OCHA Coordinated Assessment Support Section
Review of Coordinated Assessment and Joint Analysis Processes and Outputs

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIMWG	Assessment and Information Management Working Group
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CA	Coordinated assessment
CAIM	Coordinated Assessment and Information Management
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
CAR	Central African Republic
CASS	Coordinated Assessment Support Section
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CO	Country Office
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
gFSC	Global Food Security Cluster
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative
GIS	Geographic information system
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICC	Inter-cluster coordination
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IM	Information management
IRNA	Initial Rapid Needs Assessment
JIPS	Joint IDP Profiling Service
IMMAP	Information Management and Mine Action Programs
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MIRA	Multi-cluster/sector Initial Rapid Assessment
MSNA	Multi-sector needs assessment
NAFT	Needs Assessment Task Force
NPM	Needs and Population Monitoring
NFI	Non-food item
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PiN	People in need
PMR	Periodic monitoring report
PoC	Protection of Civilians sites
PSB	OCHA Programme Support Branch
RB	Regional Bureau
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
RRMP	Rapid Response to Movements of Population
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children´s Fund
UNOSAT	United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WoSA	Whole of Syria Assessment

Executive Summary

Background

In recent years, greater priority has been given to coordinated needs assessments in emergencies in order to facilitate consensus on the identification of critical needs, minimise duplication of data collection efforts and assessment fatigue and move towards a more efficient use of resources for assessments. The release of the policy and normative guidance by the IASC on coordinated assessments and lately the introduction of the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) has contributed to the roll-out of coordinated assessments and joint analysis across countries affected by disasters around the globe.

In 2015, a report produced as a result of consultations for the World Humanitarian Summit further emphasised the importance of assessments, calling for the development of mechanisms to verify and improve the quality and credibility of needs assessments.

The Coordinated Assessment Support Section (CASS) within OCHA's Programme Support Branch (PSB) is the main technical reference body for OCHA Country and Regional Offices on coordinated assessments and joint needs analysis. CASS commissioned this review of both the approaches and outputs of such exercises to shed light on the achievements, lessons learned and remaining challenges, and way forward.

Purpose and objectives

The main purpose of this review is to identify ways to enhance OCHA's capacity at country, regional and global levels to coordinate needs assessment and analysis at various stages of an emergency.

The **specific objectives** are to gain a better understanding of:

- The *appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of approaches* followed to support coordinated assessments and joint analysis in the field, in various types of crisis contexts and at various stages of a crisis,
- The quality of coordinated assessment and joint analysis outputs, including validity, relevance and timeliness,
- The role played by CASS in supporting coordinated assessment and joint analysis and the production of quality outputs, including through trainings, direct field missions, remote technical advice, and development or improvement of methods and tools by itself or in partnership with others,
- The degree of preparedness for coordinated assessments and joint analysis, particularly in countries at high and very high risk of crisis.

Methodology

The review primarily covers the **period from 2013 to 2015**, which is after the main pieces of guidance on coordinated assessments were issued and the first Multi-sectoral Initial Rapid Assessments (MIRAs) experimented in the field, and includes the latest advances with the introduction of the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). Given the relevance to needs assessment work, the review has also

incorporated some elements regarding the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the Grand Bargain which took place in early 2016 and country-specific needs assessments from early 2016.

The review has been undertaken by two independent consultants between June and August 2016. The methodology adopted included: desk review of key documents; field visits to seven countries[1]; and in person as well as remote interviews with stakeholders at global level, regional and country level[2]. More than 200 stakeholders were interviewed, representing a wide range of humanitarian actors: global and country cluster coordinators, OCHA staff at headquarters and in the field offices, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, donors and national authorities.

Review Results

Coordinated assessments (CAs), particularly MIRA and joint analysis are increasingly being implemented and used, alongside inter-sector and sector/specific assessments as an evidence base to guide response decisions at different levels: immediate response in sudden onset crisis or initial stages of conflict; strategic response planning in protracted crises or later stages of the emergencies; funding allocations; and to lesser extent operational programming decisions.

A number of factors positively influence the implementation of CAs, buy-in and use which are related to the release of global level policies and normative guidance (MIRA) and the existence of coordination mechanisms at global and country level. There are in turn factors that continue hindering the implementation of CAs including : limited understanding by operational agencies of the benefits and limitations of CAs; weak coordination; low technical and resource capacity; and context specific restrictions such as access difficulties.

The role of OCHA has been critical in coordinating and facilitating coordinated assessments but OCHA's capacity especially at country level remains low in relation to the increasing demand in terms of the number of emergency situations that need attention and the level of technical support that is required to ensure quality assessment processes and products. Within OCHA, CASS support has been pivotal in ensuring the quality of CA tools, methodologies and results. However, CASS capacity is also limited in relation to the number of requests for support that it receives.

The review has made a total of 17 key findings in relation to the different areas of focus:

- Assessment practices and experience
- Coordination processes
- Trust, buy-in and added value of CAs
- Use of CA results
- Quality of outputs
- Guidance and tools
- The role of OCHA in facilitating CAs
- The role of CASS
- OCHA Country Office preparedness

[1] Jordan (Syria), Turkey (Syria), Iraq, Nigeria, Central African Republic, the Philippines, Colombia

[2] At country level remote interviews were held with stakeholders in DRC, Mali, Myanmar, Yemen and Syria (Damascus). Remote interviews with stakeholders in South Sudan were also planned but not achieved as staff was not available due to serious deterioration in the security situation early July 2016.

Assessment practices

Key Finding 1
There is huge diversity across countries and contexts as to the type of coordinated needs assessment practices that are adopted. Whilst some countries require large scale joint assessments e.g. Syria, others require assessments only in those localities which face disaster/emergency e.g. Nigeria, Central African Republic and Colombia.

Key Finding 2
Apart from a small number of joint assessments, the great bulk of assessments undertaken are sector or agency specific. These are frequently not well coordinated nor harmonised, leading to duplication and assessment fatigue.

Key Finding 3
Whether assessments are joint, harmonised or sector-specific depends on a number of factors with key influences being human and financial resources; existing skills and experience; access; OCHA leadership; competitiveness among humanitarian agencies; and preparedness.

Coordination Processes
Key Finding 4
Coordination mechanisms for assessments exist but their functionality varies across countries. For all contexts and assessment types, international stakeholders are more involved in the design and planning stage of coordinated assessments, while local organisations are called upon primarily for data collection. Participation of governments is not systematic although it is particularly welcomed and necessary in middle income countries and natural disaster scenarios. In conflict situations many stakeholders are hesitant about the involvement of government authorities in assessments due to concerns relating to neutrality and impartiality. In those countries where Assessment Working Groups have been established, this has been an important factor that has ensured continued stakeholder engagement in CA processes.

Key Finding 5
Participation in data analysis and reporting is selective as only a few organisations have strong analysis capacity. These tasks are therefore frequently taken on by OCHA and leading operational agencies.

Key Finding 6
The most relevant factors that influence involvement of stakeholders in CAs are related to: the functioning of coordination mechanisms; clear messages from senior levels on the importance of being involved in such assessments; stakeholder staff and financial resource capacities; and the perceived added value of CAs.

Key Finding 7
There is increasing involvement of non-operational technical parties not only in CA processes but also in sector specific assessments, either as leaders or co-leaders of assessment processes or by undertaking specific analytical tasks. However, their involvement is not systematic or predictable and their participation is based on requests from humanitarian actors. It is recognised that these

organisations bring analytical skills which are often lacking within operational organisations and they are able to offer independent analysis. The majority of those spoken to during this review view increased involvement of these parties as important in terms of strengthening collaborative assessment and analysis processes, as opposed to being the sole actor in the process. This collaborative approach is considered important to ensure buy-in and ownership of assessment results. At the same time, there are concerns that the way in which these organisations are engaged so far contribute little to the capacity building of national personnel and organisations.

Trust, buy-in and added value of coordinated assessments

Key Finding 8
Trust and buy-in to CAs varies at global, national and local levels depending on context. The most important factors that influence trust and buy-in are related to: frequent lack of clear understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the CAs; the perceived value added of CAs to sector/agency programming and fundraising possibilities; clear messages and commitments from top level decision makers and donors in support of CAs; lack of agency resources (financial and human) to participate in CAs as well as undertaking their own sector/agency specific assessments which are more closely linked to programming. The lack of understanding relating to the added value of CAs is negatively impacting levels of buy-in amongst humanitarian actors. Transparency in relation to analysis methods and early involvement of stakeholders in the process are also key factors that influence trust in the results.

Use of coordinated assessment results

Key Finding 9
The usefulness of CAs varies according to context: MIRAs are more appropriate in sudden-onset disasters when there is little information, but less useful in protracted crisis where there is a need for a sharper analysis. Joint analysis such as presented in the HNO is perceived as useful in protracted crises but the fact that it is done only on a yearly basis weakens its relevance in terms of monitoring changes and trends in very volatile environments. There is need for an approach that provides regular updates on the situation.

Key Finding 10
Use and relevance of CA results and products varies. Some sectors/clusters use the HNOs to support their strategic decisions alongside other documents, however there are specificities in terms of data requirements by sector that limit the usefulness of CAs. Agencies with strong assessment capacity tend to rely more on their own sectoral assessments than on CAs, unless high transaction costs limit the possibilities of undertaking their own assessments (high insecurity, etc. as seen in Syria). NGOs use joint analysis products such as HNOs as strategic and advocacy documents. The usefulness of CAs for NGO decision-making is limited mainly due to delays in publishing the results, and low dissemination amongst national NGOs, especially in the local language.

Key Finding 11
For most of the major donors consulted, CAs and HNOs contribute to, but are not the only source for funding decisions. CAs are considered of great importance to donors as they are undertaken jointly and provide a shared picture, agreed by operational organisations. However there are a number of issues that according to donors weaken the validity and usefulness of CA products: the perceived inflation of needs and numbers of People in Need (PiN); Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)

timelines not matching with donor planning cycles; and the lack of transparency and analytical caveats on the methods to estimate caseloads. In addition, donors sometimes remain obliged to provide funding based not only on the results of needs assessments but instead on other factors.

Quality of outputs

Key Finding 12
The quality of the HNOs has improved in 2016 compared to previous years, particularly in terms of transparent documentation of the methods applied to estimate key figures. However, factors that weaken the quality and reliability of the products remain: lack of transparency on the methods used to estimate figures across assessment products; lack of standardisation within the same context over time; and consistency in indicators and analytical methods applied to prioritise needs; and weak inter-sectoral analysis.

Guidance and tools

Key finding 13
Different forms of guidance to support CAs, developed by the IASC in recent years exist. However awareness and knowledge and consequent use of such guidance is not uniform across countries and humanitarian stakeholders. Insufficient dissemination and language barriers are key factors influencing lower awareness in some countries. In addition, whilst there is sufficient guidance for assessing needs in some contexts, stakeholders agree that there is a need for promoting wider use of the existing guidance, fine-tuning it and developing new guidance for other contexts. Areas where complementary or new guidance have been found lacking include assessment and analysis methodologies in protracted crises; conflict environments; hard-to-reach locations; urban settings; and inter-sectoral analysis. Incorporation of cross cutting issues (gender and Communication with Communities (CwC) also needs to be strengthened.

The role of OCHA in facilitating coordinated assessments

Key Finding 14
The role of OCHA in coordinating and bringing together all parties to CA processes is widely recognised and welcomed. However, it is not always respected by partners. OCHA has played different roles in data analysis, reporting, and dissemination depending on the country and context. OCHA's role in helping to facilitate access to hard-to-reach areas for assessment purposes is much appreciated by other stakeholders and OCHA's information management, including GIS capacities, are also valued. However, many OCHA Country Offices (COs) have limitations in terms of lack of staff with sufficient skills and experience in CAs which undermines its leadership role in this area, particularly when other UN agencies often have stronger technical assessment capacities and skills.

Key Finding 15
In those countries where OCHA has established an assessment registry this is considered useful in terms of providing an overview of locations and sectors that have been well assessed or insufficiently assessed. Such inventories also provide opportunities to increase joint analysis of data. However, assessment inventories are not in place in all countries and there is no systematic sharing of information from all agencies on assessments that have been undertaken.

The role of CASS

Key Finding 16
CASS has provided significant support to COs both through direct field visits and remotely. Support has ranged from the provision of technical assistance to the coordination and design of CAs. This support is highly valued and is much sought after, particularly in the build up to the HNO process. However, CASS capacity is limited, and this, combined with misunderstanding about the type of support that CASS is able to provide means that CASS is not able to positively respond to all requests for support.

OCHA Country Office preparedness

Key Finding 17
Overall CA assessment preparedness activities as highlighted in the IASC guidance are being implemented in only a few countries and even then, only partially. It is of great concern that in countries highly exposed to disasters such as the Philippines and Iraq preparedness activities are not prioritised. The lack of preparedness measures in place in different COs is negatively impacting OCHA's ability to rapidly undertake assessments and produce and disseminate quality assessment results in a timely manner.

Key conclusions

The following key conclusions can be drawn from the review:

In recent years there has been significant progress towards highlighting the need for and benefits of CAs, combined with the development of a variety of tools and methodologies to support this. However the assessment practice shows that CAs are not applied on a systematic basis and there continues to be a prioritisation of sector/agency-specific assessments over CAs. Some reason leading to this practice are related to the limitations of CAs to inform operational programming, but also to gain access to donor funding in a continually competitive humanitarian funding environment. The need for detailed analysis to inform operational programming also highlight the fact that joint assessments, will not eliminate the need for sector/agency specific assessments, but it is important that these should be harmonised to ensure a more efficient use of resources and avoid duplications and assessment fatigue

Recent years have seen the creation of the MIRA which is useful in sudden onset situations but has limitations for other contexts. Before MIRA, a number of multi-sector assessment initiatives and methodologies have been developed (the WFP's Emergency Food Security Assessment, rapid assessments undertaken within the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) among others). The existence of these initiatives serves to highlight that although there is broad support for CAs, there is consensus that there is no a single methodological approach that can be applied to the great diversity of humanitarian contexts.

The review found that whilst there is broad support from a range of stakeholders – donors, UN agencies, NGOs, host governments – for CA processes this is not uniform and this support is not always

translated into practice. There remains also a need for senior leadership support and commitment to CAs including increased funding in order to overcome the factors that hinder buy-in and trust to CA processes.

The involvement of non-operational technical third parties in assessment and analysis has become more commonplace in recent years with a number of benefits and drawbacks to this. Advantages that have been highlighted include the specific technical skills that they bring and the independent nature of the analysis provided by them. Criticism is that they rarely undertake capacity building of local organizations.

