THE STORY

Multiple actors – including individuals, governments, UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector – rallied to support the millions of people affected by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in late 2013. Canada, shown here, was one of at least 20 countries that provided military assets, such as air transport for delivery of relief goods, debris clearance, and mobile medical teams.

In the aftermath of the Typhoon the Philippines government launched the Foreign Aid Transparency Hub (FAiTH)– an online platform designed to record financial and in-kind pledges and donations from international governments and institutions – to ensure accountability and improve coordination of resources.

BETTER INFORMATION

For better response

People affected by, or at risk of, crises have dynamic and interlinked needs that often go beyond even the widest interpretation of humanitarian response (see Chapters 7 and 8). To best address these, donors as well as operational agencies and domestic governments require an accurate and current picture of people's needs as well as of the landscape of available resources. Timely, accessible, high-quality and openly available information about needs and financing flows does not guarantee better decision-making on resourcing – but is essential to informing it.

The High Level Panel on the Post–2015 Development Agenda recognised this need in the development context and called for a "data revolution for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens". In response, governments and development organisations are looking at ways to improve the collection, transparency and use of data, particularly at national and sub-national level.

At the same time as the post-2015 data revolution takes shape, there is an ongoing need for improvements in the quality, coordination and accessibility of information on both humanitarian needs and humanitarian financing. As this chapter details, there has been innovation and progress in these areas over recent years, with many new needs assessments and aid transparency initiatives. The challenges remain to continue to adapt, implement and invest in these – as well as to see that this evidence is well-used in decision-making.[1]

Better information about risks and needs

Humanitarian assistance is driven by the imperative to respond according to need. This imperative is at the heart of the humanitarian principles and reiterated in the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which state that funding should be allocated in proportion to needs and on the basis of strong needs assessments.

Yet it is not a simple task to assess the multi-dimensional needs of the most vulnerable people in dynamic, complex and sometimes inaccessible crisis situations. The logistical and methodological challenges can be vast. Defining and prioritising needs is further complicated by the potentially wide scope of humanitarian action – from early action and risk reduction through to recovery and reconstruction. Assessments can also risk being biased towards the needs of those who are most visible, or towards the needs that fit agencies' repertoires of response.[2]

Recent needs assessment initiatives

Over the past five years, there have been renewed efforts to improve the quality, timeliness and coordination of needs assessments. These come both from established humanitarian actors and from newer ones including 'digital humanitarians'. This area of technological innovation has seen rapid growth in recent years and includes the volunteer mobilisation of the Digital Humanitarian Network and Artificial Intelligence for Disaster Response platform from the Qatar Computing Institute.

From established actors, the change in the UN-coordinated appeals process in 2013 was in part an attempt to give more primacy and independence to setting out needs. The previous consolidated appeals process (CAP) integrated needs assessment and project requirements in a single document, thus risking skewing the picture of needs. The new process separates out humanitarian needs overviews, from subsequent strategic response plans (SRPs, see Chapter 2).

DISAGGREGATED DATA

Different groups of people are affected by crises in very different ways and humanitarian actors require evidence of these different impacts so they can best reach those in most need. Gender and age are two factors that contribute to heightened vulnerability in crises, but the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data, though improving, remains lacking.

At the same time, available evidence is not systematically used to inform response. In the Philippines, for example, age-disaggregated data shows that the three areas worst hit by Typhoon Haiyan have higher shares of older people than the national average. Using this information in the strategic response plan (SRP) could have allowed programmers and decision-makers to take the specific needs of these populations into account.[3]

Another recent initiative, which feeds into some humanitarian needs overviews, is the **multi-cluster/sector initial rapid assessment (MIRA).**[4] Developed in 2012 by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, MIRA is a multi-stakeholder assessment, usually conducted in the first two weeks of a sudden onset disaster. Over 40 agencies participated in the first two phases of the MIRA in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan in late 2013, the results of which informed the UN-coordinated SRP.[5] While this multisectoral, coordinated approach is being widely used and adapted in many sudden onset crises, it has not yet been rolled out or adapted for the protracted crises that account for most humanitarian needs.[6]

The **Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS)**, set up by a consortium of NGOs in 2009, works across all kinds of humanitarian crises. It seeks to improve the system-wide assessment of humanitarian needs in crises. It does so through global and country-specific needs briefings, tools, training and deployment of assessment specialists. As well as providing independent support for coordinated assessments in the event of an emergency, ACAPS works with humanitarian actors to strengthen assessment preparedness in high disaster-risk countries.

