendations on the **quality of assessments** and on **leadership and coordination** of key actors in conducting rapid needs assessments.

1. Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Rapid Needs Assessments

a) Establish Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Rapid Needs Assessments to provide an important foundation for effective emergency response across all agencies.

b) Develop the Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Rapid Needs Assessments in a collaborative manner to ensure participation and consultation by the various stakeholders, including beneficiaries. One of the well established standard setting models is The SPHERE Project. Importantly, The SPHERE Project is based on ongoing learning, collective review and development.

c) Ensure the development of Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Rapid Needs Assessments is informed by other ongoing initiatives of a similar nature including the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project on joint needs assessments and the WASH Information Management Tool, as well as other cluster tools.

2. Effective Inter-Agency Leadership and Coordination

a) Country Preparedness Plans need to identify:

- In-country needs assessment capacity and response capacity of government, UN, local and international agencies, donors and local population;
- Immediate leadership and coordination mechanisms to ensure rapid needs assessments and effective response; and
- In-country donors and ensure their participation and engagement in the rapid assessment process. A collaborative partnership between donors and agencies conducting and coordinating the needs assessment process will build donor confidence in the credibility and accuracy of needs assessment data. Donor concurrence that the needs assessment methodology is credible during the preparedness phase is critical to gaining timely funding for response programs.

b) To be effective, agreed and/or mandated leadership roles need to be capacitated, in terms of the teams they have at their disposal, to mobilize and coordinate agencies participating in needs assessment, to collate, share and analyze assessment data, and develop and disseminate recommendations.

The above recommendations reflect the Principles of Partnership that we are collectively committed to.

Participants in discussion of the Regional Working Group on Needs Assessment Asia Pacific are (in alphabetical order):

CARE International (member of ECB)

Caritas Australia

Caritas International Belgium

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) (member of ECB)

Church World Service Asia/Pacific (CWS-A/P)

Enfants du Monde Droits de L'homme

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Plan International

Save the Children UK (member of ECB)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat)

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

World Food Programme (WFP)

World Health Organisation (WHO)

World Vision International Asia Pacific Region (member of ECB)