CASS and OCHA COs have made significant efforts to ensure that CA processes become systematic in all contexts but this is challenging due to lack of capacity and skills; lack of understanding of the benefits of contributing to CAs by operational organisations; and political and security impediments. There remains the need for the development of complementary guidance or adaptation of existing guidance to ensure that all contexts have appropriate tools available to undertake CAs and increased donor and agency support to participate in these processes. This should in turn ensure more transparent methodological approaches to CAs, particularly to ensure that the identification of those in need and the identification of sectoral needs are done based on sound and objective criteria which should ultimately benefit more credible and timely responses in support of those affected by humanitarian emergencies.

Recommendations

Based on the review's key findings, 14 recommendations are made in order to contribute to the enhancement of OCHA's capacity at country, regional and global levels to coordinate needs assessment and analysis.

Assessment practice

Recommendation 1: Promote assessment harmonisation

While it is clear that CAs do not replace or eliminate the need for sector/agency specific assessments that are necessary for operational programming, it is important to ensure that sector specific assessments are effectively coordinated to use resources more efficiently. It is then necessary to promote and support the re-design of sectoral assessments to become more harmonised. This can be achieved by: defining a core set of indicators to be included across all sector specific assessments; defining a common units of analysis; developing data sharing platforms and joint analysis protocols; and promoting the adoption of data sharing.

Responsible: OCHA CASS, OCHA CO – Assessment focal point, Inter-Cluster Coordination (ICC), Country AIM Working Group

Recommendation 2: Increase emphasis on monitoring of trends and programmes

Needs assessments cannot be considered as a one-off. Drawing monitoring together with needs assessment is critical in this regard. The quarterly Periodic Monitoring Reports (PMR) process managed by OCHA should also allow for the linkages between assessments and monitoring (with the PMRs facilitating the updating of data). In this line, it would be important to reinforce OCHA COs capacity (see recommendation 9) but also get the commitment of the ICC to prioritise the

implementation of quarterly exercises to refresh an understanding of needs, based on the systematisation of existing data from assessments and monitoring exercises going on in the country.
Responsible: CASS, OCHA –HQ, OCHA CO –Assessment focal point, ICC

Coordination Processes

Recommendation 3: Systematically establish assessment working groups

At country level, consideration should be given to the systematic establishment of assessment working groups, led by OCHA which have clear ToR for organising joint or harmonised assessments. In cases of sudden onset emergencies these should be established as early as possible to guide the initial rapid assessment processes. Depending on context, the Assessment Working Group should fall under the ICCG in order to ensure increased visibility.
Responsible: ICC, OCHA CO Assessment focal point

Recommendation 4: Increase coordination by supporting increased involvement of national organisations

There is a need for the increased involvement of national NGOs and CBOs in coordinated assessment processes. Specific actions in this line should be: Training on CA processes (beyond the MIRA) in the local language. Provision of guidance, tools, assessment products and other documents in local language and widely disseminate among local organisations.
Responsible: OCHA CO - Assessment focal point, ICC

Recommendation 5: Systematically involve technical third parties

Given the positive experience, especially in terms of third parties adding high level analytical skills and independence to assessments, and in line with the Grand Bargain commitments, collaboration with technical third party assessment and analysis organisations should be strengthened. This, however, does not mean that assessments are conducted solely by third parties, but under collaborative arrangements with other stakeholders. In this line, CASS current plans to further engage with a number of third parties in its ongoing and future work on coordinated assessments should be pursued and move towards establishing more formal collaborative arrangements. OCHA / CASS should also advocate towards donors to support the involvement of independent bodies.
Responsible: OCHA HQ (PSB), CASS - HQ

Buy-in to coordinated assessments

Recommendation 6: Increase understanding of the need for CAs and clarify the added value and purpose, as well as limitations of CAs within the humanitarian community

In order to increase operational agency buy-in for CAs there needs to be further dissemination work undertaken by OCHA within the clusters, sectors and with organisational HQs to highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in CAs.
Responsible: CASS, OCHA RB/CO

Use of coordinated assessment results

Recommendation 7 – Increase advocacy and dissemination to gain donor commitments to support CAs

There is a need for an increased focus at donor level in order to highlight commitments within the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (GHD) and the Grand Bargain. Donors need to emphasise to their operational partners the importance and relevance of involvement in coordinated assessments. Donors should consider allocating funds for initiatives promoting CAs and specifically to support operational organisations and independent organisations to participate in CAs. **OCHA has an important role in reminding donors of their obligations in this regard.**
Responsible: CASS, OCHA-HQ

OCHA's role

Recommendation 8: Strengthen the assessment registry (repository/inventory)
Assessment registries need to be reinforced and made more functional, in all countries. Specific recommendations are: the registry should include not only past or ongoing assessments but also planned assessments. Disseminate more regularly (monthly) the map and consolidated information on assessment work going on in-country. Presentation of and discussions on ongoing assessments should be included as a discussion point in all Inter Cluster Coordination meetings to encourage stakeholders to share information.
Responsible: OCHA CO – Assessment focal point

Recommendation 9: Increase OCHA capacity to facilitate coordinated assessments
It is important that OCHA should implement a strategy to reinforce its own capacities to facilitate assessments. The strategy should include short term and medium term actions as follows: 1) Systematic training on CAs to CO staff with priority given to national staff to ensure sustainable capacities at country level; 2) Designate assessment focal points in each CO to lead the assessment facilitation process; 3) Consider appointing assessment focal points at regional bureau level, to support assessment related activities, including preparedness and capacity building at country level as well as to build up partnerships at regional level; ad 4) to reduce the high staff turnover, the human resources and staffing strategy within OCHA should move towards longer term contracts (at least one year) to ensure permanency of international staff in country.
Responsible: OCHA HQ, OCHA CO, CASS

OCHA CO Preparedness

Recommendation 10: Strengthen preparedness for assessments in Country and Regional Offices
There is a need for preparedness for assessments to be prioritised and reinforced, particularly in those countries at high risk of emergency. At country level, the following are considered as top priority: 1) Definition of standard operating procedures (SOP) with clear definition of roles and responsibilities2) Agreed upon data collection and analysis templates 3) Build up scenarios and pre-estimate likely impact of disasters.
Responsible: OCHA CO

Quality of outputs

Recommendation 11: Ensure high quality CA products and inter-sector analysis
Clear guidance should be given at CO level to ensure that data analysis methods and tools are applied as well as ensuring that their limitations are systematically documented across all CA reports.
To facilitate and improve inter-sectoral analysis, consider the development of a conceptual analytical framework that shows the relationship existing between needs and their causal factors. This framework should be adapted by each context. In consultation with cluster members, consider establishing standardised thresholds for key sector level indicators to classify severity of need levels.

Responsible: CASS

Guidance and tools

Recommendation 12: Develop adaptable generic assessment tools

There is a need for a modular multi-sector assessment toolbox which includes a generic multi-sector assessment tool/template (especially for data collection) but which can be adapted and adjusted to context depending on specific environments.

Responsible: CASS, OCHA CO

Recommendation 13: Complement, fine-tune and adapt existing guidance

There is a need for adapting existing guidance and/or developing new guidance in areas that have been identified as lacking. Additions to the existing guidance in the form of specific guidance sheets or notes should be made for the following areas: protracted crises - develop guidance; cross-cutting issues- strengthen the current initiatives to mainstream gender and Communication with Communities (CwC); cash transfer programming and assessments in urban areas – build on the work carried out by other organisations in these areas; hard-to-reach locations – review existing approaches and develop guidance sheets and assessment methodologies based on examples of good practice.

Responsible: CASS

The role of CASS

Recommendations 14: Increase strategic and technical support from CASS

- At strategic level, there is a need for CASS to reinforce its advocacy work at senior management level (at global level, HQ and CO-HC/HCT level) aiming at gaining stronger buy-in and more investment for coordinated assessments. CASS should also continue to build partnerships at global level with a wider range of humanitarian actors (setting up collaborative working arrangements to undertake CAs whenever possible.
- At technical/operational level, CASS support to the field should be more institutionalised and less on a demand basis. CASS needs to play a more prominent role in promoting cross-fertilisation and experience sharing, systematising and disseminating best practice and lessons learned. CASS staff field missions should be shifted towards capacity building (on–the-job training, coaching) rather than replacing field staff functions.

1. Background to the review

In recent years increasing attention has been given to strengthening the coordination of assessments in emergencies in order to: avoid duplication; facilitate consensus on findings and critical needs; minimise the burden on affected populations; and maximise the use of staff and other resources. In 2009 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) established a Needs Assessment Task Force (NATF) which led to an inter-agency process to develop a general Operational Guidance on Coordinated Assessments as well as a specific approach for multi-sector/cluster initial rapid assessments (MIRA) to be completed in the first two weeks of a sudden onset emergency.

The IASC-endorsed Operational Guidance made a distinction between joint (common) and harmonised assessments[3] in order to offer some flexibility with regard to the intensity of the coordinated activity. The guidance also specified time windows during which different types of coordinated assessments bring most benefit, covering the period from the first 72 hours to four weeks after a sudden-onset event.

The IASC Transformative Agenda called for a more evidence-based, strategic and prioritised humanitarian response. In 2013, OCHA, in consultation with inter-agency partners, introduced the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) approach, including a separate Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) that serves as the primary basis for joint analysis to design a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The HNO and HRP are led by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) with the aim being to compile information from multiple sectors to estimate the number of people in need (PiN) and priorities. The HNO/HRP is meant to be updated at least twice each year but regular situation and needs monitoring is expected to take place to inform possible adjustments of programmes and priorities.

In 2015, a report produced as a result of consultations for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) further emphasised the importance of assessments, stating that, "In each crisis, a mechanism is needed to verify and improve the quality and credibility of needs assessments, track progress in meeting needs and provide a channel for handling complaints by affected people."[4] At the time of this review the WHS had taken place (May 2016). One key agenda item of the WHS was the Grand Bargain, a new way to deliver humanitarian financing. Donors and aid agencies agreed that the current financing system could not cope with today's increasingly frequent and severe global crises. Donors at the WHS committed to provide more, longer-term funding and less earmarking in exchange for greater efficiency and transparency from aid agencies in the way those funds are spent. The Grand Bargain makes a number of commitments related to improving needs assessment and data analysis which are further referred to in section 3.10 of this report below.

[3] A **coordinated assessment** is planned and carried out in partnership by humanitarian actors in order to document the impact of a particular crisis and to identify the needs of affected populations. The term "coordinated assessments" includes both joint and harmonised assessments. A **harmonised assessment** is when agencies collect, process and analyse data separately but where the collected data is sufficiently comparable to be compiled into a single database and used in shared analysis. A **joint (or common) assessment** is when data collection, processing and analysis form one single process among agencies within and between clusters/sectors, and lead to the production of a single report.

[4] *Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit – Executive Summary*

The Coordinated Assessment Support Section (CASS) within OCHA's Programme Support Branch (PSB) is the main technical reference body for OCHA Country and Regional Offices on coordinated assessments and joint analysis. Established in early 2012, it comprises 10 staff with a mix of coordination, analytical, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and information management skills. CASS staff typically provide technical advice on assessment methods and tools, reviewing/assisting with the preparation of assessment reports, delivering training and assisting with policy development. This support is given remotely as well as during frequent field missions. CASS staff also engage in different consultations and ad hoc partnerships with agencies and networks involved in multi-sectoral data collection and analysis, such as REACH, the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), UNOSAT, MapAction and others.

2. Review objectives and methodology

2.1. Objectives

The main purpose of this review is to identify ways to enhance OCHA's capacity at country, regional and global levels to coordinate needs assessment and analysis at various stages of an emergency.

The specific objectives are to gain a better understanding of:

- The appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of the approach followed to support coordinated assessments and joint analysis in the field, in various types of crisis contexts and at various stages of a crisis.
- The quality of coordinated assessment and joint analysis outputs.
- The role played by CASS in supporting coordinated assessment and joint analysis and the production of quality outputs.
- The degree of preparedness for coordinated assessments and joint analysis, particularly in countries at high and very high risk of crisis.

2.2. Methodology

The review has been undertaken by two independent consultants between June and August 2016. The following methodology has been adopted in order to respond to the key questions detailed in the review terms of reference (ToR):

- Desk review of key documents[5]
- Visits to a select number of countries (Central African Republic; Nigeria; the Philippines; Colombia; Turkey (Syria); Jordan (Syria); and Iraq), and remote interviews with partner's staff in Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Myanmar.
- In-person and skype/phone semi-structured individual and group interviews with more than 200 stakeholders representing the following:
    - OCHA staff in Geneva and New York, Regional Offices and selected countries – those who are directly or indirectly involved in coordinated assessments.
    - Global Cluster Lead Agencies and cluster coordinators at field level
    - International NGOs
    - National NGOs in visited countries
    - Donors
    - National authorities in visited countries

[5] See Annex 2

A comprehensive list of persons interviewed is presented in Annex 1.

Those countries that were visited by the review team received separate reports which are annexed to this main report.

A draft of this report was submitted to CASS for comment and final inputs prior to its finalisation.

Limitations
Some factors limited the extent and depth of the information collected from the various stakeholders during the field visits:

1. Due to high staff turnover within OCHA and amongst other humanitarian actors, more than half of the personnel contacted in countries visited (including Iraq, CAR and Turkey and to certain extent the Philippines) were relatively new in post or in country position, with limited knowledge about the assessment experiences in the past three years. Hence most of the stakeholders´ opinions in these countries referred to recent experience (2015 or first months of 2016). The review team had to complement the analysis with information gathered from secondary sources and documents.
2. Despite the efforts of OCHA Country Offices and due to tight field visit schedules there were few cases (in CAR, Iraq and Colombia) where staff directly involved in assessments were not available, therefore the review team could only speak to personnel working in different areas with little knowledge of coordinated assessments (CAs), who provided little information or information not necessarily relevant to the review.
3. There were limitations in setting up more than one remote interview with personnel in the countries to be covered remotely (Mali, Myanmar, DRC and South Sudan) due to a number of factors such as: poor quality of telecommunications; limited availability of stakeholders; and serious insecurity conditions like in South Sudan (where the review team could not set up any remote interview). Therefore, for these countries most of the information included in the review was gathered from secondary sources and documents reviewed.

2.3. Definition of coordinated assessment

The review has taken the IASC definition of coordinated assessments as outlined in its 2012 Operational Guidance:

Table 1: Definitions

Coordinated assessment	Planned and carried out in partnership by humanitarian actors in order to document the impact of a particular crisis and to identify the needs of affected populations. The term "coordinated assessments" includes both joint and harmonised assessments.
Harmonised assessment	When agencies collect, process and analyse data separately but where the collected data is sufficiently comparable to be compiled into a single database and used in shared analysis.

Joint/common assessment	When data collection, processing and analysis form one single process among agencies within and between clusters/sectors, and lead to the production of a single report.

