

Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment Preparedness in Afghanistan Workshop Report

Background

1. A one-day workshop was held on 16 January, 2012, to sensitize humanitarian actors in Afghanistan to the **Multi Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)** approach, and to identify measures required to implement this approach in Afghanistan.
2. The workshop was hosted by OCHA, and was attended by representatives of twenty-four UN agencies and NGOs¹. Key aspects of MIRA preparedness were discussed by break-out groups and in plenary to capture the views of stakeholders present. The workshop was closed with a word of thanks from the **Humanitarian Coordinator**, in which he encouraged organizations to dedicate their efforts to developing a joint approach to assessments, in order to help build a stronger case for humanitarian needs in the country.
3. The workshop followed on a series of efforts undertaken in 2011 to implement the **decision of the Afghanistan HCT** to capacitate Humanitarian Regional Teams (HRTs) to undertake multi-sectoral initial assessments.
4. The MIRA approach was developed by the IASC at the global level, with the technical input from a broad range of humanitarian organizations. During a scoping exercise undertaken in October 2011, the adaptation of this global-level work to the Afghanistan context was recommended, as was the deployment of an **inter-agency team**² to support the effort.
5. The following report has been drafted by the inter-agency team, based on discussions held at the MIRA workshop. It seeks to highlight **key points of agreement** on implementing the MIRA approach in Afghanistan, and proposes **steps for further action** to that end.

Introducing the MIRA Approach

6. The workshop provided an opportunity to acquaint participants with the IASC's efforts to improve **the coordination of assessments**, and the policy work undertaken in this regards³. Particular attention was raised to the IASC's commitment to systematically undertake joint multi-cluster initial rapid assessments during the first two weeks following a sudden-onset emergency.
7. The workshop sought to develop the **understanding of key humanitarian organizations in Afghanistan** of the MIRA approach, its purpose, and main components. The MIRA seeks to establish an early, common understanding of the humanitarian situation as a basis for strategic level decision-making and initial

¹ ACTED, Afghanaid, Care, ECHO, FAO, IMC, IOM, iMMAP, IFRC, IMC, IOM, IRC, MedAir, MdM, MSF, NRC, Oxfam, OCHA, Solidarites, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, and WHO. Also in attendance were Cluster Coordinators from Education, Emergency Shelter/NFIs, FSAC, Health, Nutrition, Protection (including Child Protection and GBV), and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.

² Comprised of staff from OCHA-HQ, UNICEF-RO and WHO-HQ

³ The IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments defines the roles and responsibilities, key principles, operating procedures, and mechanisms for assessment coordination.

fundraising. It does not aim to replace in-depth sectoral assessments but rather to inform the scope of these. The MIRA approach has three component parts: 1) the Analytical Framework, 2) the compilation and review of secondary data (pre- and post-crisis) and 3) the undertaking of a rapid field investigation to identify and prioritise perceived needs of affected groups.

Implementing the MIRA Approach in Afghanistan

8. Participants provided **positive feedback on the MIRA approach**, noting the soundness of the methodology and appreciation for its focus on ensuring timely results. The importance placed by the approach on the collection and analysis of secondary data is well adapted to a context such as Afghanistan, where **access constraints and challenges** limit the field investigations that can be undertaken. While recognizing that the MIRA approach was initially developed for disasters, workshop participants highlighted its equal **applicability to conflict situations of sudden-onset nature**. The MIRA approach was also seen as useful for assessing needs **outside of an emergency context**, in areas where temporary access to a location has been granted, and there is only a short window of time in which to conduct an assessment.
9. Also underscored at the workshop was the fact that while the **community-level field investigation** component of the MIRA does not apply in small highly localized disasters or in the case of slow-onset crisis. For localised disaster where the affected area can be fully assessed, detailed assessments are required and could suffice to support operational response planning from the start. For slow-onset crises, the analysis of the impact of the disaster and the identification of related needs relies on analysis of trends over time through regular monitoring/updating of the baseline information and through targeted household-based surveys (using probabilistic sampling to ensure representivity).
10. Participants agreed on the **strong urgency to enhance the consolidation and analysis of secondary data** for Afghanistan. A recurrent point made at the workshop was that the MIRA is much more than a questionnaire; rather it is the routine gathering, compilation and analysis of secondary data. While recognising the challenge of data reliability, steps were identified in order to improve the review of secondary data:
 - 10.1. The expansion of existing **monitoring efforts** to collect more baseline data given access limitations
 - 10.2. The increased **coordination and harmonization of data collection** efforts, to ensure that different sources of data are routinely shared and contribute to a common set of baseline data and indicators.
 - 10.3. The **triangulation of compiled data** in order to identify areas for data improvement.
 - ~~10.3~~-10.4. The increased collection of **district level data** to obtain a meaningful understanding of local realities, given Afghanistan's highly-diverse context, recognising that this will be a difficult and lengthy undertaking, and that alternative solutions may have to be found in case data is not available.

