

Reporting by Session Note-takers at the 2019 Annual Consultations with NGOs

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Session Title:	“Evidence for Action: Connecting people and data in support of evidence-informed outcomes”
Moderators:	Kimberly Roberson & Kathrine Starup
UNHCR focal point:	Kimberly Roberson
NGO focal point:	Kathrine Starup
Major points arising from speakers and discussions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely, reliable and useable data is key for identification of risks, needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of affected people in displacement situations. The role of evidence is to ensure that our response is driven by this and by people’s own assessment of their threat environment (as opposed to pre-determined projects and generalized assumptions about people’s vulnerabilities and needs). • Achievement of collective outcomes requires a shared understanding of the problems, and our respective responsibilities for solving them. Mind-set and collaborative behaviour comes first, and still needs further investing in – both across sectors and across disciplines. Cross-organizational and multi-disciplinary collaboration on information management is the way forward. • Working to ensure protection outcomes under the Centrality of Protection agenda, we must maintain a strong focus on safe, responsible and purposeful data sharing. We should not be so easily seduced by new technologies for collecting, storing and processing data, but keep an eye on the risks around how this data may be used and abused and kept safe. • A lot of good practices for information management exist and the task at hand is not necessarily to invest in development of new information management systems, frameworks and approaches, but rather to invest in improving and learning from collaborative approaches and in systematizing the ways in which we work. • To advance on our collective commitment to working evidence-based, coordination fora must take the lead (across of all sectors). Organisations and agencies responding to displacement are a collective – we need to get better at sharing and collaborating throughout the steps of the process of working with data and evidence – from identifying information needs to designing information management systems, collecting data to analysis, sharing and use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working truly collaboratively on data collection and analysis will minimize overlaps and maximize sharing and can contribute to joint objectives, such as using evidence for advocacy, informing long-term programming and adjusting response. ○ Across the humanitarian sector, too much data is collected which is never used. Data collection is not worth much if it does not feed into a system. It is important that collected information feeds into actual decision-making. In order to ensure this, we must never embark on data collection without first having clearly identified and defined the exact purpose and information needs – this will enable us to use resources effectively, including to identify whether the data required to meet an identified information need, may already exist/have been collected by another actor. The identification of key stakeholders and definition of the purpose of the data collection is crucial ahead of any data collection process. ○ In our pursuit of a collaborative approach, we must be careful to not interpret standardization to mean uniformity – we need to be better at working with the 	

diverse data sets, which exists across the humanitarian landscape and sectors, and at making sense of that in a practical and problem-solving way. If we can ensure that the data, which is collected, is relevant for practical problem solving, then our information management will align.

- Experience from across coordination fora shows that the introduction of common conceptual frameworks outlining shared principles and approaches, can serve as a solid platform for framing collaboration on evidence for collective outcomes. This requires for coordinating fora / structures to assume leadership by supporting collective capacity building (e.g. through training) and fostering strong working relationships with coordination fora members to explore opportunities for collaboration on concrete information management systems designed to meet collective information needs.
 - At the beginning of a crisis, key decision-makers should be trained on the simple concepts of working with data and evidence, in order to be prepared for how to work effectively with data and evidence.
 - We must not underestimate the “human factor” in relation to effective collaboration – reaching out and establishing personal networks with colleagues from across agencies and sectors, can be key for aiding collaboration to meet common interests and information needs.
- The value of the data which we collect and manage depends on the effective engagement with and involvement of the affected communities throughout the evidence process. Humanitarian organisations and affected communities must work in partnership, not only at the point of data collection, but also in the analysis, use and sharing of data to enhance the quality and relevance of the response. The affected community must have a seat at the decision-making table:
 - Meaningful and impactful community engagement requires for communication to take place in the right language and format. Language must therefore be a key consideration in development of e.g. multi-sector needs assessments and other standard formats and be considered throughout the programme cycle.
 - We tend to professionalize the data area, without identifying the importance for the affected communities. Going forward we should ensure that we work with the affected population not for our purpose, but for responding to their needs – which may be different even from what we perceive them to be. We need to proactively plan and make a strategy for how we meaningfully engage with affected communities.
 - We have to bring information back to communities for validation to ensure that how we interpret and analyse the data is correct and in line with the lived experiences of the affected communities, drawing on an age, gender and diversity sensitive approach.
 - In order for affected people to share their actual concerns with humanitarian responders, trust must be built. This requires basing our work off genuine interest in understanding the perspectives and needs of the people whom we serve; recruitment of local staff with local expertise; diverse teams which can create rapport with the affected community across diversity factors; and managing expectations in terms of what we can deliver.
 - In order to maintain trust between humanitarian organisation and affected communities and in line with data ethics, we must never disregard the importance of obtaining consent from the individuals whose data is collected, not only for the data collection itself, but also for our storage and later use/s.
 - It is important to “close the loop”. Feeding information back into the communities is not only a nice thing to do, it is something we need to do. It is part of meaningfully engaging affected populations and can also be a way to verify the data.