3. Review results

The review results are presented in line with the 10 thematic areas detailed in the review ToR as follows:

- Assessment practice and factors facilitating and challenging coordinated assessments
- Coordination of assessments.
- Trust, buy-in and added value of coordinated assessments
- Use of coordinated assessment results.
- Quality of the outputs of coordinated assessments.
- Coordinated assessment guidance and tools
- The role of OCHA
- The role of CASS
- OCHA Country Office preparedness

3.1. Assessment practices and experience

Assessment practice and coordinated assessment experiences

The review has found that coordinated needs assessment practice is diverse across countries and contexts both in terms of approaches adopted and use of data. The table below provides an overview of the different assessment types and tools applied in countries visited in the past three years.

Table 2: Type of Coordinated Assessments by country, in the past three years

Country	Assessment type	Data collection/analysis tools	Emergency scenario
CAR	MIRA 2014 in escalating conflict areas	Multi-sector key informant interview questionnaire	Active conflict coexisting with protracted crisis Natural disasters
	Joint localised assessments	Multi-sector key informant questionnaire	
	Rapid Assessments in the framework of the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM)	Multi-sector key informant questionnaire	
Colombia	MIRA (localised assessments)	Secondary data review Multi-sector key informant questionnaire	Active conflict coexisting with protracted crisis Natural disasters
Iraq	Country wide Joint assessment (MCNA)	Multi-sector household questionnaire Key informant interview	Active conflict coexisting with protracted crisis Natural disasters
Nigeria	Adapted MIRA (2014 and 2015)	Multi-sector key informant questionnaire	Active conflict

	Initial Rapid Needs Assessment (IRNA) (2016)	For the IRNA multi-sector key informant questionnaire and focus group discussions	
Philippines	MIRA in localised emergencies (pre-Haiyan)	Multi-sector key informant questionnaire	Natural sudden onset and recurrent disasters Active conflict coexisting with protracted crisis in specific regions
	MIRA 2013 Typhoon Haiyan	Multi-sector key informant questionnaire Household questionnaire (MIRA II)	
	Joint localised assessments (post-Haiyan)	Damage and Needs assessment (DANA) questionnaire (from government)	
Syria	Large scale Joint assessment (SINA, MSNA and WOSA)	Multi-sector key informant questionnaire (adapted to the country)	Active conflict coexisting with protracted crisis
	Harmonised assessments and joint analysis	Joint analysis of sector/inter-sectoral assessments	

The main types of assessments and key characteristics of the assessment practice in the countries visited and remotely contacted can be summarised as follows:

a. **Large-scale joint multi-sector assessments,** undertaken jointly by several humanitarian organizations, including UN Agencies, INGOs and technical third parties (and sometimes with government involvement), often led by OCHA and other operational Agencies such as WFP. For most of the countries included in the review, at least one large scale multi-sector coordinated assessment was implemented in the past three years. The scope of some of these assessments was set up to go beyond a MIRA (i.e. Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA), Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) and Whole of Syria Assessment (WoSA)) as timeframes were longer compared to MIRA (more than two months) and data collection tools included in-depth technical details for certain sectors.
   MIRA have been implemented in different countries, mainly as one-off rapid assessment exercises in the aftermath of sudden onset natural disasters (Typhoon Haiyan in Philippines in 2013, Cyclone Konen in Myanmar for example) but also in new conflict-affected areas (escalating conflict and displacement in Central African Republic (CAR) in December 2013).

   Multi-sectoral large scale assessments led and entirely implemented by technical parties, such as the Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA) (led by REACH in Iraq) deserve special attention. The REACH-led MCNA is a multi-sectoral assessment covering most of the governorates across the country (14 out of 18 governorates) and providing a broad overview of the multi-cluster priority needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living outside and inside the camps. However, despite the fact that this type of assessment could fall under the umbrella of what is considered "ideal" in terms of neutrality and independence, having been carried out by a non-operational organisation, in practice, it is not widely used. Although the results of this assessment are incorporated into the HNO, the overall buy-in to the results is weak, particularly among operational UN Agencies. This is primarily because of the differences in the results as compared with sector specific assessments (e.g. protection specific

assessments led by UNHCR or WFP which prefers to rely on its own assessment methodologies). In addition, a number of those spoken to during this review highlighted concerns relating to the comparability of data across the different rounds[6], (MCNA is planned to be held twice a year, although this is not always achieved). Similarly, donors spoken to were not well aware of the existence and value of this assessment and did not give attention to it.

b. **Joint assessments in localised emergencies**: MIRA and inter-agency/inter-sector assessment missions are undertaken in Colombia and CAR respectively to rapidly assess the situation and the needs of the people affected by disasters (usually conflicts and new displacements, but also natural disasters). These missions are scheduled as emergencies arise and are usually led by OCHA or another UN agency in cases where OCHA has no presence in the field. In relation to the assessment methods and tools used, in the case of CAR, OCHA has developed a simple multi-sector questionnaire in consultation with the clusters. Results are released almost immediately, but it is not clear how the results are used to guide the immediate response. In Colombia, the MIRA methodology, adapted to the country context is applied in different settings including natural disasters, protracted crises and active conflicts. Results are released within three days and are used to design an immediate response. These type of assessments were also the norm in Philippines in 2013-2104, before Typhoon Haiyan.
   There are also interesting inter-sector/multi-sector assessment initiatives such as the rapid assessments undertaken under the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) in South Sudan and Iraq among other countries. Here, UNICEF, WFP and FAO have developed the RRM to address gaps in the humanitarian needs of affected populations. RRM assessment missions are mobile teams comprising of technical specialists including WASH, Health, Nutrition, Child Protection and Education who deploy to hard-to-reach locations where they assess and respond to immediate needs on the ground

c. **Harmonised assessments:** Joint analysis of inter-sectoral assessments is done in Syria where stakeholders have agreed on a common set of indicators and units of analysis to be included in data collection tools and a data sharing platform has been set up. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) OCHA jointly with UNICEF is involved in coordinating the Rapid Response to Movements of Population (RRMP) programme which provides rapid multi-sectoral[7] needs assessments to the humanitarian community and to deliver an integrated assistance package to populations affected by displacement and disasters in eastern DRC. RRMP can be considered in certain way as harmonised assessments as there is a common toolbox that is being used by UNICEF's implementing partners and a common database, but data collection is done separately by each partner. RRMP assessment reports are shared within the humanitarian community and uploaded onto the programme's dedicated website.[8]

[6] According to UNHCR for example, comparability of different rounds of the MCNA is difficult due to changes in the "universe" population, as for different rounds new camps or other locations are included while others from the previous rounds are excluded.

[7] RRMP tools include food security, education, WASH, health and NFI

[8] www.rrmp.org

The RRMP is considered to play an important role in terms of multi-sector assessments in DRC, as it is specifically designed to assess the needs of displaced and moving populations (where the MIRA is considered to be inappropriate, as it is not adapted to conflict and situations where there are ongoing or potential population movements[9]). However, there has been some criticism in relation to timeliness with an average response time post assessment of three months.

For the rest of countries visited during this review assessments are not harmonised and joint analysis is hampered by factors like: limited consistency in the sharing of assessment findings with OCHA, combined with a lack of capacity within the OCHA teams to follow up on assessments undertaken by other agencies and organisations. The multitude of assessments with no harmonised data sets, units of analysis and indicators, and lack of temporal and geographical synchronisation also pose a great challenge to a joint analysis process. This can be seen in Iraq, Nigeria and CAR.

d. Sector/agency specific assessments:

Sector/agency specific assessments are being carried out in all countries reviewed. In some cases these assessment initiatives are coordinated within the cluster system (where it exists and is functioning). Some data collection initiatives constitute the base for the HNO/HRP as in the case of the Displacement Tracking Mechanism (DTM) that provides the "official" total number of IDPs (e.g. Iraq and Nigeria).

In countries/contexts receiving higher political attention and relatively higher flow of funds, such as Iraq and Syria, there is a large number of actors undertaking assessments which are not always coordinated. Information is not often shared or when shared, is not comparable. This leads to assessment fatigue, especially where the assessments are not followed by any form of assistance. In Iraq there is a recognition that many assessment initiatives are leading to duplication, overlapping and overwhelming the population with many un-coordinated assessments[10]. However, no practical solution is provided. Some stakeholders expressed their concern that most of the cluster specific assessments are being conducted in easy-to-access areas, while information on hard-to-reach areas is scarce. The situation is similar in Nigeria where a number of locations are very difficult to access due to the prevailing security situation and where OCHA has had limited capacity to lead CAs. This has led agencies to carry out their own assessments in the same accessible areas, not always followed up with any form of programming.

According to the stakeholders interviewed, some of the main reasons, why they have to undertake sector/agency specific assessments are:

[9] The MIRA guidance 2015, for instance highlights that one of the pre-conditions for a successful MIRA is related to "stability" in terms of having sustained access to the majority of the affected population and no significant additional population movements. These conditions are not present in a conflict situation such as in DRC.

[10] Oxfam, for instance has mentioned there are people that have been interviewed up to 14 times in one or two months without receiving any assistance.

- Joint assessments, do not provide enough operational detail for cluster/agency specific response programming.
- Sectors such as nutrition or protection need specialised assessment tools and methods that cannot be easily incorporated into coordinated, especially joint assessment tools.
- There is a need to comply with donor requirements for specific levels of data.
- There is a need to frequently assess the situation in dynamic contexts and there are insufficiently regular CAs to do this (partly due to the resource requirements for CAs).

Factors which have facilitated coordinated assessments

There are a number of factors which have facilitated coordinated assessments in recent years. Key facilitating factors are highlighted here:[11]

Table 3: Factors which have facilitated coordinated assessments

At global level	
Baseline/Needs indicators	The humanitarian indicator registry[12] provides a point of reference for country teams and clusters to seek standard definitions and guidance for indicators used at different stages of the Humanitarian Program Cycle. It is designed to support planning of sectoral and/or multi-sectoral assessments and surveys, developing strategic response plans and response monitoring frameworks. Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) and clusters/sectors can take the indicators in the registry as a starting point when defining country-specific indicators.
IASC MIRA Analytical Framework	The MIRA is an inter-agency process enabling actors to reach a common understanding of the situation and its likely evolution in the first two weeks following a sudden-onset crisis. Based on its findings humanitarian actors can develop a joint plan, mobilise resources and monitor the situation. The MIRA is underpinned by an analytical framework that guides the systematic collection, organisation and analysis of secondary and primary data. The MIRA is for use in sudden onset disaster situations.
Operational guidance for coordinated assessments	The IASC has developed operational guidance for CAs in Humanitarian Crises[13]. The guidance provides a number of recommendations to assist more effective coordinated assessments in relation to the establishment of coordination mechanisms; the role of cluster/sector leads and operational agencies; and preparedness for CAs.
Determination of inter-sectoral severity and risks	A number of tools have been developed in order to help determine inter-sectoral severity and/or risks. These include the Needs Comparison Tool (NCT) and the Index for Risk Management (INFORM). The NCT provides a structured way to compare humanitarian needs, impacts and vulnerabilities across geographic areas and sectors, combining data from different sources together in a consistent way. The INFORM risk index identifies countries at risk from

[11] These are global level facilitating factors. Specific country level factors are highlighted in the individual country reports annexed to this main report.

[12] https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/applications/ir

[13] https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/operational-guidance-coordinated-assessments-humanitarian-crises-0

	humanitarian crises and disasters that could overwhelm national response capacity.
Data compilation and analysis	Platforms such as the Humanitarian Information Review and Analysis (HIRA) platform have been developed in order to capture and perform secondary data reviews. This platform is at present administered by three agencies – Digital Humanitarian Network, OCHA and ACAPS. Another example is the JIPS Dynamic Analysis and Reporting (DART) tool has been developed to facilitate data sharing and joint analysis in order to increase transparency and enhance collaboration.
Partnerships	At a global level OCHA has established partnerships through the UNDAC system with organisations that can provide logistics and technical support. In addition, the Emergency Relief Coordinator of OCHA chairs the IASC that bring humanitarian organisations together. OCHA also collaborates with organisations such as ACAPS, REACH and JIPS in terms of training for building capacities for needs assessment and analysis.
At operational/ country level	
Leadership and coordination structure	In those countries where stronger and well established coordination structures amongst humanitarian actors with a clear Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and HCT leadership exist, this has been shown to facilitate the integration and willingness of stakeholders to participate in CAs and share information (Colombia, Syria to certain extent). However, building a stronger coordination environment takes time and demands continuous efforts from OCHA.
Preparedness	The extent of preparedness to conduct assessments, including a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, agreed minimum set of indicators - by cluster- that should be collected/analysed jointly, as well as agreed data collection and analysis tools, speeds up the process of CAs (Colombia, Philippines (before Haiyan), Syria).
Field presence and operational capacity	The presence of humanitarian actors in the field with capacity to mobilise staff and resources for assessments enables the implementation of coordinated assessments and expansion of coverage. This is particularly crucial in active conflict settings such as Syria, Iraq, and CAR, where assessments would be impossible without the presence of NGO networks. OCHA´s field capacity is also seen as a facilitating factor for CAs, as in the case of Colombia, where one of the factors leading to the institutionalisation of the MIRA is attributed to the strong presence of OCHA at sub-national level and in Nigeria, where there has been increased focus by OCHA at sub-national level, particularly from its Maiduguri office.
Incentives	Attaching CAs to funding allocations is a procedure that has allowed institutionalisation of the MIRA in Colombia. For example, a MIRA is required to access the humanitarian funds there.
Technical capacity	Presence of assessment focal points and/or staff trained or with previous experience in assessments in OCHA Country Offices has been a key facilitating factor and this can be seen in Yemen, Syria-Jordan and Turkey for example. UN agencies with strong technical assessment capacity in certain cases contribute to the design and implementation of coordinated assessments (Nigeria, the Philippines). Presence of technical third parties (ACAPS, REACH, IMMAP, and JIPS, among others) contributes to enhancing OCHA's capacity particularly for data analysis

	and information management, and adds neutrality and independence to the analysis process. The establishment of CASS, its involvement in and support to global and country level coordinated assessment methodologies and assessments continues to be a key facilitating factor for CAs.
Mobile data collection platforms	KoBo is considered an important tool to speed up the process of mobile data collection and processing, allowing the results of assessments to be released in a relatively short time (Syria-Turkey, Colombia, Iraq, and CAR). KoBo is widely used by different humanitarian actors including UN agencies (UNHCR) as well as international and local NGOs.

Factors which have hindered coordinated assessments.

