



METHODOLOGY TO ASSESS COORDINATED MULTI-SECTOR NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Grand Bargain on Needs Assessments Workstream 5

Co Conveners: ECHO and OCHA

Why was the methodology created?

At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the humanitarian aid providers and donors adopted the [Grand Bargain](#). The Grand Bargain comprises a series of commitments aimed at making humanitarian action more efficient and collaborative. One of these commitments is to improve joint and impartial needs assessments and analysis, for which **increased confidence in the data and analysis emerging from joint, multi-sector needs assessments** was seen as a key element. To this end, Grand Bargain signatories committed to “commission independent reviews and evaluations of the quality of multi-sectoral needs assessment findings and their use in prioritisation”.¹ Under the leadership of the Grand Bargain on Needs Assessments Co Conveners, ECHO² and OCHA, and the guidance of an inter-agency Advisory Board, the INSPIRE Consortium/GPPi developed this methodology to enable such reviews and evaluations.

The methodology identifies minimum and desired elements which, if part of the multi-sectoral needs assessment and analysis process, and present within the results, are indicative of a level of quality and corresponding level of confidence. It also offers some criteria against which to reflect upon the use of the multi-sectoral needs assessments and analysis.

¹ Australia et al. (2016) *The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need*. World Humanitarian Summit, Istanbul, p. 8.

² This work was made possible due to funding from ECHO.

What does the methodology assess?

For reviewing the **quality** of a multi-sectoral needs assessment, the methodology considers the following aspects:

- Relevance
- Comprehensiveness
- Analytical Value
- Timeliness
- Research Ethics
- Methodological Rigor
- Effective Communications

The Advisory Group

ACAPS, Care International, DFID, DG ECHO, FAO, German Federal Foreign Office, IOM, NGO Voice, OCHA, US OFDA, REACH/Impact Initiatives, World Bank, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, USAID, WFP

For reviewing the **use** of a multi-sectoral needs assessment, the methodology explores two factors:

- whether different user groups perceive the assessment as useful and unbiased;
- whether the strategies and operational plans of different user groups reflect the key findings and conclusions of the assessment.

To what types of needs assessments does the methodology apply?

The methodology was designed for coordinated, multi-sector needs assessments. The [2012 IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises](#) defines coordinated assessments as *"assessment[s] 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."*

When can the methodology be applied?

The main purpose of the methodology is to rate multi-sectoral needs assessments once they are implemented. There are two options for this:

- a) Assess the **quality** of a multi-sectoral needs assessment immediately upon release of the report or draft report.
- b) Assess all components, including the **use** of the multi-sectoral needs assessment, from approximately three months after the release of the report.

Assessment teams can also use the methodology as part of their lessons learnt exercises and to guide their future assessments.

How does the methodology relate to the Principles for Coordinated Needs Assessment Ethos?

The Ethos standards for coordinated needs assessments were developed at the same time as this methodology. The Ethos standards are reflected in criteria spread across the various pillars of the methodology. The methodology's sections on ethics and participation in particular, strongly reflect the Ethos standards. The assessment tool includes a separate summary sheet reflecting performance relating to the Ethos standards.

Who can use the methodology and for what purpose?

Any group, organization or individual interested in a structured review of a particular joint and multi-sectoral needs assessment can use the methodology. The methodology can also be used as part of broader, inter-agency review processes, for example [operational peer reviews](#), inter-agency real-time reviews or [inter-agency humanitarian evaluations](#).

- ➔ We encourage anybody applying the methodology to share their results with other interested stakeholders.

What does it take to apply the methodology?

The methodology should be applied by an external reviewer or an external review team. The reviewer must have experience in the humanitarian sector and in conducting evaluations. The reviewer should also recently have completed a training in coordinated needs assessment.³ If the methodology is used to review the **quality** of a multi-sectoral needs assessment only (scenario a), it requires at a minimum:

1. A review of the assessment report or draft assessment report.
2. A review of relevant supporting documentation, including:
 - the terms of reference of the assessment;
 - data gathering and analysis tools;
 - methodological notes;
 - training materials and standard operating procedures for assessment teams;
 - a list of partners involved in the design and/or implementation of the assessment;
 - a list of organizations involved in data gathering and interpretation;

^{3 3} For example, OCHA's Coordinated Assessment and Information Management course, IFRC Needs Assessment Course, or JIPS' Profiling and Coordination Training.

- the assessment registry and/or secondary data sources used as part of the assessment; and
 - the anonymized dataset.
3. Interviews with a minimum of three (ideally around seven) members of the assessment team.
- We recommend linking the external review to a learning exercise in which the assessment team uses the methodology to conduct a self-assessment and to compare its results with those of the external reviewer.

If the methodology is used for a full review, covering the **use** of the methodology in addition to its **quality** (scenario b), the reviewer should also interview a member of the country-level management team of at least five organizations for each of the stakeholders groups listed below. This can include organizations that contributed to the design and implementation of the needs assessment, as well as organizations who are potential users of the assessment, but have not participated in its design and implementation.

- Humanitarian coordination fora (e.g., clusters, an inter-cluster group, the Humanitarian Country Team);
- UN agencies;
- International NGOs;
- Local NGOs;
- Members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement;
- Donors;
- Government and local authority representatives; and
- Development and stabilization actors.

What are the minimum requirements?