THE SYRIA NEEDS ANALYSIS PROJECT

The Syria Needs Analysis Project (SNAP) is a joint project between ACAPS and MapAction that has been running since January 2013. It aims to improve understanding of the impact of the conflict in Syria. It does so through identifying, mapping and analysing existing assessment data and providing technical advice to support new, coordinated assessments. Products include monthly overviews of the humanitarian situation as well as specific thematic reports, such as on the cross-border movement of goods. SNAP operates as an independent project, with no affiliation to any one operational agency. Therefore, its assessments are not biased by a resource mobilisation agenda or fixed response repertoire. A mid-term review of SNAP in October 2013 concluded that the project has added significant value to the humanitarian community by improving the targeting of assistance and building a shared situational awareness of the needs of the Syrian population.[7]

Recent risk assessment initiatives

Better information is also required on risks and early warning signs, before these become manifest or acute humanitarian needs. This information should enable preparedness and trigger appropriate resourcing (development or humanitarian, national and international) to protect lives and livelihoods and build resilience. Early warning signs of violence and conflict need to be monitored as well as those of resource scarcity and natural hazards. There are a number of country-specific early warning systems that seek to do this. One example is the Drought Early Warning System in Karamoja, Uganda. This initiative allows the analysis of community vulnerability indicators and weather forecasts, and issues warnings and advice to at-risk communities.[8]

Focusing on global and national levels, **Information for Risk Management** is a new risk index to be launched in November 2014. A collaborative project of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, it aims to identify where crises may occur based on a series of indicators measuring hazards, vulnerability and capacity across 191 countries.

Coordinating needs-based funding

While there is more data on risks and needs, and more coordinated needs assessments than ever before, there is still a need for continued improvement in information gathering, analysis and accessibility.[9] At the same time, the challenge remains to systematically ensure that the allocation of funding is based on this improved understanding of needs, both at a country level and a global level.

A number of recommendations have been proposed in this regard. At global and country levels, donors should work together better to share their analysis of funding needs and gaps and decide collectively on an explicitly agreed division of labour (see Chapter 4). At the global level, this could be managed and coordinated through an operational wing of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative; and at country level through various country-specific donor coordination groups.[10] Not only would this encourage donors to agree and act on a collective analysis of priority needs but it would also support a more transparent and accountable approach to global resource allocation.

NEEDS-BASED BUDGETING

In 2014, a number of UN-coordinated SRPs, including those in Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo, are piloting different methodologies for needs-based budgeting. Previously the consolidated appeal process budgets simply represented the sum of individual project requirements in each cluster. While methodologies differ across countries, generally the new approach begins with each cluster budgeting its activities by assigning an approximate average unit or beneficiary cost to each planned activity, then multiplying that amount by the number of people to be reached to meet the needs of the target population. A UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) review of this pilot approach, due for publication later in 2014, will inform the wider roll-out of activity-based costing.

Better information about financing flows

Without sufficient funds to meet all needs, there are real opportunity costs for the choices that donors make. Donors must target their finite humanitarian funds according to information about needs; but they also need to know what other humanitarian funds are being channelled, and where, in order to best direct their own.

Improving access to this real-time data is critical to improving the effectiveness, coordination and efficiency of the collective humanitarian response – and so to avoid neglect or duplication. It is also critical for full accountability to people on the receiving end of humanitarian assistance. Yet as highlighted throughout this report, there are many areas of data poverty – timely, standardised and accessible data on financial flows is still largely lacking.

Calls for greater transparency in humanitarian assistance are increasing, including through the Open Humanitarian Initiative, which promotes the sharing of information in the humanitarian space through the principles of open data.

International Aid Transparency Initiative

The multi-stakeholder International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is one way in which better data and information on humanitarian assistance could be made publicly available. Launched at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in 2008, there are currently over 260 organisations publishing information to the IATI standard. Originally designed for development aid, initiatives are now underway to modify IATI for the particular time-bound demands and definitions of humanitarian assistance.

The ultimate vision is that IATI will provide a single standardised format to which all actors (governments, private donors and aid agencies) can publish their data. Once published to IATI standard the data can be reused and redirected to any number of reporting platforms, including the UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), and to fulfil donor reporting requirements. This would reduce the multiple

reporting burden currently placed on donors and delivery agencies. It would also allow project-level data to be geo coded so that resources can be traced all the way from donor to final recipient (see Figure 9.1).

Following the first IATI humanitarian stakeholders' workshop in 2013, proposed modifications range from adding a specific humanitarian marker so that humanitarian data can be easily identified, to creating a completely new element specifically for additional humanitarian-related information. Some governments are already using IATI data in their own tracking and transparency initiatives.