Table 4: Factors which have hindered coordinated assessments

Sectoral/inter-sector balance	Whilst there is a common agreement that CAs bring benefits and can help to save more lives and restore livelihoods[14] organisations often struggle to maintain a balance (whether due to lack of resources or lack of will) between contributing to joint assessments or carrying out their own. This challenge is faced whether post sudden onset disaster where organisations have developed their own sectoral/agency guidance (e.g. WFP 72hrs approach) or in conflict or complex emergency environments.
Weak coordination environment	In countries where coordination for assessments, within the humanitarian community, is weak and not well institutionalised, cluster lead agencies have a strong influence on the cluster system giving preference to the use of their sector specific assessment tools. In the same line, where there is lack of leadership within the UN system this stands in the way of CAs. The competitive funding environment further contributes to the fight for turf hampering inter-sectoral analysis.
Low technical and resource capacity at OCHA CO level	High staff turnover, lack of assessment focal points and limited numbers of staff trained or with experience in assessments have been found across most OCHA COs spoken to during this review. It is not the lack of OCHA CO will to try and ensure and facilitate CAs but a lack of resources and skills.
Context specific restrictions	Insecurity, access restrictions and government restrictions are factors that hinder not only coordinated assessments but assessments in general.
Limited resources for assessments	There is a lack of or limited resources for assessments, including staff, logistics, and financial resources. Response plans and programmes usually do not include specific budgets for assessments. Actors´ willingness to allocate resources for coordinated assessments depends on the level of buy-in to the assessment results and the perception of the benefits and value added of such exercises.
Politicisation	Politicisation often hampers data collection efforts while the need for government endorsement of assessment results can decrease their validity and neutrality.

[14] *IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinating Assessments in Humanitarian Crises* (2012)

3.2. Coordination processes

Coordination is analysed in terms of the extent of involvement of the various humanitarian stakeholders in the whole process of CAs, giving special attention to the participation of technical third parties.

Involvement of humanitarian stakeholders

Active involvement and improved coordination amongst the various stakeholders is essential for successful CA exercises. Overall, the main international stakeholders such as UN agencies and INGOs and to lesser extent technical institutions are involved in the process of CAs from the planning and design stage to the elaboration and dissemination of the final report. Nevertheless, the level of involvement of national and local stakeholders such as national NGOs, Red Cross/Crescent National Societies, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and the government has been reported insufficient across the countries visited. The coordination environment and the factors that facilitate or challenge the engagement of the various actors vary across countries reviewed and emergency contexts as follows:

Joint assessments in conflicts and protracted emergencies:

- In Syria, ensuring an equal co-leadership within the Assessment Working Group (OCHA, and third parties- ACAPS and REACH) and a clear division of roles and responsibilities since the design of the assessment contributed to the success of the MSNA and WoSA and greater involvement of the stakeholders in the whole process. Improved coordination further contributed to a closer cooperation with the regional offices of different involved organisations in light of a regional approach[15]. As to the involvement of national NGOs, OCHA reported having invited them to be involved at different stages of the assessment process, but only few contributed with enumerators and resources. However, NGOs in Turkey expressed that they would have expected being more actively involved especially in the design phase of the assessments, since they have much to contribute especially in the refinement and translation of data collection tools as they are well aware of the context.
- In Nigeria and CAR, OCHA has put effort into ensuring involvement of INGOs in designing and developing tools and methodologies for coordinated assessments even when those INGOs are not able or willing (due to the need for armed escorts) to take part in data collection.
- In Colombia, well established standard operating procedures with clear definition of roles and responsibilities, complemented by the existence of agreed-upon methods and tools for data collection and analysis have facilitated the participation of the various stakeholders in the localised MIRAs being regularly conducted in the country.

Joint assessments in sudden onset disasters:

- In the Philippines, pre-Haiyan, involvement of international humanitarian actors jointly with the government, to undertake joint assessments in disaster affected areas was well coordinated. This has changed in the scenario post-Haiyan (2015-2016) as the government has taken the lead in deciding whether or not humanitarian actors will participate in assessments. The situation is better at sub-national level, where regional and local governments usually are more open to conduct assessment missions jointly with the humanitarian actors.

[15] MSNA lessons learned

- During Haiyan, the involvement of the humanitarian actors in the MIRA has been reported as non-optimal. As mentioned by stakeholders contacted and from the documents reviewed[16], local stakeholders and the government were not sufficiently involved in the process. The large surge of international staff who took over most of the MIRA planning and designing processes compounded by the lack of their familiarity with the national humanitarian coordination mechanisms and systems and high pressure to rapidly deliver results, pushed aside the governmental institutions, establishing parallel assessments and coordination mechanisms. In addition, the MIRA was steered jointly by OCHA and the WFP Regional Bureau in Bangkok, which in the end decided on what to include or not in the assessment tool, despite the fact that the initial design of the questionnaire for primary data collection was participatory. This limited the usefulness of the results for certain clusters and agencies (i.e. early recovery cluster and UNICEF)[17].
- In relation to government participation, generally, in middle income countries and natural disaster scenarios, the leadership and the participation of governmental organisations in CAs is not only welcomed but considered as critical, since a greater part of the response is funded and delivered by the governments. In conflicts settings some organizations are hesitant to involve government in assessments to ensure neutrality.

Harmonised assessments in protracted crises:

- Most stakeholders are actively involved in the cluster and inter-cluster joint analysis process linked with developing the HNO and HRP, from the planning stage to the elaboration of the final document. Nevertheless, the level of involvement of local stakeholders such as national NGOs is often limited. This is particularly relevant for contexts such Syria-Turkey were 80 to 90 per cent of organisations participating in the clusters are national NGOs.

Sector specific assessments in all contexts

- Most of the assessments conducted are sector or agency specific. Each cluster has its own dynamic and mechanisms to plan, coordinate and implement sectoral assessments. The cluster/sector system was generally well established in the countries visited during the review, yet with different levels of capacity to conduct assessments. Certain clusters such as Food Security, Protection, WASH and Health tend to have stronger assessment capacity in terms of well-developed methods and tools, networks of organisations with stronger field presence and able to mobilise resources to conduct frequent assessments. On the other hand clusters such as Education, Shelter and NFI and Early Recovery, have limited capacity to conduct assessments with limited presence of organisations in the field and lack of well-developed cluster-specific assessment tools.

- Similar to CAs, the level of involvement of international and national stakeholders in cluster-specific assessments in the countries visited vary across the assessment phases. In Iraq and Syria-Turkey national NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement informed that they were not much involved in the early stages and design of the assessments, but were contacted later for data collection. Usually, few organisations are involved in data

[16] IASC Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response, Prepared on behalf of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group. October 2014

[17] Real-time Evaluation of UNICEF´s Humanitarian Response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines

analysis and report writing as this is mainly done by the leading agency (OCHA and/or other UN Agency) or delegated to third parties. Assessment products are also not timely translated (or not translated) into local language and disseminated among local actors.

Factors that have facilitated coordination and stakeholder involvement

- The existence of strong and functioning coordination mechanisms including clusters, the Inter-cluster Coordination (ICC) and the Information Management or Assessment and Information Management Working Groups (IMWG or AIMWG). In countries where the Assessment Working Groups have been well established (i.e. Syria, Colombia, Yemen) this has been an important factor that has ensured continued stakeholder engagement in CA processes.
- Preparedness in terms of agreed standard operating procedures with clear distribution of roles and responsibilities and agreed data collection and analysis templates contribute to the effective engagement of different stakeholders (Syria, Colombia).
- Strong OCHA leadership and improved coordination capacity at CO level, including strong presence in the field facilitates coordination for CAs and joint analysis (Colombia).

Factors that have hindered coordination and stakeholder involvement

- Language barriers have hindered the participation of national actors in the HNO process in Syria (Turkey hub) and Iraq, as the cluster meetings are only held in English. There were also complaints that the Arabic version of the HNO document was only released two or three months later than the English version.
- Stakeholders consulted agreed that the HNO process is burdensome, which discourages further involvement. Some NGOs struggle to balance the time of their limited staff between the delivery of the assistance and participation in coordination activities including joint analysis. The fact that they find low value-added of the HNO for their operational programming also discourages further involvement and willingness to participate in the process.
- High staff turnover within most of the organisations, weakens coordination efforts and learning from past experience.
- Low emphasis on local staff and local actor's capacity building hinders quality engagement in the process. OCHA has not invested in capacity building (perhaps because of their own limited capacity) leaving external actors and factors to drive the agenda.
- In countries where there is no clear leadership and commitment to CAs, within cluster lead agencies and HCT, the involvement of stakeholders in CAs processes is less active

Involvement of technical partners and third parties

This review has found an increasing involvement of technical partners and third parties in coordinated assessment processes both as leaders of the process (e.g. REACH in Iraq) and for specific analytical tasks such as joint analysis or secondary data review (as seen recently by ACAPS in Nigeria and REACH and IMMAP in Syria). However, their involvement is still frequently based on requests and not systematic. The May 2016 Grand Bargain commitments from the WHS highlight the importance of, "needs assessments that are impartial, unbiased, comprehensive, context-sensitive, timely and up-to-date", further stating that there is a need to, "dedicate resources and involve independent specialists within the clusters to strengthen data collection and analysis….". A number of those spoken to during

this review, including donors, did not interpret these commitments as meaning that data collection and analysis should *only* be undertaken by independent organisations but more that they should be increasingly and systematically involved in these processes. With donors particularly stressing the need for credible and impartial assessment and analysis there is potentially a need for further dedication of resources by them to support this commitment.

Examples of assessment and analysis support provided by non-operational technical partners and third parties include:

- **JIPS**: In DRC, which is facing a complex and protracted crisis with more than 1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPS), OCHA has recently requested support from JIPS. This is a follow-up to support that JIPS provided in 2015 on the request of UNHCR, UNDP and UNFPA to undertake a profiling to form the basis for strategic planning and programming for authorities, humanitarian and development actors, responding to the displacement challenge.
- **MapAction**: In Nepal in 2015, DFID funded and supported MapAction and ACAPS to help provide data for the UNDAC assessment cell. The UN had called for MapAction support which continued over a period of four months. MapAction had undertaken a preparedness mission in 2010 with OCHA which ensured that essential data had already been pre-identified.
- **IMMAP:** Through the Standby Partnership Programme, iMMAP has deployed Information Management Officers (IMOs) to OCHA-Jordan to support the planning, design and data analysis of multi-sectoral needs assessments and specific assessments such as the Area of Origin (AoO) in Syria.
- **REACH:** REACH has established an official partnership with the global Shelter cluster in relation to assessments (for which it has done more than 30 assessments) and more recently has established a similar partnership with the WASH cluster for country level facilitation of assessments.
- **ACAPS:** In Yemen, at the time of writing, the OCHA CO had requested support from ACAPS to undertake a secondary data review to help feed into the HNO process and at the request of the INGO Forum ACAPS conducted a secondary data review in Nigeria.
- **Academic institutions**: In some contexts, agencies are able to call upon students from universities to help undertake primary data collection. This can be seen in Nigeria for example.
- **Private sector bodies**: The use of private sector organisations to support assessments is also on the increase, particularly in relation to using technology for data collection. For example, at the global level WFP uses GeoPoll (an organisation which invests in remote assessment work) in its monthly food security monitoring.

During the review process, all those spoken to were keen to stress the importance of involving technical third parties in assessment and analysis processes. The main reasons highlighted in terms of added value were the following:

- These organisations are able to provide technical skills and technical capacity which is often lacking either within OCHA COs or other agencies or organisations.
- As these organisations are not operational their assessment and possibly more importantly their analysis skills are important in terms of the neutrality and independence that they bring. With some donor criticism that operational agencies inflate PiN and other figures (not necessarily in a bid to misinform but more in a desperate attempt to secure much-needed funding), these non-operational organisations are in a stronger position to provide independent assessment data, analysed in a neutral manner as they are not influenced by

programme or funding considerations. However there are some that question that these agencies are not completely independent as they respond to requests from funding agencies or donors.

In spite of the positive feedback on the involvement of third parties, some stakeholders expressed concern about their increasing involvement as they are considered to contribute very little to capacity building of local staff and organisations (which is critical to ensure sustainable assessment and analysis capacities especially in disaster prone countries). Furthermore, some operational stakeholders were concerned about the low ownership and buy-in to the assessment results and processes entirely led by third parties. An example of this could be seen in Iraq with the MCNA led by REACH as some UN Agencies did not use the results for their decision making as mentioned above (see Section 3.1).

In recognition of the benefits that such organisations can bring, OCHA is positively engaging with third parties both at global level (through CASS) and in some places at country level (e.g. Yemen and Syria). Throughout the development of the MIRA process, OCHA worked closely with a number of other technical partners including REACH and ACAPS. In order to ensure that inputs from these organisations continue to be provided to support strengthened approaches to assessment and analysis CASS plans to further engage with them in its current and future work on joint situation and needs analysis in sudden-onset and protracted crises. In the light of the generally positive experiences with the participation of technical partners and the commitments arising from the Grand Bargain, the CASS initiative is seen as very important to move towards improved CAs processes and products.

3.3. Trust, buy-in and added value of coordinated assessments

This section analyses the factors that positively and negatively influence the trust and buy-in to CA processes and products, as well as the buy-in from stakeholders on CA-related guidance.

Factors influencing trust and buy-in

Overall there is broad support to the process and products of CAs, but the level of trust and buy-in varies across actors and contexts and is influenced by different factors as described below:

Lack of understanding on the scope of CAs: In spite of guidance stating the purpose of coordinated assessments, there remains a lack of understanding amongst some stakeholders (such as individual UN agencies, cluster leads and NGOs) as to the purpose and limitations of these CAs and their need to inform high level decision processes. This lack of understanding on the real limitations of CAs whereby agencies and NGOs state that the CAs, especially joint assessments and joint analysis products such as HNO, are not useful to them because they lack sufficient detail (e.g. technical detail) to inform their own response options analysis and programming has hindered buy-in to a number of CA processes. This can for example be seen in the Syria response from the WASH cluster.

Limited availability of resources: Agencies are keen to undertake their own assessments to inform their programming and attract donor funding and this often leaves them with no/limited financial and/or human resources to participate in CAs. Additionally, in some contexts where security restrictions are apparent, only limited numbers of personnel/organisations are able to participate in primary data collection exercises to feed into CAs. In north-east Nigeria, OCHA has addressed these two latter factors by ensuring that all agencies present have the opportunity to be involved not only

in the design of assessment tools and methodologies but also in the analysis phase even though the majority did not participate directly in primary data collection processes.