The methodology distinguishes between two types of criteria:

- a) Aspects necessary for assessment results to be relevant and reliable. These “**minimum requirements**” help to decide how trustworthy assessment results are and to what extent their use for strategic decisions is recommended. Only assessments fulfilling at least 85 percent of the minimum requirements are recommended for use without major caveat.
- b) Other important elements of good needs assessment practice. Assessments scoring high on these criteria (as well as fulfilling the minimum requirements) are considered best practice (see more in the section on scoring below).

Minimum requirements for multi-sectoral needs assessments

Relevance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The assessment was triggered by one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a significant change in the situation; • the need to cover critical information gaps identified through a review of secondary data; • the need to inform a major planning exercise; or • a request by the affected government. 2. The report states the assessment's general and specific objectives in terms of geographic areas, sectors, thematic areas and population groups to be assessed. 3. Relevant decision makers, data, subject matter and context experts were involved in defining the objectives and the scope of the assessment to ensure it meets their information needs.
Comprehensiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The same of assessed areas includes all types of geographical areas relevant for the planning exercise the assessment aims to inform. 5. The assessment covers all the sectors (e.g. food security, shelter, education) and the sub-sectors (e.g. water supply, sanitation and hygiene for WASH) relevant for the planning exercise the assessment aims to inform. 6. The assessment covers all groups potentially affected by the crisis (depending on the context e.g. refugees, IDPs, host communities, affected residents, etc.) 7. The assessment identifies characteristics that increase the vulnerability of different groups in the given context (e.g. gender, age, disability, minority status, displacement, etc.).
Research Ethics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Data protection measures are in place to protect the identity of respondents, including safe storage, password protection and anonymization when sharing data. 9. Respondents are informed on how the data will be used and are formally asked if they are willing to participate through informed consent. 10. The assessment design is based on a "do no harm" analysis, identifies potential risks to affected populations and enumerators and provides relevant mitigation measures. 11. Strategies are in place to prevent and address sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse during the assessment process (this can include for example policies, guidance, briefings, training or complaints mechanisms).
Methodological Rigor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. The assessment is transparent about the number, types and location of respondents interviewed. 13. The assessment indicates sources for secondary data, key findings and graphs. 14. The assessment is transparent about limitations and information gaps and their impact on key findings. 15. The assessment provides access to the instruments used for data collection. 16. The assessment triangulates information derived from different sources (such as secondary data, key informant interviews or household surveys). 17. The assessment triangulates information gathered through different methods. 18. The assessment uses an appropriate sampling strategy, which can involve random or non-random sampling. 19. The assessment reports which humanitarian needs affected people and/or their representatives consider priority. 20. Data collection tools are tested in the context before using them. 21. Enumerators are trained on assessment objectives, methodology, questionnaire and interview techniques.

Analytical Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22. Data collection and analysis are guided by a jointly agreed analytical framework, including a theoretical framework, a data collection and an analysis plan. 23. The assessment identifies the most important ways in which the crisis affects people, including protection risks. 24. The assessment identifies factors that drive and explain humanitarian conditions. 25. The assessment estimates and compares the severity of humanitarian conditions and the number of people in need per sector or thematic area. 26. The assessment estimates and compares the severity of humanitarian conditions and the number of people in need by geographical area. 27. The assessment estimates and compares the severity of humanitarian conditions and the number of people in need by affected group. 28. The assessment is transparent on the methodology used to estimate the number of people in need and the severity of humanitarian conditions. 29. The assessment identifies certain and likely future events that might affect humanitarian conditions.
Timeliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30. Preliminary or final results are shared with response planners in advance of the response analysis and the planning/decision-making process.
<p>Effective Communication: There are no minimum requirements in this category</p>	

How is the score calculated?

[The scorecard template is available here.](#)

The reviewer determines whether or not the needs assessment meets each of the requirements included in the methodology and rates them accordingly as “yes” or “no”. Each “yes” counts for one point, with the exception of timeliness. For an assessment to be useful, its timeliness is of the essence. Yet, timeliness only includes a single requirement, whereas most other aspects include multiple requirements. Timeliness is therefore weighted more strongly to count for four points.

The scores translate into the following overall assessment:

Needs assessment quality score	
Not recommended for use / Use only with caution	Less than 85% of points for minimum requirements
Recommended for use	More than 85% of points for minimum requirements
Best practice	More than 85% of points for minimum requirements AND more than 75% of points for all quality criteria
Needs assessment use score	
Limited use	Less than 30% of points for use criteria
Average use	30% - 60% of points for use criteria
Extensive use	More than 60% of points for use criteria

How should the scores be used?

How thorough a multi-sectoral needs assessment can be depends a lot on the situation - on how much information is already available, how fast the humanitarian response needs to be, how easy or difficult it is to access different areas affected by the crisis and what resources are available for conducting needs assessments. The interpretation of the scores generated by applying this methodology therefore needs to be **context-specific**.

The scores provide a guide on how trustworthy a multi-sectoral needs assessment’s information and conclusions are based on how comprehensive, robust and rigorous the needs assessment process was. The score therefore indicates how much caution decision-makers need to take when using the information. The higher the score, the lower the risk of using the information. The lower the score, the greater the uncertainty. Especially during the early stages of sudden-onset emergencies and in situations in which humanitarian access is highly restricted, however, humanitarian action is about taking decisions under uncertainty.