DFID's Development Tracker

The UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) uses IATI data to drive its portal, Development Tracker. By using this we can see, for example, that £98m of DFID's £355 million Girls' Education Challenge fund has so far been spent, £19.1 million of which is currently showing as having been allocated by fund manager Price Waterhouse Cooper to projects for implementation. Funds can then be traced to the organisations tasked with delivering the work. Once work is being delivered using Girls' Education Challenge funds, projects should be fully geocoded, enabling access to a detailed mapping of project delivery. While this example relates to development financing, it demonstrates the potential for geocoded data on humanitarian funding to improve traceability and thus effectiveness and accountability.

Netherlands' budget tracker

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched an interactive budget webpage that uses IATI data to track national budget items, with the potential to allow users to trace funds all the way through to local project delivery on the ground. Data is presented in four blocks:

1) an overview of the overall budget for international trade and development cooperation

2) an overview of the budget by priority areas

3) a map showing countries receiving expenditure of over 1 million euros

4) a listing of individual activities. Users can filter the data presented by budget area (including humanitarian assistance), or by country.

Philippines' FAiTH

Following Typhoon Haiyan, in order to ensure accountability and improve coordination of resources, the government of the Philippines turned to IATI to track resources coming into the country. However, the data was not readily available because not enough donors are yet publishing their contributions to the IATI standard.

The government responded by creating the online Foreign Aid Transparency Hub (FAiTH) an online platform designed to record financial and in-kind pledges and donations from international governments and institutions channelled through the government, as well as donations provided through the Commission on Filipinos 'Overseas' Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino Program. It does not record donations made directly to private groups and organisations such as NGOs, UN agencies or private organisations and foundations.[11]

While FAiTH's goals are commendable, functionality is poor. While it was originally intended to enable users to track the status of donations to the point of delivery, this is not possible with the data that is currently available. If funding information was already published to the IATI standard by all donors and all actors, the government would have been able to pull the relevant data directly from the IATI registry, rather than setting up its own system.[12] Full IATI data would allow all funds to be traced, not just resources channelled through line ministries of the national government. It would also allow funds to be tracked all the way through the system – from the original source, through the various channels of delivery and, ultimately, to see where, how and by whom the aid was eventually delivered on the ground.

FIGURE 9.1

Tracing financing flows using d-portal and IATI data: CAR project examples

d-portal.org is a country-based information platform that tracks development resource flows using data published through IATI and by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC)'s Creditor Reporting System (CRS). It was set up to enable users to view all resource flows from a recipient country perspective, helping to expose gaps in development provision and highlighting unequal distribution at a national level. d-portal also assists with the planning and monitoring of development activities by enabling

ministries, parliamentarians and civil society to track where resources come from and who they go to on a project-by-project basis. As the scope and quality of IATI data increases, platforms such as d-portal will provide a means of tracing the funds all the way through from donors to end recipients.

This example shows the data available for two projects in CAR, demonstrating how d-portal and similar aid-tracking devices can allow funding to be traced through the system using IATI data.
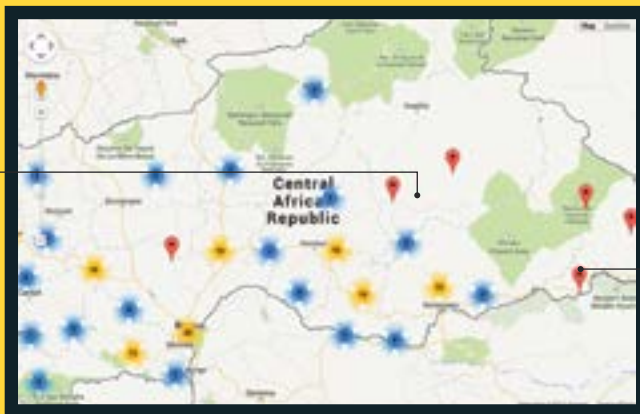
Project information

- **Title**: Prison Project in Central African Republic on behalf of the Peacebuilding Fund

- **Funder**: Other UNDP JP

- **Implementing organisation**: United Nations Office for Project Services

- **Sector**: Civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution (100%)

- 2010 budget: US$376,998
- 2011 budget: US$1,157,870
- 2012 budget: US$1,494,624
- 2013 budget: US$279,745
- 2011 transactions: US$202,243
- 2012 transactions: US$1,117,790
- 2013 transactions: US$24,331

Project information

- **Title**: DSH/HO Common Humanitarian Fund Central African Republic 2013

- **Funder**: The Netherlands

- **Implementing organisation**: United Nations Development Programme

- **Sector**: Material relief and assistance services (100%)

- 2013 budget: €2 million
- 2014 budget: €1 million
- 2013 transactions: €2 million