The perceived valued added of the CAs to agency/sector planning/programming and fundraising: The perception on the value added of CAs varies across contexts. With CAs being useful to guide strategic decisions there is a good level of buy-in at the senior decision-maker level (regional directors, heads of agencies, donors, sector coordinators among others), as seen in Syria. A number of stakeholders and documents consulted report that there is more buy-in for rapid Joint assessments like MIRA in sudden onset crises or the early stages of conflict where, often, the results of such assessments are the only reliable information available and consequently are highly relevant and useful to guide an immediate response. The fact that humanitarian funds are attached to the MIRA in Colombia, positively influenced the willingness of stakeholders to be part of the process. On the contrary, in Iraq, where for certain clusters most funding is not attached to the HNO/HRP, willingness to engage in joint analysis processes is weak. The fact that the HNO in Syria, allows programmatic partners to channel their knowledge of the situation on the ground, makes it more useful to guide programmatic decisions and fund rising based on the agree upon priorities and figures.

Transparency on and quality of the methods, tools and analytical approaches: The need to estimate needs and identify vulnerable populations influences trust and support to CAs. Low transparency has however led to lower levels of trust in the assessment results. For example, donors criticised the lack of transparency in the analysis leading to PiN estimates and prioritisation of needs (for example in the Iraq HNO), indicating that the estimated figures are not reliable. Agencies raised concerns that OCHA guidance is complex and not transparent enough to allow a common understanding on how the figures (PiN, severity of need) are estimated (CAR). Agencies and sectors were also concerned that most of the assessments feeding into the HNO are of poor quality based on perceptions of a limited number of key informants, and not reflecting the real situation and needs, therefore reducing their reliability and validity for decision making (CAR).

Involvement of stakeholders: Early involvement of stakeholders in CAs processes and better documentation of the different stages of the assessment including the established agreements, further contributed to better accountability of the participating stakeholders to the overall MSNA and WoSA processes in Syria.

Continuous capacity building and sensitisation on CAs with local humanitarian actors: This has been one of the factors that positively influenced the institutionalisation of MIRA in Colombia. Dissemination (through trainings, workshops and presentations) of CAs across the humanitarian community and the governmental organisations has also contributed to a better understanding of the advantages and limitations of CAs, which in turn contributed to greater engagement and buy-in. However this required time and stronger OCHA capacities in terms of technical human resources and financial resources. This important capacity building and sensitisation with local humanitarian actors is not consistent across all contexts thereby limiting their trust and buy-in to the process.

Donor commitment to strongly support CAs: This has been another factor that positively influenced the institutionalisation of MIRA in Colombia. This is not seen in all contexts however. Many donors voiced keen support for CA processes during this review, emphasising the importance of having operational humanitarian agencies agreeing on assessment results (through a CA process). However, agencies are frequently still required to undertake their own agency/sector specific assessments to

access funding and inform their programming and do not have sufficient funds and/or capacity to also take part in CAs. So whilst donor support for CAs is strong this is not necessarily matched with funding support to the process.

Clear messages from the higher level (HC, HCT) on the importance and necessity of CAs: High level support within the UN system has facilitated the willingness of UN agencies to engage in CAs processes (Colombia). If there is no clear message emanating from the top level, advocating for CAs, or if sector/cluster leadership is weak, the support to such processes is lacking. This was seen in Iraq and Nigeria for example.

3.4. Use of coordinated assessments results

This section examines the usefulness of CA products in terms of their validity and contribution to sector and inter-sector programming and donor funding allocations.

All stakeholders spoken to during this review stressed the importance of CA results due to the fact that they are the outcome of joint and agreed approaches and their results represent a shared picture of the situation. Most stakeholders also agreed that the relevance and usefulness of CA results to inform response decision making depends on the context and the level of detail provided. In addition, where coordinated assessment results are able to highlight priorities, donors specified that this was of particular utility rather than all needs being seen as equal and associated funding. The majority of stakeholders highlighted that rapid joint assessments, particularly the MIRA are more relevant and useful in terms of guiding the immediate response options or responses in the earliest days of a sudden onset emergency, where there is often limited information available. Finally, according to them, the usefulness of MIRA decreases in protracted crisis, where, on the one hand there is more information and sector assessment results available, and on the other hand, sound programming decision making requires a more in-depth sectoral analysis, to better capture vulnerabilities and coping capacities of the affected populations, which MIRA cannot provide.

With regard to HNOs they are used for strategic planning and resource mobilization by some operational actors such as WFP and UNHCR, alongside other documents. Some INGOs reported the HNO and HRP were useful for lobbying and others use them as a public relations tool to attract funding. Donors mentioned that the HNOs would be more useful if they clearly prioritised top needs. However, a number of UN agencies do not agree with this as they fear that those needs/sectors which are not highlighted as top priority will then not be funded.

The process of elaboration of the HNO has been considered as relevant and necessary by most of the stakeholders consulted during this review. The HPC is perceived as a key opportunity for improving coordination and building a shared understanding of the magnitude and nature of the humanitarian situation and needs, allowing at the same time to set up common strategic objectives for the response. Nevertheless, the validity of the HNOs to predict the evolution of the situation and to guide operational programming is questioned.

For very dynamic contexts (Syria, Iraq, CAR), a simple and rigid (one-off) HNO is considered not appropriate, as the situation is volatile and the HNO document becomes rapidly outdated limiting relevance for programming even at strategic level. The fact that HNO is based for certain cases on

data from the previous year also further weakens its usefulness (CAR). The whole HPC process is also seen as burdensome, donor and OCHA driven, too process oriented and not resulting in a strong inter-cluster joint analysis and coordinated response planning.

The quality of HNOs also varies from country to country and it heavily depends on the availability and quality of assessments feeding into the joint analysis. A number of cluster representatives and donors (in Iraq, Turkey and global level) consider the HNO documents to be overly generic not allowing audiences to grasp the differences in the humanitarian situation between countries.

The usefulness and validity of CA results is also diverse across different stakeholders as described below:

Sectors

Cluster representatives consulted during the review have recognised that joint assessments and joint analysis products such as the HNOs are relevant to support decisions on the strategic objectives of the response, the nature and scope of the intervention and the prioritisation of areas and allocation of resources. However, there are some limitations as these assessments/products do not provide information on specific gaps. In addition there are specificities in terms of data requirements by sector, which limit the use of joint assessments. Examples of these issues are:

- **Nutrition** indicators such as malnutrition rates, which are required to decide on the type, magnitude and location of the interventions, usually cannot be captured by joint assessments, hence, multi-sector assessment results are not very relevant to guide decisions in this sector. They can serve as a basis to trigger further investigations but this is not enough, there is a need for a more flexible methodology to reflect nutrition.
- **WASH**: The units of analysis required to assess WASH needs are households and communities. Assessments at higher administrative level, such as sub-district level in Syria, have limited use to identify specific WASH needs.
- **Protection**: This sector also needs specific assessment tools and methods due to the sensitive nature of the protection related indicators. Joint assessments can include only part of these indicators. In addition, the unit of analysis is often at individual level. There are concerns also to the training of staff to collect protection data.
- **Health**: Specific information needs for the health sector such as the functioning and quality of health services cannot be easily gathered by tools like MIRA or other rapid joint assessments.

NGOs

- Joint assessments and joint analysis products such as the HNO are used as a basis for strategic decisions. Some NGOs in Iraq mentioned that their country strategy is based on the HNO and the HRP.
- The use of the HNO and CA results is limited among local NGOs mainly because of limited dissemination of the results.
- HNO timelines do not match with the INGOs planning cycle.
- NGOs and the Red Cross/Crescent Movement emphasised the need for quick assessment results to support the immediate delivery of assistance. They stated that MIRA or other CAs take too long and are not appropriate to guide the response in the first 72 hours.
- Positive aspects of the HNO/HRP process are: they help building capacity for assessments; contribution to awareness raising in relation to humanitarian planning; they allow for

strengthening coordination between UN and NGOs which improves relationships during the implementation phase.

UN Agencies

- The extent of use of joint assessments and HNO to inform response decisions across UN agencies varies according to the nature of the emergency as well as capacities, facilities and restrictions to conduct agency specific assessments.
- Representatives of the main UN agencies interviewed (WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR) believed that the results of CAs were often marginal to their decision making. Agencies that have stronger assessment capacity tend to rely more on the results of their own sector assessments to make decisions on whether to intervene, the nature and scale of the intervention and specific programme design and planning.

Donors

Donor feedback on the use of the CAs including joint analysis products such as HNO is mixed.

- For most of the major donors consulted, CAs and the HNO contribute to, but are not the only source for funding decisions. CAs are also considered of great importance to donors as they are undertaken jointly and so this has value. If agencies are able to agree on the outputs of the assessment, and particularly if there has been government involvement or sign-off, this is useful for donors as it can help them to make the case internally to politicians that decisions they make are based on the best possible, jointly agreed evidence. Having a number of agencies saying the same thing strengthens the confidence in the results.
- However, for other donors such as ECHO, the usefulness and value added of the HNO for decision making is very limited. One key issue is related to timeliness and timing. For instance, ECHO normally starts its process of planning its operational strategy for the next year around July (the previous year) and HNOs are released only around September-October, by which time when ECHO has already finalised its strategy. This means, according to ECHO representatives spoken to that they do not look at HNOs when elaborating their funding strategy.
- Donors also raised a concern in relation to validity of data emanating from needs assessments (including CAs) stating that the data is often not perceived as reliable, with an inflation of figures relating to need, perhaps because UN agencies fear that appeals will never be fully funded, so they pitch higher than reality. In addition, the humanitarian environment is competitive. There are huge humanitarian needs and limited resources and this creates competition between agencies, with different organisations and sectors vying for attention and funding, which in turn can lead to perceived inflation of figures.
- According to some donors, the perception of inflated figures, especially in the HNOs is also related to the lack of transparency on the methods used and some analytical caveats that current methods might not be sufficiently capturing data on coping mechanisms and existing capacities. In this regard, they felt that a proper gap analysis is lacking. Furthermore, donors have pointed-out that the actual need assessments do not allow for making a clear distinction between the pre-crisis situation and the effects of the crisis, therefore the magnitude of the needs estimated in the HNOs seem to reflect the pre-crisis situation rather than the situation post-crisis. In addition, the fact that the numbers of actually assisted people is sometimes far below the total number of people in need, raises doubts about the validity of estimated figures, with no one reporting on the situation of the people not assisted.
- ECHO has made it clear that assessment processes should be impartial, transparent, timely and comprehensive. These requirements are not necessarily fulfilled in the HNO process and

with assessments entirely led by operational agencies. It is perceived that there are many interests driving the HPC process (agency specific interest, sectoral interests) and pushing the HCT to prioritise certain sectors that somehow are not filtered in the process to come to a result that is more neutral and impartial.

- Donors do recognise that despite the weaknesses, for certain contexts the CAs are the only comprehensive evidence base to inform funding decisions. This has been expressed for instance for Syria, Yemen and Iraq.
- A number of major donors highlighted that regardless of the results of coordinated (or other) assessments, they will remain obliged to providing funding based on political interest.

3.5. Quality of outputs

This section looks at the quality of CA products in terms of the transparency and consistency of methods and tools used and approaches to inter-sectoral analysis.

A range of different methodologies are adopted from country to country when gathering and presenting data from coordinated assessments. With the HNO being a document that is required from most OCHA country/regional offices it is possible to do a simple comparison of the methodologies applied for collecting and presenting the data resulting from these joint assessments as follows:

Table 5: HNO 2016 methodologies

HNO	People in need	IDP estimates	People living in conflict affected areas	Severity of need by cluster	Severity of need across clusters
CAR[18]	Each cluster estimated the PiN based on IDP and population estimates from different sources and sector severity of needs Total PiN estimated based on figures provided by protection cluster	IDP, returnees provided by the Population Movement Commission (CMP in French) and sector specific assessments	Estimates based on the National Population Census 2003 and sector specific assessments	Each cluster estimates the severity of need based on cluster specific indicators and scales. i.e. food security used the IPC classification, health a five point scale, etc.	Not estimated
Colombia	No clear description of the methods applied to estimate PiN numbers. Estimates include people directly affected by the armed conflict and host communities,		Host communities: estimation based on beneficiaries of Government of Colombia programmes (SISBEN 1 and 2), in areas with high IDP reception rates		Composite index based on: Key humanitarian indicators (50%), MIRA results (10%), and Local Humanitarian Teams qualitative prioritization (40%)
Iraq[19]	Descriptions on the methods only provided for certain clusters: CCCM, Shelter & NFI: estimations based on the MCNA	CCCM, Shelter and NFI: IDP estimates based on the DTM			Estimation based on: Proportion of displaced people compared to the total and host governorate population and percentage of displaced people living in critical shelter arrangements. No description on how indicators were combined
Mali	No clear description but some clusters mention sector specific assessments or analysis i.e. FS Cadré Harmonize, IPC, Nutrition- SMART survey No description on how the total PiN was calculated	No description	No description	Same as PiN	No description on the methods used
Myanmar	Not clear description but sector specific assessments are referred in the text	No clear description but references to figures provided by CCCM cluster		No description	No description
Nigeria	Determined through cross-referencing information from 5 databases looking at poverty; food security; displacement;	DTM	Displacement source information and projected census figures	Each sector provided 1-3 proxy indicators and contextual data provided by OCHA.	Sector severity information was triangulated using the Needs Comparison Tool.

[18] Description on the methods used to estimate figures are only provided as very brief footnotes at the end of each sector chapter

[19] Information sources and approaches used to estimate figures only included as very brief footnotes by cluster

	conflict incidents; and population distribution.				
South Sudan	Calculated by a) breaking down the number of people in need per cluster at county-level; b) identifying the highest cluster people in need figure per county; and c) adding up the highest cluster people in need figures per county to develop the total.	Estimates based population projections, available information on displacement, including the counties of origin of people who have fled the country as refugees and those who have arrived at PoC sites,			Severity index based on indicators related to mortality, morbidity and vulnerability, Including available sector specific indicators.
Syria (HNO 2016)	Sectoral PiN estimated based on 3 information sources: population estimates, needs analysis and sectoral severity scale inter-sectoral PiN was calculated using the maximum PiN across all sectors per sub-district	Estimation based on 3 data sets: Whole of Syria Assessment, governorate profiles, covering and landscan satellite imagery population estimation.	Same as number of IDPs	Each cluster provide estimation based on key sectoral indicators organised using a six point scale. Linking also with measures of the magnitude of the problem, coping mechanisms and access to aid	OCHA estimates the inter-cluster severity of needs by transforming the sector specific severity ranks into percentages and calculating the geometric mean of all sectoral ranks per sub-district.
Yemen (2016)	Cluster estimates of PiN relying on available data, pre-crisis estimates of need and expert consensus. Each cluster determines its own methodology then OCHA reviews all cluster PiN estimates and selects the highest cluster figure for each governorate. The sum of these figures is the est. total PiN.	Data comes from the Task Force on Population Movements. Figures are endorsed by the HCT	Pre-crisis population of districts with recurrent conflict/airstrikes combined with IDP numbers in districts without recurrent conflict/airstrikes. IDP numbers are taken as a proxy for affected people in districts not directly affected by conflict.	Each cluster provides expert consensus using a five point scale. OCHA provides each cluster with estimates of IDPs; conflict-affected people; casualties and previous cluster estimates of PiN.	OCHA estimates the overall severity of needs across clusters based on individual cluster estimates by averaging all cluster scores with life-saving clusters weighted three with other clusters, weighted two.