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- 10.5. The enhancement of Clusters to support **intra-sectoral data consolidation** through increased information management capacity and the promotion of data sharing among cluster members.
- 10.6. The continued work by OCHA in facilitating **inter-sectoral data consolidation** furthering on the progress made over the last months.
11. The approach to the **community-level investigation methodology** was welcomed, particularly in its aim to capture **beneficiary perspectives** and to overcome the **sectoral “compartmentalization”** often found in questionnaires. Also appreciated was the room to complement standard data fields with the **“informal observations and analysis”** of the assessment team. Key steps were identified for developing a MIRA questionnaire in Afghanistan:
- 11.1. The establishment of an agreed **“analytical framework”** ahead of compiling the questionnaire, to ensure the latter is focused on key information needs.
- 11.2. The organization of a tightly facilitated **inter-Cluster meeting** to develop the questionnaire so that it comprehensively reflects inter-sectoral linkages.
- 11.3. The **review of the questionnaire** compiled by Clusters, to ensure its coherence and its simplicity. The questionnaire must be well adapted to the skills of the assessors, and allow for translation into local languages.
- 11.4. The development of a questionnaire specific to **conflict-settings** in order to reflect specific protection concerns (this may be just an addition of questions, rather than a revised questionnaire).
12. The identification **assessors to undertake the MIRA** was raised as being particularly important in the Afghanistan context. Given access constraints, assessors participating in the field investigation are expected to be national staff drawn from the provincial level. The following recommendations were made in order to ensure appropriate assessment capacity to implement the MIRA:
- 12.1. The development of an **inter-agency pool of trained MIRA assessors** at the provincial level, underpinned by institutional arrangements to support deployments.
- 12.2. The development of a **basic training curriculum** for selected assessors, including sectoral overviews and the skill building (hard and soft skills).
- ~~12.2.~~12.3. The identification of **funding mechanisms** to support the training and maintenance of inter-agency assessor pools, with particular attention to existing contingency planning and preparedness funds.
- 12.4. The **empowerment of HRTs** to manage the pools of trained assessors at the regional level, including to trigger and oversee their deployments. The need to maintain national Cluster Coordinators well informed was underscored.
- 12.5. The need to ensure **gender-sensitive representation** in assessment teams as well as the appropriate interviewing of different key informant types.
- ~~12.5.~~12.6. The establishment of a system for **lesson learning around the MIRA**, including periodic reviews at regional and national levels.

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13. The development of **Standard Operating Procedures** for undertaking a MIRA in Afghanistan was flagged as a central and priority area of work. While the roles of Clusters and of HRTs are recognised, the exact **modalities of their engagement** require further consideration. Procedures should outline the triggers, responsibilities and key actions required for implementing the MIRA and should be developed through a broad **consultative process**. The following recommendations for action were made in this regards:

- 13.1. The development of an **Operating Manual for the MIRA** in Afghanistan, outlining the responsibilities and standard operating procedures of key actors at national, regional and provincial levels, for different types of crises (including those that affect multiple provinces).
- 13.2. The **definition of agreed triggers** for undertaking a community level assessment, based on the scale and nature of the crisis.
- 13.3. The identification of **sources of support**, including remote support, for facilitating the undertaking of a community-level assessment.
- 13.4. The inclusion of mechanisms for channelling information on “areas for urgent action” that are identified during the assessment and which need to be addressed immediately in order to help prevent further harm.
- 13.5. The inclusion of provisions for the undertaking/coordination of **cross-border assessments** (eg. Afghanistan-Pakistan).

14. Workshop participants also highlighted the need to ensure **Government involvement and buy-in for the MIRA**, including that of ANDMA⁴ and of relevant line ministries.⁵ Participants pointed out the need to ensure that the government is ultimately responsible for assessments, as it is for coordinating the response. At the same time, the importance of obtaining consensus and agreement within the international humanitarian community prior to approaching the Government was recognised. The group also recommended that regional authorities set aside specific budget lines to enable them to carry out the assessment -- or at minimum to enable them to participate.

Concluding Remark of the IASC Team

15. The workshop was evidence of the good consensus, and strong momentum that exists among humanitarian actors to further the development of the MIRA. The workshop also highlighted that considerable and substantial work remains until the MIRA is ready to be implemented in Afghanistan. The recommendations of the workshop should be taken forward in an expedient manner in order to build on this positive dynamic. Immediate priority should be placed on developing an agreed Analytical Framework and on furthering the gathering of Secondary Data. The discussions initiated on the questionnaire should also be resumed in due course, as they underscored the urgency of completing the development of the MIRA.

⁴ ANDMA (Afghan National Disaster Management Agency)

⁵Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Ministry of Urban Development, and Ministry of Public Health.