- The word "participation" is a little problematic – we need to understand that people are already putting information out there independently of humanitarian organisations, and that it is up to the humanitarian organisations to understand how the communication flows and how to participate in those processes.
- Donors and governments also have a key role to play in reinforcing the commitment to a collaborative approach to working with data and evidence to inform response.
- Donors must reinforce the collaboration to take place between humanitarian organisations and must also themselves apply a principled and systematized approach in relation to information requests made to the humanitarian organisations.
- Humanitarians should work with governments – not only support – on data and evidence building. Regional meetings can be very useful and regional level data collection dialogue including with governments, who can inspire each other, could be a way forward.
- The CRRF emphasizes the need for a whole-of-society approach – the call for joint analysis and collective outcomes should be framing how we move forward on this.

Recommendations/Conclusions/decisions on the way forward

- Humanitarian organisation and other responders should not only involve affected people at the point of data collection and analysis – but should also involve **affected people when we make decisions based on the resulting analysis**. We must close the loop. Feeding information back into the community is not only nice to do – it is a must!
- A shared conceptual framework is needed for how we work with data and evidence to inform collective outcomes. It is essential for our ability to collaborate on evidence that all partners possess a shared understanding and common reference to shared fundamental principles, competencies, processes and systems. The Protection Information Management (PIM) Conceptual Framework developed jointly by the UN agencies and NGO partners offers this and should be promoted further. **Humanitarian coordination fora have a key role to play to ensure that responsibility is collectively assumed for collaboration on data and evidence.**
- **Regional level dialogue meetings are needed on collaborative approaches to working with data and evidence to inform collective outcomes.** These should involve not only UN and NGOs but also donors and very importantly governments. We need to be cautious to not have parallel processes and to ensure that duty-bearers (governments) are part of the collaboration around information management. National institutions including national statistical offices are becoming stronger and we need to work with this capacity.

Top two quotes from the session

- “If we are really serious about community engagement then we need to build trust with communities and find ways to handle messy data. Processing of qualitative data is possible with rigorous information management.”
- “Data collection is not really worth much if it does not feed into some kind of system. The data collection and analysis which we do should feed into decision-making, otherwise it is a self-fulfilling echo chamber.”
- “If you just collect a lot of data and don't really know what you want to do with it, then you might get lucky and be able to use it. You should rather be clear on what you need to know before you proceed to collect data in order to not have to rely on your luck for your information needs to be met, and for the data, which is collected, to be used.”

Any general points regarding UNHCR-NGO partnerships

- Working meaningfully with affected communities on data and evidence is the accountability of humanitarian organisations. Further leadership and investment is needed for ensuring that humanitarian organisations collectively award affected communities a seat at the table when information needs are defined, information management systems are designed, and collected data analysed and decision-making based on the generated evidence is done.
- At the beginning of a crisis, key decision-makers should be trained on the simple concepts of working with data and evidence, in order to be prepared for how to work effectively with data.
- We should think about strategies for actively engaging grass-roots organizations who have an incredibly strong understanding of the context and the needs. We need strategies for sustainably involving them.
- Coordination meetings frequently happen in English – which serves as a barrier to participation of local actors. They should be conducted in a language and format which facilitates participation on an equal footing. We need to proactively address the trust issues between UNHCR and partners in relation to working safely with data and evidence. Trust is a prerequisite for collaboration, effective use of resources and ensuring that our actions are based on evidence. UNHCR should communicate how they intend to move forward on this (trust building), in line with the commitment stated by Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, George Okoth-Obbo.