A clear documentation of the methods and tools used for data collection and analysis as well as limitations of the approaches applied to estimate needs and number of PiN is important to judge the validity and confidence level of the estimations provided, contributing to the transparency of the needs analysis. In this regard, not all of the HNOs reviewed include a clear description of methodological approaches used. Many of the 2014 and 2015 HNOs considered in this review did not include a section or notes on the analytical methods applied by sector and across sectors. This has improved in 2016, thereby from the nine 2016 HNO reviewed, a total of four[20] included a separate section or annex explaining the methods used to estimate populations, PiN and sector and inter-sector severity of needs; three[21] included partial descriptions or brief references as footnotes, while two[22] did not include or included only very few references (Table 5 above). For some HNOs like Mali and Myanmar, even data/information sources for numbers and statements included in the text are not well documented. None of the HNO reviewed included a description on the limitations of the data collection and analysis methods applied and the estimates provided.

In terms of reliability of the estimates within HNOs, there is a standard guidance on the estimation of severity scales and PiN that can be adapted to each country and context[23]. The review of a number of HNO documents shows that the type of indicators and analytical approaches used to estimate these figures vary greatly across countries (see Table 5 above). Whilst for countries like Yemen, Syria and CAR, methods applied are to certain extent aligned to the standard guidance[24], for the case of Iraq analytical methods are decided at cluster level resulting in non-interoperable severity ranking scales. It can be said that adapting methods to context is positive, however the great variability in methods indicates the absence of a generic or systematic approach. Reinforcing this finding, a number of stakeholders contacted in Syria-Turkey and Iraq mentioned that analytical methods change every year, and according to them the lack of standardisation results in reduced reliability and consistency in relation to estimated figures. In Colombia, the method to calculate PiN in host communities differed between 2015 and 2016.,[25] Lack of standardisation and consistency in the indicators and analytical approaches does not allow for a reliable multi-year analysis and monitoring of trends, while comparability across countries is also difficult, if not impossible.

Inter-sectoral analysis

Apart from the estimation of inter-cluster severity of needs, the HNOs lack a more comprehensive inter-sectoral analysis of the situation. There is no an analysis on the co-existence of needs and possible causal or other type of relationships between needs and determinant factors (e.g. lack of water and sanitation leading to higher levels of malnutrition). This weak inter-sectoral analysis of needs does not facilitate inter-sectoral programming approach. This issue has been highlighted by certain donors at global level and cluster representatives in CAR and Colombia in terms of why it is necessary to advocate for more inter-sectoral assessments, while the analysis is lacking a

[20] Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and Nigeria

[21] Colombia, Iraq, CAR

[22] Mali, Myanmar

[23] To support the prioritization of needs, HCTs have the option to use a standardised tool based on a severity ranking approach. The tool provides a method and structure to prioritize needs by categorising and weighing indicators along geographical areas, sectors, inter-sectoral aspects and demographics. It can be adapted to either data poor or data rich contexts. Findings derived from applying this tool should be included in the humanitarian needs overview. The tool is optional, and other tools developed for different contexts may alternatively be used for severity ranking.

[24] Humanitarian Needs Comparison Tool and PiN

[25] Colombia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016. Page.12.

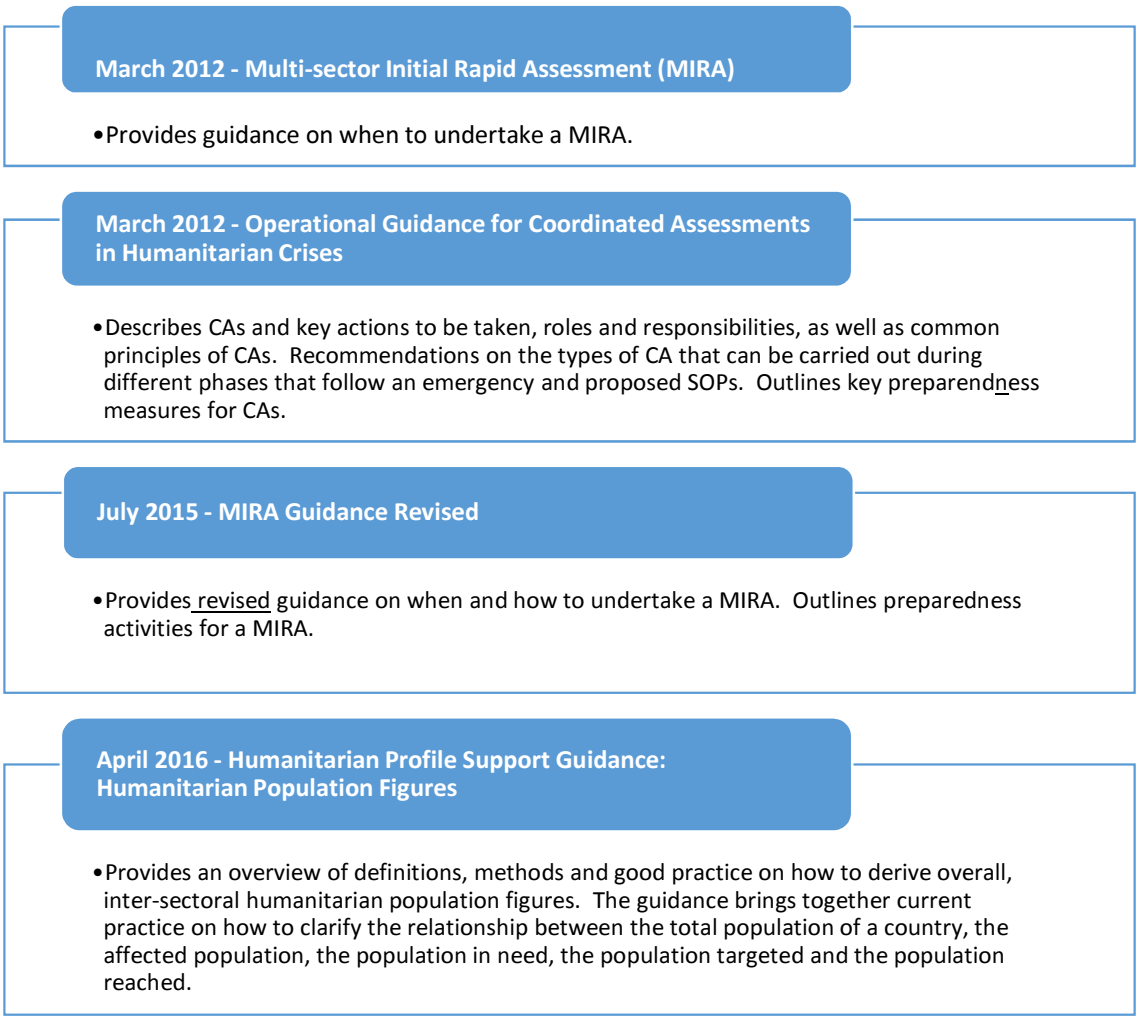
comprehensive inter-sectoral focus and most important, programming continues to be sectoral and fragmented, not looking at synergies and complementarities across sectors.

3.6. Guidance and tools

This section looks at levels of buy-in to and appropriateness of existing CA guidance, and areas that need further guidance.

In recent years the IASC has developed different forms of guidance to help support coordinated assessments. Some of the key guidance is highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Key Coordinated Assessment Guidance



Awareness and buy-in to the current IASC guidance and tools related to coordinated assessments vary from country to country. For example, in Nigeria whilst there is some awareness of the tools and guidance, they are not well known and this, combined with lack of resources in OCHA and other agencies, has resulted in the guidance not being sufficiently followed at CO level (for example, a limited number of the preparedness activities have been undertaken – see Table 6 below). In contrast, in the Syria offices in Jordan and Turkey and the Philippines, MIRA guidance is well known among stakeholders and it is mostly considered appropriate and sufficient. In other countries such as Iraq and Colombia, awareness of existing guidance is limited across international and local stakeholders, mainly due to the limited dissemination and language barriers as most of the guidance is only available in English and not in Arabic or Spanish.

More recently, the IASC Information Management Working Group has produced guidance on methods and good practice on how to derive overall, inter-sectoral humanitarian population figures.[26] Whilst the guidance that exists is of strong quality it is often long and in order for it to be of use, and those involved in supporting and coordinating CAs need to have read it in advance. This is one of the factors that discourages use of existing guidance by more operational partners, as mentioned by global NGO network representatives and the Red Cross/Crescent Movement.

Areas that need further guidance

There remains a need for the development of new guidance and/or adaptation/fine-tuning of existing guidance in some areas including protracted crises; cross-cutting issues; inter-sectoral analysis; urban environments; conflict situations; and hard-to-reach locations as follows:

Inter-sectoral data analysis: Despite the existence of guidance on the estimation of inter-sector severity of needs and PiN, it is perceived that is not enough. There is a need for more guidance on how to do a more credible inter-sector situation analysis highlighting for instance relationships between needs and identifying which needs should be addressed at the same time, immediately and in the medium and long term.[27]

Protracted crises: Most of the stakeholders in countries facing protracted crisis agreed that the current CA guidance is limited for such contexts. All agreed that protracted crises require analysis that is both broader and deeper. An in-depth understanding of the dynamics and trends in the vulnerabilities and their main determinant factors, the existing capacities including affected population´s coping capacities, the social context and the institutional framework including grass roots organisations is required not only to identify needs and to address critical constraints and risks to life and livelihoods but also to understand the underlying causes of the crisis and design appropriate response options. The assessments in certain countries such as Colombia and to certain extent CAR – transiting from acute long lasting conflict to post-conflict situations - should also allow to better guide decisions on how to bridge relief – development interventions to ensure that needs of people facing different levels of vulnerability are adequately met.

[26] *Humanitarian Profile Support Guidance: Humanitarian Population Figures* – IASC (April 2016)

[27] Coordinated assessment and joint analysis- how could they look like in various types and stages of crises? CASS internal paper 2016.

Cross cutting issues: Specialists interviewed highlighted that the current guidance for CAs need to be strengthened to adequately incorporate cross cutting issues such as gender and age dimensions and Communication with Communities (CwC).

Emerging issues: Looking to the future and developments in humanitarian assistance, there is likely to be a need for further guidance from OCHA in relation to developing assessment approaches that provide sufficient data to feed into response options analysis that will support decision making on the most appropriate forms of assistance e.g. cash, in-kind or a combination of the two. In addition, in light of increasing urbanization and urban disasters, another area where guidance will need adaptation is for urban assessments.

Hard to reach locations: Given that access constraints frequently hampers assessments, stakeholders interviewed highlighted the need for more guidance on how to assess needs in hard to reach areas. In this line, to review existing approaches and develop guidance sheets and assessment methodologies based on examples of good practice, would be necessary.

3.7. The role of OCHA in facilitating coordinated assessments

This section examines the role played by OCHA in the CA process looking at added value and limitations.

According to the MIRA guidance and the Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises, OCHA normally takes on the role of the assessment coordinator: overseeing the coordination of the MIRA process, encouraging participation by key humanitarian actors in the assessment team and ensuring production and dissemination of key MIRA outputs.

All stakeholders have recognised and welcomed OCHA´s coordination role in this regard. However, in practice, the role of OCHA varies according to the context with existing staff capacities and skills being an influencing factor. In some contexts where capacity to undertake assessments is stronger among the main humanitarian actors, OCHA acts as facilitator of the CAs process. This is the case in Colombia. In other contexts OCHA also plays a greater role of the joint data analysis and reporting as can be seen in Nigeria.

The following are areas where OCHA´s facilitating role was crucial for coordinated assessment:

- **Access:** OCHA had greatest impact ensuring humanitarian access to conflict affected areas (Syria, CAR, and Iraq) to undertake assessments.
- **Information management**: Stakeholders agreed that one of OCHA's greatest comparative advantage is information management: data visualisation, reporting and dissemination.
- **Brokering:** OCHA often plays a critical brokering role between the humanitarian community and the governments.
- **Training**: Training of stakeholder staff on information management (GIS training, Coordinated Assessments and Information Management (CAIM) training) was noted as being useful in terms of boosting agency assessment skills and capacity.

Limitations

OCHA staff highlighted that the assessment coordination role of OCHA is undermined by lack of clarity on how much power OCHA has to bring together all parties, as some listen only to directives emanating from higher levels (i.e. the HC) or their own organisational structure, such as the case of stronger UN agencies. They mentioned also that for them, existing policies and guidance are not explicit on the role of OCHA.

OCHA´s leadership has been also weakened by the lack of staff with strong assessment experience compounded by the high staff turnover that left periods with no presence of appropriate staff in charge of the coordination of assessments in some countries (i.e. this was seen in Iraq and CAR).

With the exception of Syria (Jordan and Turkey) and Colombia the rest of COs spoken with during this review have no specific/dedicated assessment focal point and often, even when OCHA staff have been appointed as responsible for assessments (among other tasks) these staff lack technical assessment skills and training to allow them to confidently lead and guide in-country coordinated assessments processes. This can be seen in Nigeria for example, where a number of staff in Abuja and in Maiduguri are involved in different elements of the assessment process but none have received any formal training (so they bring only their experience from previous missions) and there is no single dedicated assessment focal point. In the case of CAR and Philippines assessment related tasks are shared by the coordination and information management specialists, who were not trained in assessments but have gained a certain level of experience from previous assessment exercises. Conversely, for the Syria regional crisis the set-up includes staff that received training in assessments (Turkey) and a team with strong GIS and data management capacities. This lack of skilled and/or assessment-focused staff at CO level has impacted on OCHA CO preparedness for CAs including agreement in advance on what a CA will cover, the structure of the assessment and assessment processes.

In some of the countries visited the OCHA CO has developed an assessment registry or inventory. This is considered as a valuable tool to assist agencies in seeing which locations and sectors have been assessed and which have not as well as to identify opportunities for sharing of assessment data. However, not all organisations contribute to the inventory and OCHA has not set this system up on a systematic basis in all COs.

3.8. The role of CASS

This section looks at CASS support to CAs and Joint Analysis (JA) processes; production of quality outputs; provision of training, field missions, remote technical advice and improvement of methods and tools.

All countries reviewed have received some form of technical support from CASS in the past three years. Overall most of the support provided was demand driven (based on requests from COs) and consisted of direct assistance in-country through CASS staff short missions and remote support from Geneva.

According to the CASS staff interviewed in Geneva, assistance to COs, spanned from: providing technical assistance to the coordination and design of CAs and joint analysis; delivering or contributing to training activities; reviewing and developing assessment materials; implementing assessment data

collection and analysis - including inter-sectoral analysis for HNOs; reviewing and editing assessment reports or HNO documents; and writing entire HNO documents.

Concrete examples of CASS technical assistance to countries included in this review are:

- Development and revision of standard algorithms and analytical tools: cluster and inter-cluster severity scale and estimation of people in need, as a contribution to the HNO process (all countries visited except for Philippines where the HPC is not active), and developing a weighting scale to define the best estimated figures provided by key informants (Syria).
- Facilitating the coordination, design and implementation of CAs (i.e. MSNA in Syria, MIRA 2014 in CAR, and MIRA Typhoon Haiyan in Philippines).
- Short CASS staff missions to introduce specific CA components, methods and tools: i.e. introduction of the needs comparison tool in Iraq.
- Short CASS staff missions to guide the HNO process including inter-sectoral analysis (Syria).
- Remote technical backstopping: the design of coordinated assessments (WOSA in Syria, MIRAs in Colombia), the implementation of the HNO process (Syria, Colombia, Iraq).
- Training on different assessment related topics ranging from information management for rapid need assessments, KoBo toolbox, comprehensive CA training - mostly targeted at UN, NGOs and other humanitarian partners and to lesser extent to OCHA staff (see more detail on training in Annex 3).

The added value of CASS support

Overall, the perception of OCHA field staff consulted in this review on the added value of CASS technical support and inputs was positive in terms of its contribution to ensure increased standardisation and quality in assessment and analytical products. Technical advice on the design of adequate data collection tools, development of standard algorithms for data management and inter-sectoral analysis and training of partners were considered crucial elements for improving the quality of CA products.

Specific value-added to some of the countries included in the review are:

- Political stamping from CASS on the assessment process and results was crucial to facilitate endorsement of the CA by senior management in Syria. In this context, CASS provided a political sheltering of technical changes that are of scale that requires a certain investment.
- In Colombia CASS staff missions and remote support have contributed to increased assessment skills of OCHA CO staff, as field personnel gained experience and improved analytical skills by working jointly with CASS staff. CASS missions were also fundamental to support dissemination and institutionalisation of MIRA in-country. In addition, CASS missions to the regional bureau and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean greatly contributed to raising awareness on the advantages and limitations of the MIRA among governments and humanitarian actors, at the same time promoting its implementation in other countries such as Paraguay and Ecuador.
- OCHA/CASS not being operational body, is also well placed to provide independent analysis, although because it is part of the UN system not all see it as independent.

Drawbacks/limitations

- CASS capacities are limited compared to the high demand for direct field support. In addition there are difficulties in recruiting adequately qualified and skilled staff.
- Although for certain countries CASS support to the field has contributed to strengthening assessment, perceptions that CASS assistance is closer to surge support than geared towards knowledge transfer or on-the job coaching are still of concern at Geneva level. The lack of dedicated assessment focal points and high staff mobility also undermine the possibilities to build sustainable capacities at CO level. This is particularly an issue in conflict affected countries (Iraq, CAR, Syria).
- CASS staff are sometimes perceived to be disconnected from the field and insufficiently aware of the particularities, capacities and limitations prevailing in different countries and contexts (for instance on how to work with national governments and entities - Philippines and CAR). Some staff suggested that the appointment of assessment officers at Regional Bureau level would be a good solution to overcome the limitations of CASS staff from HQ, both in terms of familiarity with the regional context and limited number of staff.
- For a number of countries, the CO staff contacted were not aware of the purpose and the type of services/support offered by CASS (CAR, Syria-Turkey hub, Colombia-subnational staff). Some factors to explain this situation are: the relationship between CO staff and CASS is established on personal and ad hoc basis and not well institutionalised[28]; CASS has not adequately disseminated its purpose, functions and the menu of services across all COs; and a high staff turnover at CO level undermines institutional memory.

3.9. OCHA Country Office preparedness

This section looks at the degree of preparedness at CO level particularly in high risk countries.

The IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises provides some direction for OCHA COs to ensure that they are prepared to undertake CAs. The guidance includes the following points:

- Prepare and agree on assessment formats, indicators and tools.
- Organise preparedness trainings and if possible simulations.
- Establish procedures and responsibilities.
- Prepare common operational datasets, P-Codes[29], and key humanitarian indicators.
- Gather baseline data.
- Prepare fact sheets and lessons learnt disasters.

The MIRA guidance also provides recommendations for assessment preparedness which are of relevance even outside sudden-onset emergency situations where a MIRA itself would not be appropriate.

The table below provides an overview of which of these steps have been put in place in those COs visited as part of this review:

[28] There were cases where staff from OCHA COs had been in touch with CASS staff without realising that the person was even a part of CASS (Colombia, CAR, and Turkey).

[29] A P-Code is a place code (like a postcode). P-codes are used with associated map datasets to ensure consistent mapping and reporting of places where people are in need.

Table 6: OCHA CO assessment preparedness

		CAR	Colombia	Iraq	Nigeria	Philippines	Syria (Jordan)	Turkey
1	**Prepare and agree on assessment formats, indicators and tools.**	No, but planned	Yes, completed	No, no plans	Not initially but in process.	No, but planned, depending on the new government	Yes, but under revision	Yes, but under revision
2	**Organise preparedness trainings and if possible simulations.**	No	Yes, continuous process	No	No.	No	No	No
3	**Establish procedures and responsibilities.**	Yes, partially	Yes, clearly defined	No	Not initially but in process.	No	Yes, partially based on the past experience	Yes, partially based on the past experience
4	**Prepare common operational datasets, P-Codes, and key humanitarian indicators.**	No, but planned	No	No	No	No	Yes, partially	Yes, partially
5	**Gather baseline data.**	No	Yes, partially		No.	In process		
6	**Prepare fact sheets and lessons learnt disasters.**	No	No		No.	No	Yes, some	Yes, some
Total preparedness measures in place (out of 6 measures highlighted		1	3 fully; 1 partially	0	2 in process	1 in process	4	4

The lack of preparedness measures in place in different COs is negatively impacting OCHA's ability to rapidly undertake assessments and produce and disseminate high quality assessment results in a timely manner.

3.10. The Grand Bargain Commitments

During the May 2016 WHS a number of commitments were made by humanitarian stakeholders (UN agencies, IOM, national and international NGOs and the International Red Cross and Crescent Movement). The 10 commitments are set out in the "Grand Bargain" and a number of the commitments are of direct relevance for CASS. The commitment of most relevant for CASS is commitment number 5. The challenges for CASS in realising this commitment as well as steps already taken by CASS to realise it are outlined in the table below.[30]

[30] Commitments 1 (greater transparency); 2 (more support and funding tools for local and national responders); 4 (reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews); and 6 (a participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives) are also of relevance for CASS but are not the focus of this review and are therefore not covered here.

Table 7: The Grand Bargain – Relevance for CASS

Grand Bargain Commitment	Challenges for CASS	Steps made by CASS to realise commitment
5. Improve joint and impartial needs assessments (this commitment applies to those entities participating in the IASC humanitarian response planning process):		
We require needs assessments that are impartial, unbiased, comprehensive, context-sensitive, timely and up to date…..the needs assessment process must be coordinated, impartial, collaborative and fully transparent with a clear distinction between the analysis of data and the subsequent prioritisation and decision-making. All aid organisations and donors commit to: - Provide a single, comprehensive, cross- sectoral, methodologically sound and impartial overall assessment of needs for each crisis to inform strategic decisions on how to respond and fund thereby reducing the number of assessments and appeals produced by individual organisations. - Coordinate and streamline data collection to ensure compatibility, quality and comparability and minimising intrusion into the lives of affected people. Conduct the overall assessment in a transparent, collaborative process led by the HC/RC with full involvement of the HCT and the clusters/sectors and in the case of sudden onset disasters, where possible, by the government. Ensure sector-specific assessments for operational planning are undertaken under the umbrella of a coordinated plan of assessments at inter-cluster/sector level. - Share needs assessment data in a timely manner, with the appropriate mitigation of protection and privacy risks. Jointly decided on assumptions and analytical methods used for projections and estimates. - Dedicate resources and involve independent specialists within the clusters to strengthen data collection and analysis in a fully transparent, collaborative process, which includes a brief summary of the methodological and analytical limitations of the assessment. - Prioritise humanitarian response across sectors based on evidence established by the analysis. As part of the IASC HRP process on the ground, it is the responsibility of the empowered HC/RC to ensure the development of the prioritised, evidence-based response plans. - Commission independent reviews and evaluations of the quality of needs assessment findings and their use in prioritisation to strengthen the confidence of all stakeholders in the needs assessment. - Conduct risk and vulnerability analysis with development partners and local authorities, in adherence to humanitarian principles, to ensure the alignment of humanitarian and development programming.	- Putting together the MIRA and having it endorsed by the IASC took a number of years. This methodology and tool cannot be used in all contexts. Being able to develop a single, comprehensive, cross-sectoral, methodologically sound and impartial assessment of needs for each crisis will take significant time and will require the bringing together of organisations (such as CASS and 3rd party technical bodies) to define roles and inputs. - Weak/short-term/absent HC/RCs and resulting weak cluster/sector coordination mechanisms in a number of contexts stands in the way of OCHA's ability to put in place transparent, collaborative and effective assessment processes. - The commitment is broad yet detailed. CASS resources to contribute are limited yet their inputs are critical.	- CASS has developed a proposal and protocols for joint situation and needs analysis in sudden-onset and protracted crisis in partnership with other organisations.[31] - CASS is the process of designing a new strategy in order to improve their delivery capacity in terms of technical support to align the CAs process to the grand bargain commitments

[31] *Proposed Protocols for Joint Analysis in Sudden-Onset and Protracted Crisis* (Draft, 31 May 2016) and *Proposal for Joint Situation and Needs Analysis in Sudden-Onset and Protracted Crises in Partnership (*Draft, 8 June 2016)

4. Conclusions

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the need for and benefits of coordinated assessments. Guidance has been developed to support this form of assessment although there remain limitations to this guidance in terms of relevance to different contexts. Whilst the focus on coordinated assessments has ensured that they are undertaken in a variety of different scenarios (complex emergencies; protracted crises; conflict and insecurity environments; and post sudden onset disaster for example), this is not done on a systematic basis and there continues to be a prioritisation of sector/agency-specific assessments over CAs. Indeed one of the limitations of CAs is that even when joint analysis is undertaken this does not appear to reduce the need for sector/agency-specific assessments in order to inform operational programming and/or to gain access to donor funding in a continually competitive humanitarian funding environment. But it is important that these sector specific assessments should be harmonised to ensure a more efficient use of resources and avoid duplications and assessment fatigue.

Recent years have seen the creation of the MIRA which is useful in sudden onset situations (although even here there are challenges for example, translating some of the terminology into meaningful local language). Apart from the Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises, the MIRA is the only CA approach which has the endorsement from the IASC and is certainly the best known among humanitarian agencies. C. However, as long as MIRA has been applied some of its limitations become evident, in terms that the process is still heavy and not suited for complex contexts. Before MIRA, a number of multi-sector assessment initiatives and methodologies have been developed (sometimes with OCHA leading the development process and sometimes other UN agencies taking this role). This can be seen with WFP's Emergency Food Security Assessment approach and with country-specific initiatives such as the rapid assessments undertaken as part of the RRM in South Sudan, Iraq and CAR for example and the RMMP in DRC. These latter initiatives combine rapid assessment with immediate delivery of assistance. These initiatives in multi-sector assessment approaches serve to highlight that although there is broad support for CAs, there is consensus that there is no a single methodological approach that can be applied to the great diversity of humanitarian contexts. As such, there remains a need for further development of tools and methodologies to support CAs in a wide range of contexts. Humanitarian response environments where there is considered to be a need for this tool development include protracted crises; insecure/conflict environments, particularly where there is limited access; and urban settings.

The review found that there are different levels of involvement of international and national stakeholders in CAs with national NGOs being less frequently involved in the design and analysis stages of assessments but more being relied upon to undertake primary data collection.

Whilst there is broad support from a range of stakeholders – donors, UN agencies, NGOs, host governments – for CA processes this is not uniform and this support is not always translated into practice. For example, some host governments stand in the way of coordinated assessment processes (and assessment in general) and/or have been perceived to influence the results of such assessments (in relation to PiN figures for example). Operational agencies spoken to during this review for the most part see the benefits of CAs but this does not mean that they always participate in them. There are a number of reasons for this including lack of human and financial resources (which they prefer to dedicate to their own assessments) or a need to disassociate themselves from assessments where there is government involvement which may risk jeopardising their neutrality. Similarly, donors are

supportive of CAs and see their value as they present a shared and agreed picture of needs but at the same time there is an absence of funding to support operational agencies being involved in CAs in addition to their own assessments.

There remains a need for senior leadership support and commitment to CAs including increased funding in order to overcome the factors that hinder buy-in and trust to CA processes. These are related to: the lack of understanding of the benefits and limitations of CAs; perceived low transparency in relation to methodologies; and analytical caveats in the methods and tools applied to estimate need and PiN numbers.

The involvement of non-operational technical third parties in assessment and analysis has become more commonplace in recent years and a number of benefits and drawbacks to this. Advantages that have been highlighted include the specific technical skills that these organisations can bring which are often lacking within operational humanitarian organisations, with analysis being a key skill highlighted. The independent nature of the analysis provided by third parties is seen as important in terms of flagging priority needs and locations as such organisations have no vested interest and are not part of the funding competition that operational agencies are obliged to take part in, although some voices question their independence in terms that these organisations also respond to the interest of their funding agencies or donors. One criticism levied at the increased involvement of third parties is that they rarely undertake local level or organisational capacity building activities as part of their work.

OCHA CASS and OCHA COs have played a critical and central role in terms of supporting and facilitating CAs across the globe. However, many COs have significant capacity constraints with very few having a dedicated assessment focal point/coordinator and a number of OCHA staff assigned to be responsible for coordinating CAs lacking the requisite skills and training required. This has in turn led to COs frequently turning to CASS for a wide range of support, particularly in the build up to the HNO process. This support has included complex technical assistance such as the development and revision of standard algorithms and analytical tools and training on assessment-related topics. Support from CASS is highly valued by COs but CASS in turn has its own capacity limitations and is therefore increasingly less able to respond positively to requests for direct support through missions, instead having to provide advice remotely. Weaknesses in capacity, particularly at CO level, are often compounded by weaknesses within the senior leadership of OCHA and other UN agencies and this has led to a lack of focus on CAs. In order to encourage UN agencies and other operational organisations to participate in CA processes there is a need for strong leadership within the UN system and this is lacking in some contexts.

This review has found that in those countries visited there is a lack of preparedness for undertaking CAs. Adequate preparedness including the establishment of assessment coordination mechanisms; standard operational procedures; clearly defined roles and responsibilities; pre-elaborated data collection and analysis tools; and baseline data are factors that facilitate and speed up CAs but many of these important factors are not yet in place.

In recent years there has been significant progress towards highlighting the need for and benefits of CAs, combined with the development of a variety of tools and methodologies to support this. CASS and OCHA COs have made significant efforts to ensure that CA processes become systematic in all contexts but this is challenging due to lack of capacity and skills; lack of understanding of the benefits of contributing to CAs by operational organisations; and political and security impediments. There

remains the need for the development of further guidance or adaptation of existing guidance to ensure that all contexts have appropriate tools available to undertake CAs and increased donor and agency support to participate in these processes. This should in turn ensure more transparent methodological approaches to CAs, particularly to ensure that the identification of those in need and the identification of sectoral needs are done based on sound and objective criteria, which should ultimately benefit more appropriate and timely responses in support of those affected by disasters.

5. Recommendations

Based on the review's key findings, 14 recommendations are made in order to contribute to the enhancement of OCHA's capacity at country, regional and global levels to coordinate needs assessment and analysis. Additional country-specific recommendations are provided in the country level reports that are annexed to this review.

Recommendations	Who is responsible	Links to key findings
Assessment practice **Recommendation 1: Promote assessment harmonisation** While it is clear that CAs, especially joint assessments, do not replace or eliminate the need for sector/agency specific assessments that are necessary for operational programming, it is important to ensure that these assessments are effectively coordinated, to use resources more efficiently. By including appropriate indicators, harmonised sectoral assessments could also serve to both purposes: strategic planning and operational programming. To achieve this, it is necessary to promote and support the re-design of sectoral assessments in a way that they become more harmonised. The following is recommended: ● Humanitarian actors under the leadership of OCHA COs should start by pre-defining a core set of indicators that are required by all operational organisations and need to be included in each sector/agency specific assessment. This is considered to be feasible as the majority of sectoral assessments already include indicators from various sectors. ● Agree on common units of analysis and temporal synchronisation to allow data inter-operability and joint analysis. ● Develop data sharing platforms and joint analysis protocols, preferably pre-crisis and reinforce the assessment information sharing. ● Additionally OCHA leadership and cluster leadership should consistently promote the adoption of harmonised approaches and data sharing.	CASS OCHA CO – Assessment focal point Inter-Cluster Coordination (ICC) Country AIM Working Group	KF 2
Recommendation 2: Establish regular monitoring of trends and programmes Needs assessments cannot be considered as a one-off – they do provide a snapshot but they need to be updated as necessary and as feasible. Drawing monitoring together with needs assessment is critical in this regard. This is emphasised in the IASC Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) reference	CASS OCHA -HQ OCHA CO – Assessment focal point ICC	KF 9

module[32]. The quarterly Periodic Monitoring Reports (PMR) process managed by OCHA should also allow for the linkages between assessments and monitoring (with the PMRs facilitating the updating of data). It would be important to reinforce the OCHA COs capacity (see recommendation 9) but also get the commitment of the ICC to prioritise the implementation of quarterly exercises to refresh an understanding of needs, based on the systematisation of existing data from assessments and monitoring exercises going on in the country . This would allow for the identification of trends and the use of proxy indicators looking at trends. This would then allow for a convergence at the HNO planning stage, bringing assessments and shared indicators together. The next step is then for OCHA and operational agencies to show that the data being put together in this way is being used to feed into programming. This in turn requires sufficiently flexible programme design to allow for needs-based change where necessary. And this in turn needs the support of the donors (flexible and adjustable programming) who are seeking this robust type of data collection and analysis process.		
Coordination Processes **Recommendation 3: Systematically set up assessment working groups** At country level, consideration should be given to the systematic establishment of assessment working groups, led by OCHA which have clear ToR for organising joint or harmonised assessments. In cases of sudden onset emergencies these should be established as early as possible to guide the initial rapid assessment. Depending on context, the Assessment Working Group should fall under the ICCG in order to ensure increased visibility.	Inter-cluster Coordination (ICC) OCHA CO Assessment focal point	KF 6
Recommendation 4: Increase coordination and involvement of national organisations There is a need for the increased involvement of national NGOs and CBOs in coordinated assessment processes. They are often more familiar with the context and have increased access than the UN and INGOs. Specific actions in this line should be: • Training on CA processes (beyond the MIRA) in the local language. • Provision of guidance, tools, assessment products and other documents in local language and widely disseminate among local organisations.	OCHA CO - Assessment focal point ICC	KF 4
Recommendation 5: Systematically involve technical third parties Given the positive experience so far, especially in terms of these parties adding high level analytical skills and neutrality to assessments, and in line with the Grand Bargain commitments, collaboration with them should be strengthened. This, however, does not mean that assessments are conducted solely by third parties, but under collaborative arrangements with the rest of stakeholders. To achieve this the following is recommended:	OCHA HQ (PSB) CASS - HQ	KF 7

[32] file:///C:/Users/Tim/Desktop/lois%20docs/OCHA%20CASS/hpc_reference_module_2015_final_.pdf

● CASS plans to further engage with a number of third parties in its current and future work on joint assessment in sudden-onset and protracted crises should be pursued and move towards establishing more formal collaborative arrangements to ensure that the engagement of these parties is more systematic and predictable rather than on demand basis. ● OCHA / CASS should advocate towards donors to fulfil commitments under the Grand Bargain and ensure increased funding to support the involvement of independent bodies.		
Buy-in to coordinated assessments **Recommendation 6: Increase understanding of the need for CAs – clarification of the added value, purpose and limitations of CAs within the humanitarian community** In order to increase operational agency buy-in for CAs there needs to be further dissemination work undertaken by OCHA within the clusters, sectors and with organisational HQs to highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in CAs. This dissemination/advocacy needs to highlight that if done effectively with inputs and involvement of a broad range of operational actors that the results of CAs should be able to highlight priority sectors; priority affected groups; and affected geographic areas. Dissemination should also stress clearly the limitations of CAs.	CASS OCHA RB/CO	KF 8
Use of coordinated assessment results **Recommendation 7: Increase advocacy and dissemination** to gain donor commitments to support CAs There is a need for an increased focus at donor level in order to highlight commitments within the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (GHD) and the Grand Bargain. Donors need to emphasise to their operational partners the importance and relevance of involvement in coordinated assessments which are used to gain an initial (and ongoing) broad understanding of numbers of PiN, their locations and priorities. In order to contribute to fulfilling the commitments made by the donor community within the Grand Bargain and the GHD donors should consider allocating funds for initiatives promoting CAs and specifically to support operational organisations and independent organisations to participate in CAs, both for full participation as well as participation in the design and analysis phases of such assessments. ***OCHA has an important role in reminding donors of their obligations in this regard.***	CASS OCHA HQ	KF 8
OCHA's role **Recommendation 8: Strengthen the assessment registry (repository/inventory)** Assessment registries need to be reinforced and made more functional, in all countries, in order to improve the coordination and synchronisation of assessments. Some actions and adjustments suggested to move in this direction are:	OCHA CO – Assessment focal point	KF 2

● The registry should include not only past or ongoing assessments but also planned assessments. ● The Excel sheet used to gather assessment information should be complemented/replaced by a user-friendly online platform to enter the data across all countries. ● Disseminate more regularly (monthly) the map and consolidated information on assessment work going on in-country. ● Presentation of and discussions on ongoing assessments should be included as a discussion point in all Inter Cluster Coordination meetings to encourage stakeholders to share information and identify areas which are over or under assessed.		
Recommendation 9: Increase OCHA capacity to facilitate coordinated assessments Given that one of the remaining weaknesses for OCHA to facilitate CAs is related to the relatively low capacity of OCHA COs in terms of skilled human resources, it is important that OCHA should implement a strategy to reinforce its own capacities. The strategy should include short term and medium term actions as follows: 1) Systematic training on CAs to CO staff with priority given to national staff to ensure sustainable capacities at country level. To date training has not prioritised OCHA staff. In this line, surge human resources should also focus on capacity building and on the job learning to reinforce national staff capacities. 2) Designate assessment focal points in each CO to lead the assessment facilitation process. Clear coordination lines should be established between the assessment focal points and other sections within the CO to ensure that additional support (i.e. coordination, information management, etc.) is adequately provided when necessary. 3) Consider appointing assessment focal points at regional bureau level, to support assessment related activities, including preparedness and capacity building at country level as well as to build up partnerships and advocacy at regional level. RB focal points would be part of the surge mechanism, having the advantage of being more familiar with the regional/country contexts. 4) To reduce the high staff turnover, the human resources and staffing strategy within OCHA should move towards longer term contracts (at least one year), to ensure the permanency of international staff in the same country and help build up coordination mechanisms for assessments and support in country capacity building.	CASS OCHA CO/HQ OCHA HQ OCHA HQ	KF 14
OCHA CO Preparedness **Recommendation 10: Strengthen preparedness for assessments** There is a need for preparedness for assessments to be prioritised and reinforced, particularly in those countries at high risk of emergency.	OCHA CO	KF 17

At country level, preparedness measures should be put in place on the basis of the actions suggested by the IASC guidance with the following three being considered as top priority: ● Definition of standard operating procedures (SOP) with clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in assessments. SOPs should be explicit on when and who is responsible to trigger the assessments to avoid delays in the launch of assessments especially in cases of sudden onset disasters. ● Agreed upon data collection and analysis templates, including a definition of key sector indicators. ● Build up scenarios and pre-estimate likely impact of disasters, based on baseline data available, geographical and spatial information and lessons learned from past events. These scenarios can be a good start to assess the situation in the first 72 hours. ● Overall preparedness products such as SOP, tools, templates or others should be realistic and feasible.		
Quality of outputs **Recommendation 11: Ensure high quality CA products and inter-sector analysis** ● In order to improve quality and transparency of the assessment products clear guidance should be given to assessment focal points or staff responsible for facilitating CAs in country offices to: o Ensure that data analysis methods and tools applied as well as their limitations are systematically documented across all CA reports. o Ensure consistency on the indicators and analytical approaches used to estimate PiN and severity of needs across time for the same country to allow over time comparison (trend monitoring). ● To facilitate and improve inter-sectoral analysis, consider the development of a conceptual analytical framework that shows the relationship existing between needs and their causal factors (UNICEF´s conceptual framework of the determinants of mortality and malnutrition, and the analytical framework for the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) are examples of this). This framework should be adapted by each context and will help needs prioritisation highlighting which needs should be addressed first and at what level (individual, household, and community). ● In consultation with cluster members, consider establishing standardised thresholds for key sector level indicators to classify severity of need levels. This will allow for comparability of estimations over time and trend analysis.	CASS	KF 12
Guidance and tools **Recommendation 12: Develop adaptable generic assessment tools** Each country visited in this review has had to develop/adapt country-specific multi-sector assessment tools. In addition, it is clear that given the great diversity of contexts it is impossible to have one assessment approach that fit to each case. Hence there is a need for a modular multi-sector assessment	OCHA CO CASS	KF 13

toolbox which includes a generic multi-sector assessment tool/template (especially for data collection) but which can be adapted and adjusted to context depending on specific environments. Having tools available, rather than having to develop them on the spot, should facilitate OCHA in convincing agencies and organisations present on the ground to adopt the same data collection methodology which will in turn improve the quality of data collected.		
Recommendation 13: Complement, fine-tune and adapt existing guidance There is a need for promoting a wider use of existing guidance but also adapting this guidance and/or developing new guidance in areas that have been identified as lacking. Additions to the existing guidance in the form of specific guidance sheets or notes should be made for the following areas: *Protracted crises:* Develop specific guidance to allow a deeper understanding of people´s situation (vulnerabilities, capacities, coping mechanisms) and needs in protracted crises and to allow for the identification of trends over time. Guidance should incorporate the lessons learned and experiences from the several protracted crises scenarios where assessments are being conducted. Approaches should consider advantages and limitations of joint assessments or harmonised sector specific assessments *Cross cutting issues:* The current initiatives to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender as well as Communication with Communities (CwC) should be continued and reinforced in close collaboration with specialised sections within OCHA and other partners. *Emerging issues such as cash programming and humanitarian issues in urban contexts:* Considering that the attention to both aspects is increasing, it is necessary to update assessment guidance to respond to the increasing demand on need assessments that are relevant to inform cash programmes and humanitarian response programming in urban contexts. However, there is also a lot of work that has been done in the development of specific guidance on these topics by specialised global initiatives such as Cash Learning Programme (CaLP), ALNAP and the Global Food Security Cluster (gFSC) (for urban assessments). In order to incorporate these dimensions into CA guidance, it is recommended that instead of OCHA/CASS dedicating additional effort to the development of guidance materials, collaborative arrangements are established with specialised organizations to: ● Provide technical support to the COs when there is a need to incorporate these dimensions. ● Prepare short technical guidance sheets to complement the current CA guidance. *Hard to reach areas:* review existing approaches and develop guidance sheets and assessment methodologies based on examples of good practice	CASS	KF 13
The role of CASS		

Recommendations 14: Strengthen strategic and technical support from CASS *Strategic level* ● There is a need for CASS to reinforce its advocacy work at senior management level (at global level, HQ and CO-HC/HCT level) aiming at gaining stronger buy-in and more investment for coordinated assessments. This should include advocacy at donor level to gain commitments towards promoting CAs as an evidence base for appeals and allocating additional funds to support their implementation. ● CASS should continue to build partnerships at global level with a wider range of humanitarian actors (UN Agencies such as WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, technical third parties, INGOs), setting up collaborative working arrangements to undertake CAs whenever possible. Discussions at this level should also look at finding ways to integrate the various sector/multi-sector assessment approaches beyond the MIRA. *Technical/operational* ● CASS support to the field should be more institutionalised and less on a demand basis. Periodic virtual forums can be scheduled with countries to discuss key issues and provide assistance ● CASS needs to play a more prominent role in promoting cross-fertilisation and experience sharing, systematising and disseminating best practices and lessons learned. One area of interest is the systematisation of lessons learned from protracted crises. It is proposed that CASS could establish a specific working group for protracted crises to discuss existing knowledge and suggest the way forward for the improvement of assessments in such contexts. ● CASS needs to publicise its mandate, functions and menu of services across COs. Field staff contacted in the countries were not aware on the services that CASS can provide. ● CASS staff field missions should be shifted towards capacity building (on the job training, coaching) rather than replacing field staff functions.	CASS OCHA HQ, RB	KF 8

Annex 1: List of people interviewed

Geneva and global level			
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Magalie Salazar	OCHA - Geneva	CASS - Needs Assessment Coordinator & Data Analyst	salazar@un.org
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